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EXPLORING THE ESSENCE OF STUDENT-ATHLETE SPIRITUALITY:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF

NCAA DIVISION I ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the essence of eight NCAA Division I student-athletes' experiences related to spirituality while participating in intercollegiate athletics. Discussions of NCAA Division I athletes often reveal ideas and misunderstandings of the student-athlete experience. There exists an increase in contemporary conversations about spirituality in higher education, and with that a need to better understand the student-athlete experience related to this complex construct. This study examined the experiences of student-athletes and how their spirituality, differentiated from religion, influenced how they utilized their athletic abilities. Through semi-structured, face-to-face in-depth interviews which were digitally recorded and analyzed, qualitative data revealed the emergence of four themes: (a) defining spirituality; (b) inseparability of spiritual, student, and athlete; (c) responsibility; and (d) influence on others. The Moustakas (1994) phenomenological research method revealed the essence of the student-athlete spiritual experience. The findings resulted in implications for those who concern themselves with the holistic education and development of college student-athletes, as well as recommendations for future practice and research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The study of college student-athletes fosters emotions and opinions among those who concern themselves with the development of college students. The stories and media reports associated with "big time" college sports like football and basketball rarely assimilate to the daily life of the every-day college student. Increasingly, college athletes are making obvious their commitment to a faith tradition by wearing references to specific Bible verses on their eye-black patches. However, alternative images of football stadiums filled with rowdy student sections and media reports of players given god-like status do not portray an accurate image of the typical college student-athlete. Regardless of the assumptive advantages which seem to accompany elite athletes, student-athletes face the same challenges as do we all; pursuing our place in this world and attempting to answer the spiritual and "big questions" that transcend our individuality.

There is noticeably an increase in contemporary conversation about spirituality in higher education-related academic publications, student development programming, and popular media. These observations are not merely popular trends, but rather an age-old endeavor for peace and understanding. Palmer (2007) describes the spiritual journey of meaning making as "the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life" (p. 5), while Downey (1997) states it as "the deepest yearnings in the human heart, a desire for more than meets the eye" (p.

13). Likewise, there is a growing interest of researchers to more fully understand what it means for the college student to have a holistic experience which occurs internally during their college years. This includes the development of student "beliefs and values," how they experience spirituality. Intercollegiate athletics provides an often misunderstood avenue through which student-athletes not only serve their institution, but also the forum through which this student population makes meaning of their spirituality.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of examining the spirituality phenomena in athletes goes beyond that which is simply observable, such as ritualistic religious disciplines (e.g., preparatory prayer, crossing oneself following a touchdown) during competition, or those who practice various methods of mental rehearsal in order to achieve the "flow" experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Dillon & Tait, 2000), or even iconic athletes like University of Florida football's Tim Tebow, who exhibits his religious commitment on his person. There is an increasing interest by researchers in the role of spirituality among college students (Astin, 2004; Bryant, 2007; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Mayhew, 2004; Nash, 2002; Tisdell, 2003). Consequently, recent attention has been given to the interplay between spirituality and sport (Higgs & Braswell, 2004; Parry, Robinson, Watson, & Nesti, 2007; Schroeder & Scribner, 2006; Sing & Sing, 2004; Storch, Kolsky & Silvestri, 2001; Watson & Nesti, 2005). While much of this literature explores various religious aspects in athletic environments and the ecumenical benefits associated with physical activity, little is known of the essence of spirituality among student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics.

The purpose for this study was to better understand the essence of spiritual experiences of student-athletes during athletic participation, where athletic participation is understood to be

the unique college experience in its entirety of being a member of an intercollegiate athletic team. In a recent interview, Dr. Jennifer Lindholm, director of the UCLA Spirituality in Higher Education project, discussed the importance of continued spirituality research among the various student populations.

> If we don't have a clear understanding of who our students are both as a collective and in various subgroups, it's very difficult to develop programs that are going to most effectively serve them throughout their undergraduate careers and to accurately determine the nature and extent of students' development during their undergraduate careers. (Bryant, 2009, p. 5)

Numerous studies have been conducted on student development in the college years (e.g., Astin, 1984; Baxter-Magolda, 2001; Chickering, 1969; Kuh, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Among the important findings within these works, it has been discovered that when students are active participants in the learning process, "change is likely to occur" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 645). The college setting is a complex learning environment, challenging students through academic, personal, and social constructs (Astin, 1993). For those of us concerned with understanding college students we need to examine more closely how these constructs affect the student-athlete spiritually.

> Spirituality is not simply about fine ideas and aspirations, but about the embodiment and the lived experience of beliefs and values that inform and provide the backdrop to people's lives. Hence, the real exploration of spirituality in sport is in the reflection, the dialogue and the practice. (Parry et al., 2007, p. 3)

With access and opportunity to observe college students, "the college years represent an ideal moment in which to study intrapersonal, sociological, and educational forces that influence spiritual development" (Bryant, 2007, p. 838).

A phenomenological method was utilized in this spirituality research. Student-athlete spirituality is best understood from the athlete's individual perspective. Moustakas (1994) describes the "primary target" of phenomenology as "the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience *in the context of a particular situation*" (p. 14). This method, phenomenology, "involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience" (p. 13). Practically, the aim or problem statement of this phenomenological research is to attempt to make sense of, or interpret, student-athletes' spiritual experience in terms of the meanings or the comprehensive description athletes bring to their experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). As has been discussed, spirituality is a difficult concept to fully understand. The use of empirical methodologies in fully understanding this very intrinsic phenomenon, spirituality, has shown to be incomplete and difficult to generalize. Therefore, utilizing a phenomenological approach in order to gain understanding into the meaning and essence of the lived spiritual experiences of college student-athletes during sport participation is evident.

College student-athletes have been the subject of much higher education research (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Cornelius, 1995; Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Studies have identified some of the unique challenges student-athletes face. A number of studies have looked into the effect participating in intercollegiate athletics has on the academic

performance of student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1985; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; Meyer, 1990), while others compare differences among student populations (Pascarella et al., 1999; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Storch, Roberti, Bravata & Storch, 2004). Still other research has examined the effect of stereotypes and interpersonal interactions inside and outside the classroom on the outcomes of student-athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Bruening, 2005; Comeaux & Harrison, 2006, 2007; Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995; Sailes, 1993). Yet, this researcher has identified no research that explores the meaning student-athletes make of their spirituality during athletic participation.

Many student-athletes report feeling stressed by times of challenge, crisis, and struggle during their playing careers. It is during these times that athletes are expected to reach down deep within themselves and pull out something extra in an effort to overcome, achieve, win. The following questions are of interest to those who seek to understand the essence of student-athlete spirituality while participating in intercollegiate athletics. What is this something extra? Where is the inner strength in student-athletes found? How is it that some athletes thrive in pressure situations while others collapse? Is there something deeper going on inside the athlete, in their being where they find strength? Is it true that participating in intercollegiate athletics, fraught with obstacles and times of crisis where one athlete or group of athletes is attempting to overcome, outperform, or even physically beat the other, will provide opportunities where "spiritual experiences are more likely to occur" (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992, p. 169)? These questions and others approach the essence of spirituality within the college student-athlete, but are unanswerable without taking the time to research and explore the student-athletes' spiritual experience.

Overall, the higher education body of knowledge which encompasses college student experiences has "woefully underrepresented" (p. x) the experiences of college student-athletes (Jones, 2009), and has given even less attention to their spirituality. It is evident a more complete understanding of the essence associated with the college student-athlete spiritual experiences is needed. The attention given to intercollegiate athletes in the media as well as the negative perceptions and stereotypes projected onto them, both inside and outside the academy, while still having increased demands placed on their time, requires a closer examination of the college student-athlete experience. Research needs to be conducted in order to more fully understand the spiritual meaning student-athletes make through participating in intercollegiate athletics. Therefore, this research proposes to elucidate the spiritual essence of the student-athlete experience while participating in intercollegiate athletics.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of student-athletes' experiences related to spirituality while participating in intercollegiate athletics. For the purposes of this study "participating in intercollegiate athletics" was operationalized as college student-athletes who are current members of an intercollegiate athletic team. There are other potential definitions of "participating in intercollegiate athletics," whereas "participating" could be understood to mean during the competitive season, or during competition, practice, while performing a specific skill or the like. However, due to the year-round and competitive nature of intercollegiate athletics, this study accepts that the student-athlete is "participating" in intercollegiate athletics throughout their four or more years of college.

Recently, the discipline of spirituality has found a place of higher learning within the Academy. Not only has there been an increase in the number of publications surrounding the

topic of spirituality, but leading organizations in higher education have dedicated significant resources to the study and impact of spirituality. These efforts are an attempt to provide "a forum for on-going academic study, discussion and debate in this expanding field of enquiry" (Centre for Sport, Spirituality, and Religion [CSSR], 2009). Also, research and refereed journals (e.g., *International Journal of Sport and Religion, Journal of College and Character, Journal of College Student Development, New Directions in Student Services*) continue to make known the importance of spirituality for those who are influential in the lives of students and athletes (Jablonski, 2001). Furthermore, as further evidence of the developing importance of the intersection of sport and spirituality, the 2nd International Conference on Sport and Spirituality was held August 2010 (the Inaugural International Conference on Sport and Spirituality was held at York St. John University, York, United Kingdom in 2007) to present ideas and findings related to sport and spirituality. Finally, the establishment of "centres of learning," like the Centre for Sport, Spirituality, and Religion (formerly the Centre for the Study of Sport and Spirituality, established 2003), University of Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom; and the Neumann College Institute for Sport, Spirituality, and Character Development, housed at Neumann University, Aston, Pennsylvania represent the growing interest in spirituality and sport within higher education. These developments affirm the continued interest of the interplay between sport and spirituality and further encourage the need for this research into the spiritual meaning college student-athletes make from their athletic participation.

As spirituality garners more attention within higher education, those concerned with the impact of sport and especially intercollegiate athletics are beginning to explore the impact spirituality has on the spiritual development of its participants. This study not only expands the

existing knowledge of spirituality within the higher education literature, but also helps student affairs professionals and others who work with student-athletes enhance the living and learning opportunities for all students. Because this study of spirituality and student-athletes is important in further understanding the spiritual experiences of this student population and because there exists a gap in the spirituality literature, the purpose of this study is to discover the meaning and essence of the college student-athletes' spiritual experience during athletic participation.

Research Questions

The following research questions were of interest: How do college student-athletes perceive spirituality through participation in their sport? What do college student-athletes perceive spirituality to mean? How do athletes make spiritual meaning from participation in their sport? What role do these athletes perceive spirituality to play in their ability to be successful? What environmental and personal factors do these athletes perceive to influence their spirituality? However, in pursuit of the essence or meaning-making associated with the student-athlete spiritual experience, the following question will be the emphasis from which this research is derived: What is the spiritual experience of student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics?

Plan for Dissertation

This chapter introduced the college student-athlete and spirituality within higher education. Additionally, the chapter discussed the interplay between spirituality and sport, and especially intercollegiate athletes and spirituality. Guiding this study is the research question which seeks to provide insight into the essence of the college student-athlete spiritual experience garnered through being a current member of an intercollegiate athletic team. The

second chapter provides a review of the student-athlete and spirituality literature related to students in the college years, as well as the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to make meaning and get at the essence participating in intercollegiate athletics has in the spirituality of college student-athletes. Chapter 4 presents the student-athlete experiences of the participants, the emergent themes, and the essence which emerged from the data. The sub-themes which emerged from the data analysis are presented in Chapter 5. The discussion of the results is presented in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents the implications, recommendations for future research, limitations of the study, and research summary.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to spirituality and college students and, more specifically, the experiences of college student-athletes. The review, followed by the introduction, consists of five sections. The first segment examines spirituality; the differences and similarities in the literature between it and religiousness or religiosity, their relationship to faith and the place of spirituality within the higher education literature. Following the spirituality section is an historical piece which traces the course of spirituality in American higher education and provides a brief historicity of sport and intercollegiate athletics. The third section examines the interplay of spirituality and sport, while the fourth segment studies the literature surrounding spirituality and college students, which includes related student development theories. The final section investigates the research of college student-athletes, and specifically research related to NCAA Division I athletes.

Spirituality

This section of the literature review provides the foundation for understanding the complex and intrinsic nature of spirituality, ending with the definition of spirituality which will be utilized throughout this study. Concepts related to spirituality, such as belief, faith, and religion, are often used synonymously. However, clarification and separation must be made in order to give spirituality its proper place within this study. The works of Fowler (1981), Parks

(2000), and Smith (1991, 1998) are emphasized in this section, providing a basis of understanding distinctions between these spiritually-related concepts. Belief and faith are presented as necessary antecedents to spirituality while religion, or religiosity, will be positioned as distinctly different from spirituality.

Belief and Faith

Belief and faith hold core value in this study and are foundational in understanding the very personal nature of spirituality. It is understood that in order to claim *belief,* one must recognize the epistemological nature of having justified "true belief" which is grounded in the theory of knowledge and Truth (Noddings, 2007). Simply stated though, belief is the cognitive enterprise of holding certain ideas (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Smith (1998) affirms the cognizance of belief and offers the following. "Some might see [belief] as the intellect's translation (even reduction?) of transcendence into ostensible terms" (p. 12). Beliefs are ideations then, and therefore it is possible to believe without faith (Smith, 1991, 1998).

Fowler (1981) explains the relationship between belief and faith in religious context which is the intention of this study; that is, belief and faith are foundational in understanding spirituality. Although they are often linked, especially by Western Christians, the two terms are distinctly disparate (Smith, 1998). Therefore, if we are to be grounded in our understanding of belief, faith and ultimately spirituality, "we must be clear that when we use the word *faith* we are speaking of something quite different than *belief*" (Parks, 2000, p. 18). Fowler (1981) continues the comparison between belief and faith.

Belief arises out of the effort to translate experiences of and relation to transcendence into concepts of propositions. Belief may be one of the ways faith expresses itself. But one does not have faith *in* a proposition or concept. Faith, rather, is the relation of trust

in and loyalty to the transcendent about which concepts or propositions – beliefs – are

fashioned. (p. 11)

Both Smith (1998) and Fowler (1981) urge the necessity to take seriously the concepts of belief

and faith. Furthermore, they make distinction between religious belief and religious faith.

Smith provides a meaningful description of the intrinsic comparison between "simple" belief

and faith.

> Faith is deeper, richer, more personal. It is engendered by a religious tradition, in some
>
> cases and to some degree by its doctrines; but it is a quality of the person not of the
>
> system. It is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the
>
> universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees…; a capacity to live at
>
> more than a mundane level; to see to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension.
>
> (Smith, 1998, p. 12)

> All human beings address matters of faith and spirituality in one way or another.

Fowler (1981) describes this universal understanding of *faith* to involve "an alignment of the

heart or will, a commitment of loyalty or trust" (p. 11), and Parks (2000) emphasizes that "faith

is integral to all human life" (p. 16). Again, citing from his germinal work *Stages of Faith*,

Fowler (1981) summarizes what is known about the universality of faith.

> Faith, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental category in the human quest
>
> for relation to transcendence. Faith, it appears is generic, a universal feature of human
>
> living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the remarkable variety of forms and
>
> contents of religious practice and belief…. Faith is an orientation of the total person,
>
> giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions. (p. 14)

From the Christian perspective, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 New American Standard Bible). With more explication, Smith (1998) defines faith as:

> A quality of human living. At its best it has taken the form of serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one's own life, a meaning that is profound and ultimate, and is stable no matter what may happen to oneself at the level of immediate event. (p. 12)

Furthermore, as evidence to the complexity of the terminology used to describe what one believes, Cimino and Lattin (1998) found in their study of popular culture and religion that "spirituality and religious faith are increasingly viewed as individual, private matters with few connections to congregation and community" (p. 11). Also affirming Fowler (1981) and Parks' (2000) notion of faith being "universal," Teasdale (1999) describes spirituality as "a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging" (p. 17). According to Smith (1998), "One may go further and say that my faith, for instance, is not the same to-day as it was ten years ago, let alone not the same as my neighbour's[*sic*]" (p. 11).

Belief and faith are found to be foundational concepts toward understanding spirituality. The human pursuit of knowing Truth is universal and an individual quest. As this review continues to pursue, identify, and define spirituality, Noddings' (2007) reflections on Kierkegaard and existentialism support the notion that "there should be no rational quest for objective certainty in religion. Rather, faith emerges as individuals recognize the awful tension between subjective certainty and objective uncertainty" (p. 62). Parks (2000) gets us closer to

understanding the construct of faith within spirituality. "Faith is not only the act of setting one's heart; it is also what one sets the heart upon" (p. 32). Expressions of faith, when observed, are expressions of religious faith, and must be understood as such (Smith, 1991). Understanding the relationship and distinction between belief and faith is relative to our understanding of the intrinsic nature of spirituality.

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality have perceived similar meanings. We will see from the scholarly literature oftentimes these two terms are either intentionally or unintentionally deemed equivalent. Therefore, confusion exists as to the meanings and intentionality of spirituality unless one makes clear the intention and purpose of the terminology, clarity cannot be achieved.

> We need to listen carefully to what people are trying to say when they contrast the two terms [, spirituality and religion,] with one another. We may not learn much about 'spirituality' or 'religion' as abstract concepts, but we will learn a great deal about the experience of the people who use the words in this way. (Holder, 2005, p. 5)

Mayhew (2004) describes the complexity of the terminology used to describe this construct.

> The perceived familial relationship between spirituality, religion, and faith renders empirical investigation into the nature of one or all of these constructs problematic; while so many perceive spirituality as synonymous with faith and religion, others may understand these constructs as conceptually distinct, each with their own definitional properties and subsequent behavioral expressions. (p. 649)

The following will provide additional support for delineating between religiousness and spirituality.

As previously stated, spirituality is difficult to define (Downey, 1997; Ma, 2003; Moloney, 2007). The literature is not clear on the term and no single definition has been agreed upon within the body of knowledge. Adding further disparity to clearly understanding what researchers define as spirituality, some state that the terms spirituality and religiousness will be used interchangeably within their work (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). For example, in their study of college student-athletes and being in "the zone," Dillon and Tate (2000) state, "In this study then spirituality *or* religiosity will be defined as experiencing the presence of a power, a force, an energy, or a God close to you" (p. 93). Conversely, Bryant (2007) clearly makes the distinction between religion and spirituality. She describes religion as being "typically associated with commitment to a supernatural power that is expressed through ritual and celebration both individually and within the context of a faith community" (p. 835), and further details spirituality as being an "elusive construct." Also, Ma (2003), in her exploratory study of the college student spiritual experience at Christian colleges operationally defined spirituality as "spiritual formation… one's growth towards spiritual maturity, which is reflected in one's relationships with God, self, and others" (p. 321). Although there is increased interest in spirituality among college students, Nash (2002) notes "many students refuse to equate the 'spiritual' with the 'religious' realm, because, for them, the latter connotes a kind of sectarian dogmatism" (p. 43).

It is evident within the body of knowledge that complexities exist in attempting to fully understand spirituality, especially among college-students. Oftentimes spirituality is substituted, erroneously with the term *religiousness* or *religiosity* within the spirituality literature. Some researchers hold spirituality as being distinctly and intentionally apart from religiousness, while others specifically combine the two terms. For example, Pargament (1999)

describes spirituality as being distinct from religion, "'spirituality' appears to represent the functional, more intrinsic dimensions of religion, whereas 'religion' represents the more substantive, extrinsic ones" (Marler & Hadaway, 2002, p. 289). These two terms, although similar and often included synonymously in the literature, are different and should be considered as such. Hill et al. (2000) took a comprehensive look at the two interrelated terms. They suggest "criteria for judging the value of existing operational definitions of religion and spirituality" (p. 71), and believe their criteria "are broad and flexible enough for scholars to readily adapt to the needs of the particular phenomena they are investigating in relation to religion or spirituality, but are not so broad that they dilute the meaning of either construct" (p. 71).

Spirituality Defined

In order to develop a clearer understanding of the definition of spirituality for use in this research on college student-athletes, a survey of the spirituality literature used by researchers who have studied various aspects of college students and college student development, was conducted. How researchers define spirituality is important in understanding potential biases, as well as how the researcher interprets or attempts to negate bias in studying a dynamic student population such as student-athletes. Numerous studies that used and defined the term spirituality as it relates to college students were examined (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2008; Bryant, 2007; Buchko, 2004; Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Gehrke, 2008; González, 2008; Hill et al., 2000; Howard-Hamilton, Hinton, & Ingram, 2009; Jablonski, 2001; Love, 2000; Love & Talbot, 1999).

Gehrke's (2008) summative description of spirituality in his leadership study emphasizes the works of many of the influential spirituality researchers (Fowler, 1981; Love,

2002; Parks, 2000; Rogers & Dantley, 2001). His description of spirituality, along with others (Berkel, Armstrong, & Cokley, 2004; hooks, 2000; Patton & McClure, 2009), utilized for this student-athlete research. For this study, examining the spiritual experiences of college student-athletes, the following amalgamative definition will be utilized in order to provide sufficient depth of meaning and breadth of inclusion to appropriately define spirituality. Spirituality, then, is a universal lived human experience wherein meaning-making is sought in order to fully understand the human experience; an honorable pursuit toward interconnectedness with self, others, community, and a higher power (Berkel et al., 2004; Fowler, 1981; Gehrke, 2008; hooks, 2000; Love, 2002; Moloney, 2007; Parks, 2000; Patton & McClure, 2009; Rogers & Dantley, 2001). This working definition of spirituality is not meant to be *the* definition of spirituality. Rather, understanding the inherent limitations of this and any other definition of such a complex concept, the definition of spirituality as presented here guides this study of college student-athletes and will hopefully generate further discussion, dialogue and thoughtful reflection of spirituality.

Sport and Religion

American intercollegiate athletics can trace its roots to some of the earliest recordings of competition. From the first Olympic Games, sport and religion have been tightly coupled, illuminating the societal characteristics of the day. Sport and the influence of sport often reflect the desires, beliefs, and values of a given society (Eitzen & Sage, 2003, 2009; Evans, 1997; Johnson, 1982). For example, in relation to today's highly regulated NCAA Division I, media too often report the discrepancies of coaches and programs who attempt to gain competitive advantage by embracing the "gray areas" of the rules and regulations, or simply ignoring and intentionally breaking the rules all together (Clark & Batista, 2009; Mahoney, Fink, & Pastore,

1999; Thelin, 1996, 2004). Similarly, in today's society business leaders in industry are observed trying to gain strategic advantage by attempting to gain a competitive advantage through manipulating the labor laws of other countries or even blatantly disregarding the impact their transgressions may have on others (e.g., Enron, Bernie Madoff). Although a few have the ability to tarnish the collective perception of sport, its sport and athleticism in their purest form where harmony exists in fair competitive play, and where beauty is found in the performance and play of the participants. It is in the competitive realm, whether field, court, course, pitch, or diamond, where sport and religion come together to form a true spiritual experience for the athletes participating, and arguably to the spectators engaging in observation.

From the first Olympic Games in 776 B.C., which marked the beginning of elevating athletes to god-like status, to the reigns of Theodosius I and Theodosius II, who were Christian emperors of Rome who temporarily ended the Games as a result of religious conviction by shutting down all pagan shrines and burning the Temple of Zeus in 426 A.D. (Eitzen & Sage 2009; Leth, 2004), athletics played a special role in society. When the games began, wars and conflict were suspended until the games concluded. Whether an act of respect, fear, or reverence to the gods, the Olympic Games were very religious in ritual as well as in practice. For example, the first competition of each Olympic Games was a footrace to the Altar of Zeus, the god of thunder and lightning and king of the gods; a ritual sacrifice of energy to the god (Leth, 2004; Eitzen & Sage 2009). However, as is often the case in many societies, the commitment to tradition or practice diminishes until the people forget the original mission or purpose of the event. "Long before the Greek Olympics came to an end in the fifth century A.D., faith in the old gods waned to such an extent that Olympia's religious trappings lost much of their original meaning" (Baker, 2007, p. 11).

Although the relationship between religion and sport apparently dissolved, sport and competition continued to be popular among the people. The Apostle Paul wrote to the early Christian church using competition as a metaphor, giving deeper meaning to his words or providing relational understanding to his message. Paul also wrote that he "fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7 New American Standard Bible). In his letter to the Christians of Corinth, Greece, where he is writing to instruct the people on Christian living, he proclaims, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win" (1 Corinthians 9:24 New American Standard Bible). Paul used sport as allusion in this letter, capitalizing on the young Christians' familiarity with the Isthmian games at Corinth (Mathisen, 2005), to teach and encourage them about the importance of self control. The early church became a spectacle of Roman sport. Baker (2007) explains:

> For well over two centuries, Christians were unwilling participants in Roman spectacles. Thrown into the arena for punishment for their unorthodox religious beliefs, they inevitably lost the lions-versus-Christians game. Yet even when the persecution ceased, Christian leaders continued castigating Roman sport's "pagan" basis, its open association with gambling and prostitution, and its inhumane brutality. (p. 11)

"For several centuries Muslim, Christian, and pre-Christian practices blended harmoniously, especially around the annual rites of spring renewal that Christians called Easter. Various forms of ball play became an integral part of Easter season ceremonies all over medieval Europe" (Baker, 2007, p. 13). Prior to the seventeenth century all forms of sport were admonished by both the Catholic and Protestant churches. The church leadership of Europe and England during the Reformation believed that:

Evil exists in the body and that therefore the body should be subordinate to the pure

spirit. As a result, church dogma and education sought to subordinate all desires and

demands of the body in order to exalt the spiritual life. (Eitzen & Sage, 2003, p. 167)

It was not until the reign of the King of England and Ireland, James I (1603-1625), who

"encouraged sporting activities that traditionalists and reformers found unacceptable"

(Mathisen, 2005), and issued his 1618 "Declaration on Lawful Sports" which provided for

lawful recreation.

While those in Europe began to accept sport and the inherent virtues associated with it,

American settlers found themselves in conflict over those who desired physical activity and

those who saw it as a distraction from God's work. In comparing the Puritans of New England

and those in the emerging colonies of early America, Eitzen and Sage (2009) affirm the Puritan

angst against sport. "Like the Puritans, the most prominent objection to sport by religious

leaders in the colonies was that participation would divert attention from spiritual matters" (p.

170). The Puritan opposition to sport has been documented by Daniels (2005) who presented

the seven Puritan propositions against sport.

- Sport was frivolous and wasted time.

- Sport did not refresh the body as good recreation should, but tired people instead.

- Much sporting activity was designed deliberately to inflict pain or injury.

- Sporting contests usually led to gambling.

- More sport took place on Sunday than on any other day, so sport encouraged people to

  defile the Sabbath.

- Sport was noisy and disrupted others, sometimes entire communities.

- Many sports had either pagan or Popish origins. (p. 166)

Interestingly, similar arguments are heard today when speaking of the proper place of athletics.

As America modernized and entered into the era of industrialization, churches increasingly

"broadened their commitment to play and sport endeavors to as a means of drawing people

together" (Eitzen & Sage, 2009, p. 170). By the beginning of the 20th century, Catholic and

Protestant churches and parachurch organizations had begun to accept the role of sport in the

church, oftentimes embracing it as a means of bringing people together in community and

evangelism.

Muscular Christianity

Modern church sports leagues and evangelistic endeavors (i.e., Fellowship of Christian

Athletes, Athletes in Action) grew from the Victorian English ethos of "muscular Christianity"

embodied by Charles Kingsley, who first rejected the term as offensive, but later embraced it as

it became commonplace, emphasizing and encouraging the development of moral and spiritual

values in competitive participants (Baker, 2007). The benefits associated with sport were

adopted by those who were concerned with the whole-person development of young men,

namely in the establishment of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), 1844 in

London, England (Young Men's Christian Association [YMCA], n.d.). The relationship

between religion and sport continued through the similar development of intellectual, spiritual,

and physical discipline. This "three-pronged approach" further encouraged the relationship of

the church and those in competitive sport, the athletes (Parker, 2009).

The term and practices of muscular Christianity continued to gain favor throughout

European society, finding its way into educational institutions and ultimately landing across the

Atlantic in America. As the idea of muscular Christians made their way into American pulpits,

increasingly it became a male-centered endeavor, placing a "significant emphasis on reaching

males and sent an obvious 'masculine' message" (Ladd & Mathisen, 1999, p. 55). The

Americanized version of muscular Christianity followed in the moral tradition established by

British intellectuals, but carried the societal influence of new America. Ladd and Mathisen

(1999) presented four essential characteristics, manliness, morality, health, and patriotism,

found within muscular Christians.

> These characteristics composed an initial "core ideology" within a cultural ethos that
>
> was evangelically Christian. Muscular Christians focused on the transformation of
>
> society, assuming that participation in games and sports by adolescent males had
>
> inherent value immediately and in later life. (p. 16)

Furthermore, the "distinctively American muscular Christianity" (Ladd & Mathisen, 1999, p.

18) presented by Ladd and Mathisen, offered political, social, educational, and evangelistic

benefits. The expansion of the American university westward through denominationalism, the

establishment of land-grant universities by the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act, and the rise of

"big time" sports, changed the landscape of higher education (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004).

Intercollegiate Athletics

Intercollegiate athletics in America began for the purpose of benefitting the student

body. Intercollegiate athletics actually has its roots in the curriculum, or more precisely the

extracurriculum, through academic clubs and literary societies. It was in these societies that

students found outlets for competition and performance. In 1860 Amherst "established a

Department of Hygiene and Physical Education, charged with the responsibility for the health

of the undergraduates" (Rudolph, 1990, p. 153). Although this institutional support of

athleticism was a dramatic move towards fully endorsing physical activity as appropriate in the

college environment, the leadership of Amherst prominently stated their intention for this

support by notably displaying the motto for this endeavor: "Keep thyself pure: the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost" (Rudolph, 1990, p. 153). These societies expanded into intramural programs, resulting in intercollegiate activity. It was the students who initiated and administered the athletic programs in the early years. Rudolph expounds on the state of student support during *The Extracurriculum* (Rudolph, 1990).

> The American college student was not content with liberating the mind, giving it free range in organizations that served the intellect. He was not content with enthroning manners, enshrining the ways of success in the world in a far-flung system of fraternities and social clubs. He also discovered muscle, created organizations for it; his physical appearance and condition had taken on new importance. (p. 150)

Early on in American higher education there was an attraction toward the physical, intercollegiate athletics. "From the start, intercollegiate athletics had been a source of intense enjoyment and rivalry among students" (Thelin, 2004, p. 177). Intercollegiate sports shared with other extracurricular activities the characteristic of originally having been run by and for students. "In 1852 at Lake Winnepesaukee the first intercollegiate contest of any sort was a boat race between Harvard and Yale. The game, however, that answered the needs of the American undergraduate for thrills, for competition, for physical development was baseball" (Rudolph, 1990, p. 154). The rise of intercollegiate athletics toward the professionalism of "big time" sports that we see today was well on its way almost before structured intercollegiate athletics began.

Early in American intercollegiate athletics history, college sports existed, described by Duderstadt (2000), as a "myth" of amateurism. "In theory, at least, college sports provided an important opportunity for teaching people about character, motivation, endurance, loyalty, and

the attainment of one's personal best – all qualities of great value in citizens" (p. 70). These ideals supported the notion and ethos of muscular Christianity. However, the structure and values associated with amateur athleticism were quickly neutralized as the rise of football gave way to almost immediate professionalism of the "student athlete," where it was not uncommon for a college's athletes to not even be students (Duderstadt, 2000; Rudolph, 1990). It was not only football teams which were seeking competitive advantage, but the allure of championships and stadiums filled with paying customers. "The downside to the nationwide popularity of intercollegiate sports, according to Thelin (2004), was that athletics directors and ambitious coaches continually stretched the limits of acceptable practice" (p. 209).

Although football was not the only intercollegiate sport at the turn of the twentieth century, it was the publicized brutality of the sport that caused the then president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, to summons the presidents of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale to address the issue (Thelin, 1996). Out of this meeting grew a leadership team that in 1910 would come to be known as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA "was charged with the responsibility of regulating college sports and minimizing the dangers they entailed, particularly in football" (Bowen & Levin, 2003, p. 25). Duderstadt (2000) argues that "although the NCAA was promoted as the guardian of amateur principles and integrity in sports, since it was dominated by coaches and athletic directors, its primary purpose increasingly became that of defending college sports against true reform" (p. 72).

The 1929 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published a report on the state of intercollegiate athletics, the first of numerous alarms which have been sounded against intercollegiate athletics. In recent years there have been groups established to examine and critique intercollegiate athletics (e.g., Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics

[Knight Commission], The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics). These organizations present data and research towards keeping central the "academic purpose" of higher education, "to ensure that intercollegiate athletics programs operate within the educational mission of their colleges and universities" (Knight Commission, n.d., para. 1)

The 1929 Carnegie Report "found serious fault with college football, noting its increasing commercialization and professionalization, the lack of integrity of players, coaches, and fans, and the dangers its 'demoralizing and corrupt system' posed both for participants and academic institutions" (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 72). "Listed first among the causes of the defects of American college athletics [however, was] 'a negligent attitude toward the educational opportunity for which the college exists'" (Bowen & Levin, 2003, p. 246).

Although there is sentiment that college sports continue to become more professionalized and commercialized than ever before, there has and continues to be a significant amount of "good work" being done through sport as well. Sport provides a unique opportunity for access and voice to audiences that may not otherwise hear a message. "Athletes have access to a unique platform when they enter the playing field or the basketball court to demonstrate their skills before an appreciative audience" (Rousselow-Winquist & Winquist, 2001, p. 39). For example, it was the Taylor University football team who broke down racial barriers by playing the first inter-racial game in Tennessee history against Fisk University on October 30, 1954.

Purposeful Athletics

There are organizations that utilize sport and especially intercollegiate athletics to minister to college students and athletes. The forerunner of sports evangelism was Venture for Victory, a "Venture for Victory became the forerunner of all sports evangelism organizations"

(Marlow, 1993, p. 12), including such organizations as Athletes in Action, Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Sports Ambassadors. The many missions of Venture for Victory are examples of how athletics can cross even language barriers. Additionally, athletes have the ability, by the nature of their athletic culture, to foster meaningful and trusting relationships.

Beyond organizations established to use sport as an instrument for changing the lives of others, the regulating bodies (e.g., NCAA) have established initiatives to encourage character-building and community engagement. For example, the NCAA has implemented the CHAMPS program, to foster student-athlete involvement into the campus community, enhancing the student-athlete experience in the following areas:

- Academic excellence

- Athletic excellence

- Career development

- Personal development

- Service (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.)

Intercollegiate athletes have a unique position from which they can impact others. These ways of impacting others have a dual impact; they support the community and help others while at the same time developing the intellectual, spiritual, and physical of each individual. These purposeful initiatives are similar to those embodied by Charles Kingsley in his pioneering muscular Christianity.

Spirituality in American Higher Education

Today's higher education landscape includes common and free conversations of spirituality and religion, beliefs and values, even academic courses and disciplines dedicated to the study of various aspects of religiousness. Regardless, American higher education has seen

the establishment of colleges as exclusively Christian (Ringenberg, 2006), to the secularizing of colleges and universities, until today, where we are experiencing an era of renewed spirituality. Through American history, higher education has changed with societal and more directly, student influence. This section will show, aside from Divine omniscience, that student-interest and societal influence has been a significant influence in the establishment, secularization, and renewed interest in spirituality in American higher education.

During the Colonial Era higher education was a Christian education. According to Ringenberg (2006), when the early colleges were being founded during the Colonial Era their missions were God-honoring. For example, the goal of Harvard's establishment was "to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning" (p. 38), and for Yale was that "every student shall consider the main end of his study to wit to know God in Jesus Christ and answerably to lead a Godly, sober life" (p. 38); whereas, "Dartmouth College was founded in 1769 by a Yale-educated Congregational minister following his calling for 'the laudable and charitable design of spreading Christian Knowledge among the Savages of our American Wilderness'" (Stamm, 2006, p. 73). These goals changed as the curriculum expanded.

With the rise of the modern American university in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century came an altered curriculum, which began at Harvard in 1869 under then president, Charles Eliot. In describing the move away from the traditional required curriculum, Ringenberg (2006) explains that students began to "choose from a broad variety of curricular options those which best met their vocational and personal goals" (p. 102). This expanding curriculum contributed to the social movement away from the founding goals of higher education, and began liberalizing Protestant theology and introducing Darwinian biology led to

increased institutional funding and the adoption of an anti-religious bias. The move toward a classical European curriculum "formed the foundation of college instruction through the late nineteenth century, and the Christian faith was [no longer] studied as a form of academic inquiry" (Stamm, 2006, p. 74). These trends continued as electives and science became increasingly of interest. As colleges and universities, including "church-related colleges," continued toward an ever-increasing secularization, "religion in the American academy had fallen to the secular juggernaut in the twentieth century" (Mahoney, Schmalzbauer, & Youniss, 2001, p. 36).

Significant historical events shaped the culture of American higher education in the mid 1900's. World Wars I and II, Sputnik, Vietnam, and the Cold War, all had significant impact on the life of college students. These societal influences coupled with a decline in church and religious participation (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999) continued the secularization of higher education. However, as society and culture shape institutions of higher learning (Sloan, 1994; Stamm, 2006), there became a rising tide of spirituality among our college campuses. This rebirth, according to Mahoney et al., (2001), is "driven in large part by the public resurgence of the sacred, [and] religion's academic comeback has also been aided by an epistemological revolution in higher education" (p. 40). Kuh and Gonyea (2005) acknowledge "increasing numbers of students are openly practicing their religious beliefs or exploring spiritual dimensions of their personal development, whether at a small private church-related college or a large public university" (p. 1).

Over the last decade there has been a noticeable increase in the social science literature relating to spirituality. Gehrke (2008) describes the recent interest surrounding spirituality in the higher education literature as a "surge" (p. 351). There is also an increasing interest by

researchers in the role of spirituality among college students as evidenced by recent research (Astin, 2004; Bryant, 2007; Chickering et al., 2006; Gehrke, 2008; Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2005; Tisdell, 2003). Additionally, numerous studies have been conducted on student development in the college years (e.g., Astin, 1984; Chickering, 1969; Kuh, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). There seems to be a growing body of research related to college students and spirituality and spiritual development (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006; Gehrke, 2008; González, 2008; Muller & Dennis, 2007; Traulvetter, 2007). With this growth of interest, more studies are taking into consideration the role of spirituality in combination with various aspects of college student life and development.

College Student Development

The college years are a complex time of learning and questioning, where college students are likely to develop through the many developmental domains transitioning into adulthood. There are numerous domains which could be examined in the study of college student-athletes. Much research has been conducted on college student development during these impressionable years (Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, Love's (2002) article Comparing Spiritual Development and Cognitive Development in which he made numerous comparisons between spiritual and cognitive theories, concluding:

> One's level of cognitive development need not be similar to one's spiritual development, though because they both relate to the development of meaning-making, it is hard to imagine a situation where they would be significantly divergent in an individual. Given the focus on meaning-making, there are many ways in which theories of spiritual development overlap and are mutually informing. (p. 369)

For the purpose of this research faith, cognitive, and identity development will be examined, as will motivation. These domains align well and inform this research as they are imperative to understanding the spirituality and meaning-making that college student-athletes make from their athletic experience.

College students in the college years have been the subject of much research (Astin, 1984; Chickering, 1969; Kuh, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Among the important findings within these works, it has been discovered that when students are active participants in the learning process, "change is likely to occur" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 645). Theorists have recognized that these are formidable years and students progress through developmental "stages" in the many developmental domains. As the spiritual experience of the college student-athlete is examined in this study, a number of developmental theories are found to have significance in understanding the college student-athlete.

The college student-athlete vies in a competitive milieu, one of constant adaptation and challenge where learning opportunities regularly occur. By its very selective nature, intercollegiate athletics results in a much different student experience for athletes than that of their peers (Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Miller & Wooten, 1995). Thus, the outcomes of student-athletes may be different than those of other college students (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004; Fitch & Robinson, 1998; Richard & Aries, 1999; Watt & Moore, 2001). Therefore, participation in intercollegiate athletics is likely to promote change in the many developmental domains for the student-athlete.

This study of the spiritual meaning-making of college student-athletes will examine Fowler (1981) and Parks' (2000) work on faith development; Baxter-Magolda's (2001), and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986), and Perry's (1970) theories of cognitive

development; as well as Erikson's (1980) identity development. Furthermore, although not a cognitive or psychosocial domain, motivation is recognized as a significant trait in student-athletes and will be discussed. Collectively these theorists attribute growth through the stages via "shipwreck" (Parks, 2000) or times of disequilibrium. Specifically, the college years provide opportunities for progressive, holistic development of college students. Research needs to be conducted then in order to better understand the essence of the college student-athlete spiritual experience.

Faith Development

Among the developmental theories, Fowler's (1981) faith development theory which was developed through 359 interviews between 1972 and 1981 and designed to examine the complexities of faith, provide insights into "the nature and workings of faith" (p. xii), and "offering a theory of growth in faith" (p. xiii). Faith is the developmental theory which is most closely related to spirituality. Fowler's faith development work follows in the constructivist tradition of Jean Piaget (1952), whose germinal cognitive-structural theory focuses on the experiential nature of how people think and make meaning (Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2010). Furthermore, Fowler's "theories explicitly build on the foundations set by Erickson's theories of psychosocial development, Piaget's theories of cognitive development, and Kohlberg's theories of moral development, and are intended to parallel and elaborate on these theories (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 53). Fowler (1981) originally presented six stages of faith in his foundational work on faith development, *Stages of Faith;* later adding a primary seventh stage, Primal Faith, found in infancy (Fowler, 1996).

The second stage of faith development presented by Fowler is the Intuitive-projective stage often found in early childhood. It "is the fantasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child

can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the

visible faith of primally related adults" (p. 133). The third faith stage is the Mythic-literal stage

also found in early childhood. Here "the person begins to take on for him- or herself the

stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community" (p. 149).

The next faith stage, Synthetic-conventional, begins to be prevalent in adolescents, but some

adults also never advance beyond this stage. Fowler (1981) depicts this stage as:

> A "conformist" stage in the sense that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and
>
> judgments of significant others and as yet does not have a sure enough grasp on its own
>
> identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain an independent
>
> perspective. (p. 172)

Robinson (2007) describes Fowler's Individuative-reflective stage of faith development, found

in young adulthood and beyond, as where:

> Faith meaning is more personally chosen and believed. There is an awareness that one's
>
> view is different from others, and can be expressed in abstract terms. The faith
>
> development at this stage is for the sake of the person and of making sense of her life in
>
> family or community. (p. 31)

The next to last faith stage presented by Fowler (1981), Conjunctive Faith found in the early

midlife stage and beyond, "involves the integration into self and outlook…, where symbolic

power is reunited with conceptual meanings… an opening to the voices of one's 'deeper self'"

(p. 197). There is an internal dimension, one that is expressly spiritual and relevant to this

study of the spirituality of college student-athletes within this stage. Fowler emphasizes this

internal dialogue as involving "a critical recognition of one's social unconsciousness – the

myths, ideal images, and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like" (p. 198).

Finally, the Universalizing Faith stage is one that is "others" focused and not so much a matter of an achievable developmental stage. Fowler (1981) describes this stage as being "exceedingly rare." Those who have attained this final stage of faith development:

> have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community (p. 200).

Examples of individuals who have attained a "universalizing faith" are those who, regardless of faith tradition many would ascribe to them a "saintliness," affirming their faith achievement. Examples of those who have reached a universalizing faith include Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dietrich Bonhoffer, among others (Fowler, 1981; Parry et al., 2007).

Although Fowler's work was foundational in theorizing faith development through stages, it was further enhanced through the expertise of Parks (2000) who "formulated a theory of faith development specific to the young adult years of the college-age population" (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 57). Parks (2000) terms this transitional period between adolescence and adulthood as "young adult;" emphasized by a time of "probing commitment," where "[o]ne explores many possible forms of truth – as well as work roles, relationships, and lifestyles – and their fittingness to one's own experience of self and world" (p. 67). Her work emphasizes the experiential nature of this life stage. "The promise and vulnerability of young adulthood lie in the experience of the birth of critical awareness and the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self, other, world, and 'God'" (p. 5).

Parks (1986) urges that special attention should be given beyond just the structural understanding presented by developmental theorists, such as Fowler. "Faith development theory, however, like all other constructive-developmental theories has had a tendency to focus on structures and stages rather than on the process that gives rise to the stages and to shear structures (stages) from content (image-symbols)" (p. 138). From Parks emphasis on "process" over structure, Chickering et al. (2006) present the three components to Parks "faith development during the young adult years" (p. 58), (a) forms of knowing, cognitive aspects; (b) forms of dependence, affective; and (c) forms of community, social aspects. These components form the understanding from which Parks develops her four phases of faith development.

- Stage 1: Adolescent, conventional faith

- Stage 2: Young adult faith

- Stage 3: Tested adult faith

- Stage 4: Mature adult faith (Parks, 2000).

Parks' (2000) stages of faith development enlighten the previous faith development work of Fowler. She presents the college years as "harboring, as they do, both promise and vulnerability. Young adults embody critical strengths and yet remain dependent in distinctive ways, upon recognition, support, challenge, and inspiration" (p. xi). These last words which remind those concerned with college student development, especially for those who work with college student-athletes that:

Young adults look for places where they can be truly at home. If they are conscious of their own spiritual search and commitments, they seek places of belonging that can embrace the whole self as it is emerging in its new integrity. In the ongoing search for meaningful belonging, young adults, like the rest of us, value places and people where

the spiritual dimensions of life are acknowledged and where it is possible to work that

delicate mix of sustaining comfort and solace, along with a healthy dollop of stimulation

and challenge. (Parks, 2000, p. 202)

The faith development work of both Fowler and Parks "represent the most thorough

investigations to date into how individuals develop their religious and spiritual attitudes and

beliefs, and as such provide useful heuristics for guiding the work of student affairs

professionals" (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 63). Together, these two faith works inform this

study and provide a solid foundation from which an understanding of college student-athlete

spirituality can be drawn.

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development theory is a foundational process for meaning-making, and has

been shown to be linked to other developmental domains (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000; Love, 2002;

Martin, 2000; Sanchez & Carter, 2005). Perry (1970) built on upon the early work of Piaget

(1952) to theorize that cognitive development occurs through a "continuum" of nine

"positions." Evans et al., (1998) note the importance "that Perry regards the positions

themselves as static" (p. 130), or possible "resting points," wherein development occurs in the

transitions between positions rather than in the positions. Perry's nine positions are can be

presented as progressing from "Basic Duality" (Position 1) where the world is viewed

dichotomously in good or bad, right or wrong terms; through varying levels (Positions 2-4) of

"Multiplicity" where many right answers are legitimate; and then to "Relativism," position (4-

5) that begin to embrace other viewpoints, but states that not all viewpoints are valid; finally

ending in one of four forms of "Commitment." Although Perry's work is based primarily on

white males, it has been the basis for other important cognitive development research that

relates more precisely to different populations.

Building off the work of Perry (1970), Belenky et al. (1986) examined women's intellectual development in their book *Women's Ways of Knowing*. Here they present five "epistemological perspectives from which women know and view the world" (p. 15). These five "perspectives" are stated as, and characterized by: (a) *silence*, obedience; (b) *received knowledge*, listening to others for truth comes from others not self; (c) *subjective knowledge*, truth resides in self and not from others; (d) *procedural knowledge*, knowing comes from experience; and (e) *constructed knowledge*; knowing is integrated with feeling and thought (Evans et al., 1998).

Finally, in taking a comparative look at intellectual development and specifically the gender differences between females and males, Baxter-Magolda (1992) developed her Model of Epistemological Reflection from a longitudinal study of 101 college students. From her research she identifies four stages: (a) absolute knowing, (b) transitional knowing, (c) independent knowing, and (d) contextual knowing. Although differences do exist between genders, she emphasizes that there are more similarities. Severiens, Dam, and Nijenhuis (1998) describe Baxter-Magolda's (1992) four-stage work as similar to both Perry (1970) and Belenky et al.'s (1986).

 As in Perry's model, the students develop from viewing knowledge as absolute, to questioning these facts and discovering a variety of perspectives. In the third stage all knowledge is considered to be uncertain, but in the final stage knowledge exists in a context, and certainty of knowledge is context-dependent. In her longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda observed women and men going through the same stages, but using different patterns of reasoning about their knowledge assumptions. Within each stage of

the model, two patterns of reasoning emerge, one more often used by women and one more often used by men. In general terms the patterns more often used by women can be characterized by a focus on relational aspects. While reasoning about knowledge, women seem to be open to other perspectives and incorporate other perspectives into their own. The pattern more often used by men includes, generally speaking, an individual focus. Men are more often focused on their own learning processes and perspectives. Thus, the two patterns seem to react to the distinction between "connection" and "autonomy" as described by Belenky et al. (1986). (p. 330)

Collectively, cognitive-structural theorists hypothesize that change through stages "takes place as a result of assimilation and accommodation" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 124), where "assimilation is the process of integrating new information into existing structures…[, and] accommodation is the process of modifying existing structures or creating new structures" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 124). It is through an understanding of the cognitive position or "stage" that an individual is in, where appropriate dialogue and programs can be established to further enhance the learning experience of the individual. We can look to the foundational work of Perry (1970) to get an introductory understanding, and to Belenky et al. (1986) to examine the cognitive development of women, and also to Baxter-Magolda (1992) to develop a greater appreciation for the intellectual development through a gender-differences lens (Evans et al., 1998).

Identity Development

Identity development was first addressed by Erik Erikson (1964), where he defines it as "the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly" (p. 42). This eight-stage psychosocial constructive theory, as discussed by Torres,

Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper (2003), develops through a process where a decision between two "polarized attributes are part of each stage (for example, trust versus mistrust)" (p. 10). An example often cited in the student-athlete literature is the decision athletes have to make with regards to their academics. Oftentimes an athlete enters college with an ambitious academic goal only to have their dreams dashed due to the influence negative stereotypes have on them, or reality of their circumstance in not being able to give enough attention to succeed in a challenging major.

Individual identity is further based on the personal internal as well as (and equally) the external environment. "Erikson puts the developing person in a social context, addresses the influences of significant others and social institutions across the life span" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 55). Issues related to identity development differ for different student populations (Evans et al., 1998; Torres et al., 2003), and student-athletes are no exception. As individuals develop holistically, their identity is shaped by their surroundings, interactions with people of influence, and their experience.

"The very term student-athlete implies an individual who is being asked to manage and succeed at the tasks that make up two different realms of his or her life, athletics and academics" (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008, p. 34). College student-athletes are not just wrestling with the dual identities of student and athlete; there are numerous identities student-athletes are juggling and balancing (e.g. gender, ethnicity, student, athlete). Depending on their surroundings, conversations, and experiences, student-athletes are making meaning, defining, and owning their identity through their circumstances. Not only do college student-athletes "struggle with the same age- and stage-appropriate developmental tasks as students who are not

engaged in intercollegiate sports" (Street, 1999, p. 21), but they also must learn to respond and adapt differently in different contexts (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).

According to the higher education literature related to students in the college years, students change.

> The belief that students' sense of identity is developed during the college years is widely accepted; what has not received as much attention is the influence of race, ethnicity, other social categories [including intercollegiate athlete], or the interrelationship of multiple identities on that development during the college years. (Torres et al., 2003, p. 3)

Not only are athletes a special college student population (Jolly, 2008; Kowal & Fortier, 1999; Street, 1999), their identity is "shaped" more complexly due to the varying nature of their social environments.

Motivation

In researching college student-athletes it is important to have at least a cursory knowledge of motivation. Motivation is a common attribute associated with college student-athletes. It "concerns energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality – all aspects of activation and intention" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). It is an energy or force from which direction is drawn in an effort to achieve a goal. The impetus for goal-oriented action, or motivation, can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. Cox (1994) describes extrinsic motivation as coming in many different forms, "usually in terms of praise, money, and awards" (p. 216), attributable to some external cause. Understanding student-athlete motivation is likely to be a key factor in understanding the essence of the student-athlete spiritual experience. Oftentimes, extrinsic motivation is explained using attribution (cause and effect) theory (Cox, 1994; Heider, 1958;

Roberts, 1982; Weiner, 1985). Attention, then, will be given to the role of extrinsic motivation in understanding the essence of the college student-athlete spiritual experience.

Intrinsic motivation has been closely linked to identity and self due to its inherent nature and the influences associated with it (Bandura, 1982; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). The theory that is commonly associated with motivation is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000). "SDT is an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods while employing an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans' evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral regulation" (p. 68). Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, and Leone (1994) describe SDT more plainly; "One's behavior emanates from one's self; it is self-determined. One does the behavior wholly volitionally because of its utility or importance for one's personal goals" (p. 121). Specifically, among their findings, Ryan and Deci (2000) concluded:

> If the contexts in which [student-athletes] are embedded are responsive to basic psychological needs, they provide the appropriate developmental lattice upon which an active, assimilative, and integrative nature can ascend. Excessive control, nonoptimal challenges, and lack of connectedness, on the other hand, disrupt the inherent actualizing and organizational tendencies endowed by nature, and thus such factors result not only in the lack of initiative and responsibility but also in distress and psychopathology. (p. 76)

In their efforts to achieve, college student-athletes are motivated from somewhere or some source. What role, if any, does the spiritual experience play in motivating the student-athlete towards goal attainment?

College Student Spirituality

This section will explore the growing area of research on college students related to student spirituality and religiousness. (Bryant, 2007; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2003; Dalton et al., 2006; Gehrke, 2008; González, 2008; HERI, 2005). The study of college student spirituality (as cited by the aforementioned and others) seeks to bring insights to a topic where there seems to be a "disconnect" between college student spirituality and "the reality of institutional support for spiritual development and meaning-making" (Bryant & Schwartz, 2007, p. 6). As interest and understanding into college student spirituality continues to increase, even among different student populations, more institutional attention should be given to college student spirituality.

Both quantitative and qualitative research reveals that spirituality as well as religiousness has a significant place in the research related to college students. Further, the literature reveals that spirituality remains an elusive construct, one which is difficult to quantify. For example, the researchers at the HERI have identified 12 scales upon which spirituality can be empirically measured utilizing their 2004 (and subsequent 2007 instrument by the same name) College Student Beliefs and Values (CSBV) instrument. Although much effort was made to validate the CSBV instrument (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2004b) and subsequent "spirituality" scales, the researchers explain their difficulty in defining and quantifying the "high and low" scores within the measured scale as "arbitrary." This difficulty is explained by the researchers:

> Given that raw scores on factor scales such as these have no absolute meaning, it may
> be useful for certain research and policy purposes to be able to classify students
> according to their scores (e.g., "How many students obtained 'high' scores on
> Equanimity?" "How much of a net increase in high scorers did we observe over time?")

Since any student's score on one of our measures of spirituality, religiousness, and

related qualities reflects the *degree* to which the student possesses the quality being

measured, defining "high" or "low" scores is, to a certain extent, an arbitrary decision.

(Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2004a, para. 1)

The HERI researchers further "acknowledge that each student will view his or her spirituality in

a unique way" (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], n.d., para. 5). These emphases are

not made to criticize the HERI researchers, as much important work is being done by and based

upon the scales and measures developed by the researchers at HERI. Rather, this emphasis is

made to highlight the difficulty in quantifying a complex construct such as spirituality.

In the search for the ideal quantitative measure for college student spirituality, beyond

that being done at the HERI, researchers have and continue to develop instruments to that end.

Hill and Hood (1999) compiled a comprehensive book of religious measures, *Measures of

Religiosity.* Researchers have used empirical methods to discern differences between female

and male college students, the "use" of spirituality or religiosity practices as coping

mechanisms, and "influential factors" toward college student spiritual development.

Quantitative research methods have been found to be beneficial in understanding the spirituality

of college students.

Buchko (2004) found "important differences" between women and men in their

religious beliefs and practices among 269 college students enrolled in two introductory

psychology and sociology courses. She used an eight-item instrument designed by Rohrbaugh

and Jessor (1975) to measure the religiosity of the sample, choosing the Rohrbaugh and Jessor

instrument "primarily because it does not refer to any specific religion or religious institution"

(Buchko, 2004, p. 93). She found "women's religious faiths appear to reflect greater daily

connection with God through prayer, more assurance of God's presence and activity in their lives, and more emotive connection with God as evidenced by more frequent feelings of reverence or devotion" (p. 95). Her findings support cognitive and faith development assumptions towards "relational vitality," in that women's connection to God is more emotive. In her study, "Gender Differences in Spiritual Development During the College Years," Bryant (2007) examined "gender differences on 13 spiritual characteristics and personal and educational factors and explore the personal and educational factors associated with changes in spirituality during college" (p. 835).

Bryant (2007), in her empirical study of gender differences among 3,680 college students utilized the 2000 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey and the 2003 College Students' Beliefs and Values (CSBV) Survey to "explore the personal and educational factors associated with changes in spirituality during college" (p. 835). This study "incorporates several measures of religiousness, including internalized personal commitment to one's religious faith (a cognitive/affective measure), endorsement of principles associated with conservative religious doctrine, and skepticism regarding the hallmark beliefs of religious individuals (a negative measure of religiousness)" (p. 835). Her findings among college students conclude that both women and men "generally became more committed to integrating spirituality into their lives over 3[*sic*] years of college" (p. 840). This study however:

> Points to gender differences across a number of spiritual and religious constructs and to unique patterns of change for men and women during the college years. Moreover, various student characteristics and some aspects of college life appear to direct men's and women's spiritual development in different ways. (Bryant, 2007, p. 843)

Finally, Bryant's findings present that women are generally more aware spiritually and religiously inclined than are men.

These studies have shown differences exist between female and male college students on various measures of spirituality. Questions arise when college student-athletes become the participants in these studies, or using these methodologies, do the findings hold true? Are these findings generalizable to student-athletes? Or, through their unique experiences, do student-athletes mimic the feelings, experiences, and attitudes of one gender over another, or are student-athletes their own unique subculture?

With regard to race, research shows African American college students tend to use religion and spiritual practices as coping mechanisms more often than their White peers (Baldwin, Chambliss, & Towler, 2003; Herndon, 2003; Jackson, 1998). Constantine et al. (2002), in their study, "Religious Participation, Spirituality, and Coping Among African American College Students, found that "African American college students may view their church or spiritual communities as primary places for psychological support" (p. 611). Because their study had such few (N=38, compared to 106 female) numbers of African American males, Constantine et al. further emphasize future studies related to the topic of African American college student spirituality should make a special effort to incorporate African American participants. This will be an area of emphasis for this study of college student-athlete spirituality, as special emphasis will be made to recruit African American male participants.

Chae, Kelly, Brown, and Bolden (2004) in their empirical study utilizing the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) examined the relationship of ethnic identity and spiritual development among four ethnic groups. They concluded that "it is evident that for many ethnic minority groups, their ethnic heritage and tradition are deeply intertwined with

their spiritual belief system" (Chae et al., 2004, p. 5), and further found significant differences between African Americans and Whites. However, they found no significant differences between African Americans and Latino and Asian American populations. The results of the research conducted by Chae et al. (2004) "revealed that ethnic identity was positively correlated with both spirituality ends and spirituality means" (p. 21), and there exists a variation of spirituality among ethnic groups.

In his study exploring the relationship between coping strategies and religiosity and spirituality for distressed college students, Schafer (1997) predicted that "religious belief and practice and spirituality would contribute to lower stress" (p. 634). However, Schafer's (1997) results were mixed, finding statistically significant associations among some of his variables.

> First, uncertainty about the existence of God resulted in lower personal distress than either belief or nonbelief. Second, higher importance of religion in respondents' lives was associated with higher personal distress, contrary to expectation. Third, having a clear sense of meaning and direction was strongly associated with lower personal distress. (p. 640)

As this research on college student-athlete spirituality seeks to explore the spiritual essence of athletic participation, Schaffer's work supports the notion that spirituality and religiousness can benefit college students during difficult times.

In her study "The Christian College Experience and the Development of Spirituality among Students," Ma (2003) explored the effects various college experiences had on the spiritual development of 953 college students from 20 different Christian colleges. The sample included students who completed a 4-page questionnaire "focused on how students perceive their overall college experience in relation to their spirituality" (p. 327). In framing her study,

Ma used research specific to Christian colleges and college students. In delimiting her focus on spirituality, she utilized Love and Talbot's (1999) work to frame her perspective and need for the study. Of interest to this spirituality research is her discussion related to the various types of development which has been researched and is said to take place during the college years. As this researcher has done in this literature, Ma (2003) emphasizes Parks' (1986, 2000) and Fowler's (1981) works "in helping young adults find meaning and identity" (p. 324). Rather than take an inclusive approach to religiousness and spirituality, Ma specifically delineates her study as solely related to the spirituality of college students as a process of "spiritual formation." She clarifies within her survey instrument the definition of spiritual formation that is to be used by the students in their self-assessment within the research.

> Spiritual progress made in their personal relationship with God towards spiritual maturity, in all aspects of their lives and character. It involves spiritual growth towards maturity in at least three areas (relationships with God, self, and with others), and encompasses one's intellect, beliefs, values, emotions, will, and behavior. (Ma, 2003, p. 328)

Students reported that the three most influential factors towards their spiritual formation were peer relationships, working through crises while at college, and personal spiritual disciplines. Ma also found statistically significant differences between women and men within her study. In summary, Ma concludes that students at Christian colleges experience positive spiritual growth while in college and that peer relationships have the most significant impact on the spiritual formation of college students at Christian colleges.

The literature cited within this section acknowledged spirituality as an important factor or characteristic for the development of college students. The works utilized empirical and

qualitative methodologies to assess, compare, or understand the unique experiences of college students and the role spirituality has had within higher education or how it has influenced the development of college students. The research indicates that spirituality influences the development of college students, even during their first year of college (Bryant, 2007). Others looked into how spirituality was found to be useful as a coping mechanism during these difficult years (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Constantine et al., 2002; Schafer, 1997). Three studies looked into the role gender differences may have in the spirituality of college students (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004; Bryant, 2007; Buchko, 2004); while others explored the impact various types of spirituality specifically had on African American students (Chae et al., 2004; Constantine et al., 2002).

College Student-Athletes

In this research exploring the spiritual essence of college student-athletes during intercollegiate athletic participation, it is important to understand the college student-athlete population as revealed in the literature. Because this study proposes to utilize National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletes, this section begins with a look at the personal characteristics of Division I college student-athletes as reported by the NCAA. The time demands which influence the college student-athlete experience will then be examined. Following a review of the role of "influential others" and college student-athletes is a section on the identity challenges faced by this unique student population. Finally, research of spiritually related topics and the college student-athlete will be explored.

Division I Student-Athletes

Student-athletes and their intercollegiate participation are governed by the NCAA, founded in 1906 as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (Hawes, 1999).

The NCAA continues today as it did from the beginning for the purpose of, "the regulation and supervision of college athletics throughout the United States, in order that the athletic activities ... may be maintained on an ethical plane in keeping with the dignity and high purpose of education" (Hawes, 1999, para. 22). Today, the "Basic Purpose" of the NCAA is defined as follows:

> The competitive athletics programs of member institutions are designed to be a vital part of the educational system. A basic purpose of this Association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body and, by so doing, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2009a, p. 1)

To this end, the three divisions (I, II, III) of the NCAA and its membership of over 1,000 institutions serve the more than 415,000 student-athletes participating in 23 sports (De Haas, 2009).

Intercollegiate student-athletes comprise a minority of the student population on college campuses, "from less than 2% of the general student body at large Division I institutions to 30% or more at some highly selective Division III liberal-arts colleges" (Brand, 2006, p. 17). The student-athletes who compete at the Division I level, likely the most recognizable population of college student-athlete, are proposed to be the participants in this study. Therefore, the data relevant to this group of student-athletes will be presented. Collectively, the NCAA reports having 164,281 student-athletes competing at the Division I level (De Haas, 2009). The following summary presents the ethnic and gender demographics for Division I

student-athletes, as well as the ethnicity percentages of football and basketball student-athletes
(for a sport by sport and Divisional breakdown see De Haas, 2009).

In 2007-08 the highest percentage of male (64.3 percent) and female (71.9 percent)
student-athletes in Division I was White with the next highest percentage of student-
athletes being Black (25.0 percent) for male student-athletes and 15.9 percent for female
student-athletes). In 2007-08, the highest percentage of male basketball student-athletes
in Division I was Black (60.4 percent) while for the first time the highest percentage of
female basketball student-athletes was also Black (50.1 percent). The next highest
percentage of male basketball student-athletes was White (32.6 percent) and the next
highest percentage of female student-athletes were also White (42.6 percent). The
percentage of male and female Nonresident Alien basketball student-athletes are 7.4
percent and 6.2 percent, respectively. In 2007-08, the highest percentage of football
student-athletes in Division I overall was White (46.6 percent) followed closely by
Black football student-athletes (46.4 percent). The sports with the highest percentage of
Black male student-athletes are basketball (60.4), football (46.4), indoor track and field
(27.8) and outdoor track and field (27.5). Bowling (50.6), basketball (50.1), outdoor
track and field (29.5) and indoor track and field (29.4) were the women's sports with the
highest percentages of Black females. All other sports for both men and women had
less than ten percent Black student-athletes, except for women's volleyball (12.1) and
men's (10.6) and women's cross country (12.9). (De Haas, 2009, p. 5)

In an effort to more fully understand who college student-athletes are, it is also
important to examine the academic nature of NCAA Division I student-athletes. First, in order
for a student-athlete to be eligible for intercollegiate participation they must register with the

NCAA Eligibility Center. The task of this "clearinghouse" is to "certify the academic and amateur credentials of all college-bound student-athletes who wish to compete in NCAA Division I or II athletics" (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2009b, p. 2). The standards for participation site that in order for a student-athlete to be eligible to participate or to receive athletics scholarship, they must (a) Graduate from high school; (b) complete the following 16 courses: (i) 4 years of English, (ii) 3 years of math, (iii) 2 years of natural or physical science, (iv) 1 extra year of either English, math, or natural or physical science, (v) 2 years of social science, (vi) 4 years of extra core courses; (c) earn a minimum required grade-point average in core courses; and (d) earn a combined SAT or ACT sum score (NCAA, 2009b). Although previous research has discussed the special treatment athletes received during the admissions process (Hood, Craig, & Ferguson, 1992; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1985; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Stuart, 1985), these standards ensure that all college student-athletes competing at the NCAA Division I level at least meet a minimum academic standard. In many cases student-athletes not only meet these minimum standards set exclusively for prospective student-athletes, but also are required to meet institutional admission standards which are often higher than those set by the NCAA.

The NCAA also tracks student-athlete progress towards graduation. The 2009 NCAA Graduation-Rates Report (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2010) is prepared by the NCAA and "gives graduation information about students and student-athletes entering in 2002. This is the most recent graduating class for which the required six years of information is available" (NCAA, 2010, para. 3). The freshman cohort graduation rate for all NCAA Division I student-athletes entering in 2002-03 was 64%, where "the freshman-cohort rate indicates the percentage of freshmen who entered during a given academic year and graduated within six

years" (2010, para. 5). This student-athlete graduation rate was higher than that of all students (62%). The freshman-cohort graduation rates for Division I male and female student-athletes was 57 % and 72% respectively. While the male non-athletes graduated at a higher rate (60 percent) than that of their athletic peers, the female non-athletes did not graduate as well as their athletic peers (65%).

The 2009 Graduation-Rates Report also reveals the student-athlete graduation success rate (GSR), which is 79%.

> The graduation success rate (GSR) adds to the first-time freshmen, those students who entered mid-year, as well as student-athletes who transferred into an institution. In addition, the GSR will subtract students from the entering cohort who are considered allowable exclusions (those who either die or become permanently disabled, those who leave the school to join the armed forces, foreign services or attend a church mission), **as well as** [*sic*] those who would have been academically eligible to compete had they returned to the institution. (NCAA, 2010, para. 5)

The 2005 NCAA Graduation-Rates Report, the first year in which the NCAA included the Student-Athlete Graduation Success Rate, identified student-athletes as having a higher graduation rate (6%) than that of their non-athletic peers (60%). While some studies indicate that student-athletes are less academically prepared for college than other students (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Hood et al., 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shulman & Bowen, 2001), much of the research on college student-athletes affirm that their experiences are different than those of college students who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995; Jolly, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). For example, Jolly (2008) in his article exploring the "unique aspects" of the college student-

athlete experience, cites the "relentless, regimented schedules" (p. 146), extensive travel required during season, and limited devotion to academic pursuits as differentiating the student-athlete experience from that of their non-athletic peers. He also posits that "stereotypes of student-athletes as *unintelligent* and *unqualified* for academics continue to be perpetuated" (p. 148). Regardless of the negative impressions student-athletes perceive from faculty, research indicates that faculty still hold the key to student-athlete success (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Jolly, 2008).

The dualistic relationship of the student-athlete as being both student and athlete does not seem to hinder the student-athletes' ability to graduate, compared to that of non-athletes. In fact, based on the NCAA Graduation-Rates Report, one might assume that student-athletes, because of their participation in intercollegiate athletics, are more likely to graduate than are those who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics. This idea of intercollegiate athletic participation increasing the rate of graduation for college student-athletes is incongruent with the "established stereotypes of college athletes as dumb jocks lacking the intellectual constitution and academic motivation to succeed in higher education" (Kissinger & Miller, 2009, p. 4). Conventional wisdom assumes that "due to the structured nature of the playing season, many student-athletes perform better academically in-season than they do during the less structured off-season" (Scott, Paskus, Miranda, Petr, & McArdle, 2008, p. 203). Recent research by Scott et al. (2008) indicates that student-athlete academic performance is, in fact, adversely affected by the playing season.

> Generally, the academic performance of student-athletes was shown to be better outside the season of competition than during the season – contrary to the conventional wisdom. The negative in-season effects were stronger in sports known to have high in-season

time demands (e.g., Division I football, baseball and softball) and among student-athletes who entered college less well prepared academically. (p. 202)

The college student-athlete academic experience is influenced by their participation in intercollegiate athletics. According to the NCAA, student-athletes graduate at a higher rate than do students who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics. Scott et al. (2008) however, found that the graduation rate of student-athletes who participate in "high-profile" sports graduate at a lower rate than do non-student-athletes. Beyond the influence participating in intercollegiate athletics has on student-athletes, there are additional factors which influence the college student-athletes' experience.

Time Demands

Among the factors that influence the college student-athlete experience, time is one of the most influential. Much of the student-athlete research acknowledges the significance of the time demands required of student-athletes both in and out of season (Adler & Adler, 1985; Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995; Jolly, 2008; Sailes, 1998; Scott et al., 2008; Singer, 2008; Wolcott & Gore-Mann, 2009). Student-athletes "have the same responsibilities as other students to the university, but have other duties to their team and coaches" (Wolcott & Gore-Mann, 2009, p. 80). Kissinger and Miller (2009) describe the many demands placed on student-athletes.

While striving to meet such academic demands as attending class, completing homework assignments, meeting with tutors, and attending study halls, it is not uncommon for student-athletes to spend an additional 20 or more hours per week practicing and competing in their chosen sport. (p. 94)

The amount of time student-athletes put into their sport and other commitments has an impact on their academic achievement.

> In a 2001 study, Carodine et al. examined a number of factors that affect a student's ability to be successful academically while participating in intercollegiate athletics. The study revealed that time commitment, physical stress from athletic participation, a high profile on and off campus, and high expectations from faculty and staff cause tremendous stress and affect a student's ability to perform at their academic best. (Stansbury, 2003, p. 6)

The college experience of student-athletes is different than that of students who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics. Both student-athletes and non-athletes alike set out to earn a college degree and make their college choice for similar reasons (Adler & Adler, 1985; Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003). Beyond the common thread of degree attainment, additional factors influence the college student-athlete and segregate their experience from those of their non-athletic peers.

> In addition to the normal developmental issues confronted by the age group, student-athletes must learn to (a) balance academic, athletic, and personal demands; (b) handle the physical and psychological pressures imposed upon them by the athletic environment; (c) deal with being stereotyped; (d) cope with discrimination; (e) adjust to social isolation; and (f) prepare for retirement from active competition. (Street, 1999, p. 22)

Although more and more research is being done on the busyness and engagement of college students (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Hurtado, 2007; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009), little

research exists examining the high demands and expectations placed on the NCAA Division I college student-athlete.

Influential Others

College student-athletes are influenced not only by their environment, but also by their interactions with the many people who surround them (Bruening, Borland, & Burton, 2008). The circle of influence that surrounds the student-athlete is not limited to coaches and teammates, but includes relationships outside the sport arena as well. The people who make up this group of "influential others" or "socialization agents" as Bruening et al. (2008) describe them, include: Faculty, coaches, teammates, family, mentors, and others. It is with the assistance and sometimes guidance of these influencers that "student-athletes must somehow learn how to balance the numerous demands and expectations of school, sports, and social and personal development on a daily basis" (Etzel et al., 2006, p. 521).

Astin (1994), in his follow up study revisiting "the four critical years," asserts that it is the college student's peers who are "the single most important source of influence" (p. 398) to college student success. This is also evidenced by the work of Lally and Kerr (2005), who interviewed eight college student-athletes, examining their career planning and athlete role identities. The participants in Lally and Kerr's study "remarked that their peers from the intercollegiate subculture strongly influenced their beliefs and attitudes early in their university careers" (p. 283). In addition to this idea of peers having significant influence over each other in college, there is much research which indicates that faculty are significant agents of student-athlete academic success (Bruening, 2005; Bruening et al., 2008; Carodine et al., 2001; Comeaux & Harrison, 2006, 2007; Cornelius, 1995; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Engstrom et al., 1995; Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006; Jolly, 2008; Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen,

2007). Adler and Adler's (1985) foundational research of intercollegiate athlete academic performance posited that based on their observations, detrimental classroom interactions and experiences may be transferable to other levels of intercollegiate athletics. Their work affirms that classroom interactions and experiences with faculty caused the student-athlete to become progressively disengaged from their academics.

As the heart of the institution and having significant direct and regular meaningful contact with student-athletes, college faculty members play a significant role in the identity assimilation of student-athletes. Comeaux and Harrison (2007) affirm the impact of student-athlete and faculty interactions to the academic success of male student-athletes. They explored the benefits from particular interactions among "racial/ethnic groups," not previously studied. Their findings suggest that Black and White athletes do not benefit equally from different types of faculty interactions including encouragement to pursue graduate school, achieving professional goals, and assistance with study skills.

Other studies have indicated the importance of faculty interactions in the development of college students and student-athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lamport, 1993; Miller & Kerr, 2002). Harrison et al. (2006) found in their study of faculty interactions with male football and basketball players that "faculty who are willing to extend communication beyond the classroom and are connected with students in an intimate enough way to discern personal qualities have the potential to significantly influence the students' lives, and vice versa" (p. 278).

Additionally, other campus constituents including the coach, librarian, and researcher each have specific roles related to their specialty which are intertwined with those of the faculty affecting the college student experience (Armentrout, 1941). Armentrout's study supports the

need for meaningful relationships to be developed between faculty and student-athletes, both inside and outside the classroom. These meaningful relationships are likely to positively influence the academic success of the student-athlete.

Athletes are often subject to stereotyping that portrays them as academically inferior, unintelligent, and socially impotent (Watt & Moore, 2001). The "dumb jock" stereotype, as prescribed by Simons et al. (2007), highlights the burden faced by student-athletes, having negative perceptions of them regarding their academic capability and motivation. Negative treatment reported by the participants in their research revolved around stereotypical comments made by faculty within the classroom. When athletes fulfill these "prophesies," they affirm the stigma. Simons et al. (2007), put most of the onus on the athletes instead of the faculty, encouraging them to combat the negative stereotype. The research of Engstrom et al. (1995) indicated that faculty perceived male athletes negatively when considering academic competence – the "dumb jock" stereotype, needing special academic services, and from recognition in school papers. The student-athlete's lack of campus engagement makes them susceptible to stereotyping.

In a recent report, which presents an alternative opinion of faculty perceptions of student-athletes, by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (Lawrence, Hendricks, & Ott, 2007), the more than 2,000 faculty surveyed to, among other questions, determine how faculty perceive intercollegiate athletics on their campus at 23 NCAA Division I institutions generally perceived student-athletes in a positive light.

Faculty characterized student-athletes in general as motivated and prepared academically to keep pace with other students. The majority [of faculty] does not believe their faculty colleagues negatively stereotype student-athletes and most do not

perceive that student-athletes lack academic integrity or that academic misconduct

among student-athletes is treated differently. (Lawrence et al., 2007, p. 24)

Whether faculty hold positive or negative views of student-athletes, their perceptions are

directed toward and felt by student-athletes. Faculty are key stakeholders in the student-athlete

experience.

Identity Challenges

Student-athletes face unique challenges, beyond those identified within the academic

and social settings. As the student-athlete enters college they idealize the notion of being both

student and athlete. However, they soon realize time is a precious commodity and difficult

decisions must be made in determining which they will be more of, student or athlete. The

amounts of time student-athletes dedicate to their pursuits, either academics or athletics,

ultimately defines which identity, student or athlete, they assume (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Oftentimes, student-athletes are not masters of their own destiny. It is the "influential others"

who assist with and help define the student-athlete's identity. These coaches, professors,

teammates, and others often project an athletic-dominant identity onto the student-athletes.

Student-athletes early in their academic careers often present themselves as athletes

first, giving the impression that athletics is primary in their college journey. Lally and Kerr

(2005) found their participants who were early in their academic careers to have "strong and

exclusive athletic identities. When in their later university years and more seriously

considering professional occupations, the participants reported investing less in their athlete

role identities" (p. 282). "As the exclusivity of the participants' athlete role identities waned,

their student role identities swelled, followed by the exploration of nonsport career options…

The decline of their athletic identities created the opportunity to explore other roles" (Lally &

Kerr, 2005, p. 283). This notion of a declining athlete identity and a maturation of student or career-minded is more likely for student-athletes who play minor sports or are less likely to pursue a professional career playing their sport. However, many student-athletes, regardless of personal desire, find themselves being labeled, having various stereotypes projected upon them.

Among the common student-athlete stereotypes is the label "dumb jock." This characterization is one that presumes the student-athlete is less academically prepared than non-athletes, enhancing the athlete-specific identity. Being labeled as a "dumb jock" is one of the many sports stereotypes student-athletes face both in and out of the classroom as they navigate the college years. Although the label of dumb jock is a common one, no literature was found to support the notion that student-athletes are indeed less intelligent than that of their non-athletic peers. This stereotype pervades higher education and is not only an issue at "big-time" colleges. When examining the relationship between dumb jock and racial stereotyping, Sailes (1993) in his racial stereotyping study at Indiana University found "more support for the dumb jock stereotype compared to athletic racial stereotyping" (p. 98). Faculty is not above stereotyping athletes. Studies show that some faculty assumes the student-athletes are only at the institution to participate in sport and are surprised when their work is deemed quality (Jolly, 2008).

College student-athletes need to be considered in different and specific subgroups when examining their identity challenges. Not only are student-athletes collectively stereotyped with the "dumb jock" label, but student-athlete subgroups also face additional challenges in their identity realization. Minority student-athletes, that is, female student-athletes and student-athletes of color face additional difficulties when their identity development needs are considered.

The student-athlete population that faces the most significant challenge when navigating the student and athlete identity and college experience are female student-athletes of color. Female student-athletes are a unique student-population in that they do not only face similar time and identity challenges as do male college student-athletes, but they also have additional challenges unique to women. Significant among the difficulties faced by female athletes is the "female athlete triad," disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis (Rust, 2002). This "triad" has been acknowledged in the student-athlete literature and is a significant consideration for those who work with female athletes. Researchers have also identified additional stressors for college female student-athletes (Etzel et al., 2006; Lance, 2004). In addressing the issues related to being a female athlete, and notably leaving out the identity of student, Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, and Kauer (2004) found the female participants "in negotiating and reconciling the social expectations of femininity with athleticism, sportswomen develop two identities—athlete and woman" (p. 326).

Student-athletes of color and specifically female college student-athletes of color face the most strenuous identity issues among college student-athletes. These minority student-athletes go beyond the researched idea of "double-consciousness" and are forced to engage in a milieu of identity selection. These special student-athletes are influenced by their environment and influential others. The college experience of these minority student-athletes is truly unique compared to that of students who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics. Some student-athletes have struggled with their identification as being both student and athlete, as presented in the phenomenological study by Singer (2008), and have refused to be considered "student-athlete." In his study with African American football players, Singer notes that his participants "viewed the term, 'student-athlete' as an inappropriate label and inaccurate description of who

they are, especially given the inordinate amount of time they were expected to devote to football served as a detriment to their overall educational development" (p. 402). These challenges are just some of the ones being faced by student-athletes.

There are multiple opportunities for those concerned with the development of college student-athletes of color, and especially female college student-athletes of color to surround and encourage these students in various types of developmental relationships. Jolly (2008) encourages this awareness-raising effort stating, "Part of helping student-athletes overcome their academic challenges is working with them to strengthen their identity and self-efficacy as students" (p. 147).

Spiritually Related

Though some research has been conducted on topics related to the broad concept of spirituality and student-athletes, very little has been dedicated to the spirituality *of* student-athletes. For example, Storch et al. (2001) examined the religiousness of elite student-athletes. Through the Duke Religion Index (DRI; Koenig, Parkerson, & Meador, 1997) the researchers generalized that athletes were more religious than non-athletes because "athletes attended religious services more than male nonathletes" (p. 350). Other topics that are relative to spirituality and student-athletes include: Athlete's use of prayer in sport (Czech & Bullet, 2007); athlete superstition (Bleak & Frederick, 1998; Todd & Brown, 2003; Wright & Erdal, 2008); athlete competitive and religious orientation (Kelley, Hoffman, & Gill, 1990); and the superlative experience first described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) known as flow.

One area that is closely related to the spiritual experience among student-athletes is the phenomenon known as the "flow" experience. The flow experience has been described in athletic circles as "being in the zone." Jackson (2000), in her chapter "Joy, Fun, and Flow State

in Sport" defines flow as "an optimal psychological state in which complete absorption in the task at hand leads to a number of positive experiential qualities" (p. 140). The flow experience is not something that can be forced. "Sport offers plentiful opportunities to experience flow. Yet the flow state eludes most athletes and seems mysterious and unachievable to many coaches. Indeed, most athletes achieve flow by chance" (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. vi). Although there is an apparent relationship between spirituality and the flow state, few studies have explored their association. One such study is Dillon and Tait's (2000) study which found "empirical verification for the relationship between spirituality and being in the zone in sports" (p. 91). Participating in intercollegiate athletics does not imply that student-athletes will achieve a state of flow while participating, nor does participating in intercollegiate athletics reason that student-athletes are necessarily spiritual individuals. However, the research of college student-athletes related to their participation in sport might lead us to believe that student-athletes experience a higher or transcendent experience from their sport participation.

Summary

This literature review explored the literature related to spirituality and college students, as well as the experiences of college student-athletes which makes them a unique student population. The first segment examined the literature surrounding spirituality, including religiousness, and the role of faith and belief as being foundational for understanding spirituality. Following the spirituality section, a historical perspective of spirituality in American higher education was presented, providing historical connections to sport and intercollegiate athletics. The third section examined the relationship of spirituality and sport. The fourth segment presented the literature related to spirituality and college students and college student development. The final section in this literature review presented the research

related to college student-athletes, including student-athlete related subsections related to the

Division I student-athlete, their time commitments and demands, influential others and the

student-athlete identity quandary. The literature presented in this review is meant to establish a

foundation upon which the essence of the spiritual experience of student-athletes made through

participation in intercollegiate athletics is derived.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of student-athletes' spiritual experiences while participating in intercollegiate athletics. The goal of this chapter is to present the rationale for this qualitative phenomenological student-athlete research. This study explored the essence of college student-athlete spirituality through sport participation. Guiding this investigation was the research question: What is the spiritual experience of student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics?

Within the introduction of the research methodology, phenomenology is presented as the appropriate method for studying student-athlete spirituality. The section on research design includes the epoche, wherein the researcher brackets this study "in preparation to derive new knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85), followed by participant selection, data collection and analysis. The plan for results and considerations for participants concludes this chapter.

Phenomenology

Although spirituality is a difficult phenomenon to study scientifically, the qualitative method is noted as an appropriate approach (Collins, 1987; Love & Talbot, 1999). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a wide range of "interconnected interpretive practices" (p. 3) are used in qualitative research to attempt to fully understand a phenomenon. To this end, they provide the following definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible; transforming the world into a series of representations; studying things in their natural settings; attempting to make sense of, to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

This study used the interactive qualitative inquiry method of phenomenology to describe the essence, or lived experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Moustakas, 1994) of the spiritual experience of college student-athletes. The transcendental phenomenological approach, a procedure-driven method presented by Moustakas (1994), is "focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on the description of the experiences of participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59).

The researcher following a transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the Epoche process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies – to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22)

Dukes (1984) described the nature of phenomenological research as the study of a small sample of participants, "allowing the subjects to speak for themselves and to reveal the logic of their experience as lived" (p. 197). It is the procedures of the transcendental phenomenological approach presented by Moustakas (1994) that revealed the essence of the student-athlete spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics.

Research Design

In an effort to "convey an overall essence of the [spiritual] experience" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60), this research drew on the transcendental phenomenological procedures put forth by Moustakas (1994) and described by Creswell (2007). The procedures for this study included: (a) identifying the phenomenon to study; (b) bracketing out the researcher's experiences through the epoche; (c) collecting data from multiple college student-athletes who have experienced the phenomenon; (d) analyzing the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes, then combining the statements into themes; and (e) developing both textural and structural descriptions of the student-athlete experiences to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon.

Epoche

In this study of college student-athlete spirituality, the researcher, through "bracketing," or epoche, "set aside [his] experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59), which in this study was the spiritual meaning college student-athletes make during intercollegiate athletic participation. This setting aside:

> Makes it possible to view the constitutive process – the *hows* – by which a separate and distinct empirical world becomes an objective reality for members. Ontological judgments about the nature and essence of things and events are temporarily suspended so that the observer can focus on the ways that members of the life world subjectively constitute the objects and events they take to be real – that is, to exist independent of their attention to, and presence in, the world. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 489)

Because this student-athlete research was more concerned with the experiences of the

participants and not as much on the exposition of the researcher, the transcendental

phenomenological approach was utilized (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Although a

complete removal of biases through bracketing is difficult to achieve (Moustakas, 1994), it was

sought through an intentional and ongoing reflective analysis to "learn to see naively and

freshly again" (p. 101), as if for the first time.

Participant Selection

Participants were identified from three research universities which compete within the

same athletic conference at the NCAA Division I level. Student-athletes who participate at the

Division I level are easily recognizable in the media and typify what is commonly understood

to be a college student-athlete. The institutions for this study were given the following

pseudonyms: Central State University (CSU), Great Lakes University (GLU), and Golden

University (GU). As student-athletes, the participants were enrolled full-time in their university

and were current members of an intercollegiate athletic team. Because "the aim of a

phenomenological study is, finally, to uncover the necessary structural invariants of an

experience, and those invariants are fully discoverable in any individual case" (Dukes, 1984, p.

200), this research utilized a relative sample size.

To achieve a thick, rich description of the essence of the student-athlete spiritual

experience made through intercollegiate athletic participation, eight participants were selected

for this phenomenological research. The co-researchers included in this spirituality research

agreed to fully commit to sharing their experience in order for the researcher to capture the

essence of the student-athlete spiritual meaning-making which is made through participation in

intercollegiate athletics.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that many qualitative researchers "employ theoretical or purposive sampling, and not random sampling models. [Researchers] seek out groups, settings, and individuals where and for whom the process of being studied are most likely to occur" (p. 370). "It is essential that all participants have experience with the phenomenon being studied" (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). Therefore, participants were recruited using purposeful criterion selection. That is, student-athletes were identified and selected with their participation being requested based on specific criterion. The following criteria were used to qualify the participants for this student-athlete spirituality research:

1. Student-athletes competing at a NCAA Division I university.

2. Student-athletes having completed at least one competitive season of intercollegiate play (e.g., used at least one year of eligibility).

3. Student-athletes who place value in spirituality.

4. Student-athletes who acknowledge and accept the researcher's definition of spirituality for the purpose of this study.

Initial identification of potential participants was made through personal contacts and networks at two of the universities, Golden University and Great Lakes University. These personal contacts were individuals who acknowledge and understand not only the phenomenon being researched in this study, but are also personally or professionally connected with organizations which ascribe to the "use" of athletics in developing the personal, moral, and spiritual development of student-athletes (e.g., Athletes in Action, Fellowship of Christian Athletes). In understanding these organizations are distinctly Christian and have an evangelistic mission, I utilized these contacts or networks to also pursue and achieve maximum variation among the participants. That is, to solicit the assistance of these personal contacts in

identifying not only student-athletes who profess a traditional Christian faith, but also student-athletes who fit the selection criteria and who also ascribe to a different or no faith tradition than that of Christianity.

Once identification of prospective participants was obtained, initial solicitation of those participants was made in order to (a) request their participation, (b) explain the study, its importance, and the protocol, including participant requirements and expectations, and (c) determine their qualifications based on the selection criteria to be included in this spirituality research. In order for the prospective participants to be included as a co-researcher in this student-athlete spirituality research, each participant avowed three criteria. First, the participant understood the purpose of the study and agreed to the definition of spirituality cited for the purposes of this research. Second, the participant acknowledged spirituality as it has been defined does, in fact, have role in their athletic participation in their student-athlete experience. Finally, the participant agreed to fully engage in the research process, including completing the Informed Consent Form. Participants in this study were assured their rights as a participant and the possible risks associated with participating in this study. Student-athletes with varying personal characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, gender, sport) were included in this spirituality study.

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to understand the essence of the college student-athletes' experiences related to spirituality while participating in intercollegiate athletics. After Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, potential student-athlete participants were identified, solicited, and recruited to participate in the study. Once the student-athletes were identified and agreed to participate in the research, I traveled to the location of each participant's choosing in order to conduct a face-to-face interview. None of the interviews took

place on the physical campus. Interviews were conducted in an office building conference room, a super-center café, a hotel meeting room, and in a restaurant. It is the responsibility of the researcher to create a "climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Data collection was conducted for each participant separately by way of semi-structured, electronically recorded, in-depth interviews, where handwritten notes were taken to capture non-verbal and other descriptive data relative to the interview.

To hear the essence of the student-athlete spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics, the following interview questions guided this study and were derived from the researcher's experience and expertise, as well as from related spirituality studies (Gorsuch & Miller, 1999; Hansen, 2005; Lowry & Conco, 2002):

1. What is it like to be a student-athlete at (institution)?

2. What does it feel like to take the (competitive venue)?

3. Are there routines that you follow prior to or during competition? Tell me about them.

4. Describe for me your experience as a student-athlete.

5. Why do you play (insert sport)?

6. How would you describe the feelings you get when you play your sport to a non-athlete?

7. What is playing your sport most similar to? Why?

8. Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person? Why or how so?

9. How do you define or describe spirituality?

10. In your own words, can you describe the essence of spirituality?

11. In what ways is your spirituality lived out?

12. Explain from where your understanding of spirituality comes from.

13. Besides, or other than an experience where you made some form of a "faith commitment," please describe a spiritual experience you have had.

14. Is there a time that you would say you have felt most spiritual? Can you describe that time?

15. Is spirituality static, or is it something that grows and develops over time? Can you explain?

16. How do you understand spirituality as it relates to your participation in your sport?

17. How is your spirituality affected by your participation in intercollegiate athletics?

18. Are there similarities or differences between your spirituality and how you participate as a student-athlete?

19. How do believe your athletic experience has affected your spiritual development?

Data Analysis

Upon completion of each interview, data were transcribed verbatim for further analysis. Prior to formal analysis, each participant was asked to member-check the transcription, critically reviewing the transcript of their respective interviews and initial interpretations, "amending, removing or appending comments where necessary" (Miller & Kerr, 2002, p. 352). This process of confirming the data was the first of two methods of triangulation. The second method of triangulation which was utilized in this research was peer review or debriefing. Once the data validation was completed, I followed Moustakas' (1994) method for analyzing the transcribed data, revealing the essence of the spiritual experience of student-athletes made while participating in intercollegiate athletics. The procedures presented by Moustakas (1994)

include: 1) horizontalization, listing and grouping every relevant expression; 2) reduction and elimination, testing each expression for (a) relevancy and (b) identification; 3) clustering and thematicizing, identifying the core themes; 4) validation, checking the theme for consistency against the entire constituent record; 5) construct an individual textural description for each co-researcher; 6) construct individual structural descriptions for each co-researcher; and 7) "Construct for each research participant a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes" (p. 121). Finally, a "composite description" of the group of student-athletes' essence of their spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics was made (Moustakas, 1994).

Consideration for Participants

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before the study was begun. The safety and welfare of the participants was primary in conducting this phenomenological research. In order for the participants to reveal their spiritual experience through the data collection methods, priority was given to their comfort and freedom to speak without restraint, ideally revealing the spiritual essence of their student-athlete experience made through intercollegiate athletic participation. The participants were given the opportunity to member-check the findings, and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

Plan for Study

The plan for the results of the study will be to disseminate the findings among those who are concerned with the development of college student-athletes, assisting in furthering the understanding of the spiritual nature of this unique student population. Furthermore, faculty, athletics administrators, and student affairs professionals will be better informed in how to best develop strategies and programs which enhance the learning environment of student-athletes.

As a result of the growing interest in spirituality in higher education, there is potential for publication and further research beyond the participants utilized in this phenomenological study.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of the student-athlete spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics. The following question guided this study in attempting to fulfill the purpose: What is the spiritual experience of student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics? Chapter 4 presents characteristics gathered from the eight individuals who agreed to participate in this spirituality study, and further reveals the intercollegiate athlete experiences related to spirituality. A table is presented illustrating the characteristics of each participant including: Pseudonym, university pseudonym, sport, gender, age, ethnicity, and educational level. Using the transcribed data from the semi-structured interviews and field notes, participants' responses were grouped into "relevant expressions" or clusters to present the student-athlete experience in a thick, rich description. Four core themes emerged from the data using phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994) and are presented. Illustrations, analysis, and synthesis of participant responses are used to present evocative description to the four themes: (a) defining spirituality; (b) inseparability of spiritual, student, and athlete; (c) responsibility; and (d) influence on others. The analyses within the illustrations are a product of the Moustakas (1994) phenomenological research method. Finally, the meanings and essences of these student-

athletes' spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics are presented as the spiritual essence of the student-athlete experience.

Participants

The participants in this spirituality study were four females and four males who participate in intercollegiate athletics at the NCAA Division I level, at three different Midwestern institutions which compete within the same athletic conference. Each institution attended by the participants is clearly recognizable within the sports media as being a member of this Midwestern conference, and are also well-regarded as "world-class" and "prestigious" research institutions. The institutions for this study were given the pseudonyms: Central State University (CSU), Great Lakes University (GLU), and Golden University (GU). Each participant chose the time and place for the semi-structured interviews to be conducted, where they described their spiritual experience related to participation in intercollegiate athletics.

The student-athletes who agreed to participate in this study were willing and enthusiastic towards openly sharing their spiritual experience; two from Great Lakes University even offered to call friends who they felt would be interested and willing to participate. There were other potential participants from Golden University who were willing and very interested in participating in this research, but their intercollegiate athletic practice and workout schedules were too demanding. I felt like I was asking too much of them, and together we decided it would be in their best interest to not participate. "Rick," a baseball player from Great Lakes University expressed at the end of our time together that he appreciated my openness and willingness to hear his story without prejudice. He came into the interview with the idea he was only "selected" because he is Jewish. Although it was beneficial to this spirituality research to contact Rick as a participant with a Jewish faith, he was identified and recruited to

participate as someone who was recognized as being spiritual as well as a qualified candidate meeting the research protocol and criteria. In all, the participants were enthusiastic about the study, although many stated they were unsure of what to expect prior to the interview appointment, but that they were interested in the topic and wanted to contribute. Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of the eight participants in alphabetical order by their self-selected pseudonym.

Table 1 Participant characteristics.

Pseudonym	University	Sport	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/Race	Educational Level
Bob	Central State	Football	M	20	African American	Sophomore
Dominique	Great Lakes	Swimming	F	22	Black*	Junior
Lucy	Golden	Swimming	F	22	White	Senior
Matt	Central State	Football	M	22	White	Senior
Mya	Great Lakes	Volleyball	F	21	White	Junior
Rick	Great Lakes	Baseball	M	22	White	Senior
Sandra	Great Lakes	Track & Field	F	20	White	Junior
Steve	Great Lakes	Baseball	M	21	White	Junior

*Note.** Dominique insisted she be identified as "Black, not African American.

In an effort to give illustrative description to the intercollegiate athletic experience, the experiences of the participants are presented as student-athletes at their respective NCAA Division I institution. These descriptions include what it is like to be a student-athlete at their institution as well as the experience of being an elite athlete. Because being a student-athlete at Division I institutions is a unique experience, the feelings the participants experience when they take their respective competitive arena are presented to further explicate the Division I student-athlete experience.

Bob, a 20-year old African American sophomore walk-on football player who attends Central State University, was "raised Christian." Bob grew up in a close-knit family where his grandparents were very influential in his life and his upbringing.

My senior football season, my grandmother on my dad's side died. I was really close – she really helped raise me. She is the reason I talk the way I do. She was an English teacher and I came in the house talking like a hoodlum from being out talking in the streets all day, she would be like "Excuse me. What did you say? Pronounce your words." Etc. etc. She, I mean, she was very instrumental in raising me along with my grandfather.

He describes himself as "having a certain set of beliefs and in those beliefs I'm not necessarily a church every Sunday like strict like whatever the Bible says goes Christian."

I believe that you can believe what you want but I'm definitely going to believe what I want to. I'm not the type of person that's going to sit there and preach to someone about how they should be religious and how oh you're going to hell. . . . I think that if a person is going to come to God, then they're going to come to God on their own time. Once they've made up their minds about something, no one is going to change it. . . . You have to have something change inside yourself, not have someone sit there and talk.

Growing up in the same city as CSU, "I've always loved CSU football." In his athletic experience Bob reveals the priority he gives playing intercollegiate football, the enjoyment of the college football experience, and the importance of being a part of a team. His words describe well the position of football in his college town and his reasons for playing football.

I think really being a student-athlete is just about managing your time and having fun while you're in school. It's about playing for something bigger than yourself. It's not about making it to the NFL or anything like that. It's about really having fun and like when you walk around and you see people wearing CSU football jerseys, even though they might be wearing one person's jersey, they really like love the team, you know? So I mean that's really what it means to me, it means playing for something bigger than yourself, doing something beyond just academics. Um, and just having fun. It's just a lot of fun.

Bob goes on to explain how he believes playing football provides the avenue through which life's challenges can be tested, and how it can also be a microcosm of life.

Through your experiences you learn, and you have goals and you set goals and you try to reach those goals and sometimes you come up short and sometimes you make them, but regardless I mean until it's over, you're always working towards goals. You're always on a pursuit of happiness you know? Um and sometimes you look back at your athletic career and you say I accomplished what I wanted to accomplish and sometimes you don't. Sometimes you have regrets and sometimes you wish you would have worked harder at this so that you would have a better chance at doing something else or accomplishing one of those goals you didn't' get to, know what I mean? So it's almost like a small life inside of life.

Dominique, a 22-year old junior studying movement science and planning to add psychology as a second major, swims for Great Lakes University. Being born in Jamaica, and having grown up in Florida, describes herself as "Black, not African American." She describes herself as having "strong Christian beliefs." Everyone in her family is "on the same page" with

their beliefs. "We all believe there's a higher power and we do things like sports, like everything we do is with purpose."Dominique has a high sense of purpose in all she does: Swimming, academics, and life.

> When you go through your life, not just doing it just because. You're doing it because like you're, you have a higher purpose to what you're doing so everything you do, you do it with meaning. And it's not just "Oh, I go to school because I should." You go to school – I don't know, I think when I'm going to school, I go to school because no one is gonna give you a background or platform to stand on. So you have a college degree or masters or something, people are like "Okay, I just came out of high school." No one is gonna listen to you. So everything you do, you do with a higher purpose.

> As long as she can remember Dominique has been in the pool. For her a big part of the

swimming experience is the social aspect, the friends and relationships that are developed. Dominique describes being a student-athlete at her institution as "interesting."

> I mean everywhere you go everyone knows [reference college] student-athletes and it's a really well deserved reputation. It's really hard trying to balance school and swimming and trying to be like social. Everything is hard. Nothing is very easy. So it's definitely interesting.

To be a student-athlete, according to Dominique, is to be someone who is in a position of responsibility; one where high expectations are placed upon the student-athlete, especially at her institution.

> I feel like when you become a NCAA Division I athlete people always, no matter where you go, people, I mean, I've always been an athlete, they're like "oh, you do sports in college," and they always have this like, look up to you, depending on where you are. If

you're at Central State University, they don't' really care. It's like "oh, you go to CSU,

okay. They expect a lot from you. I feel like, they always expect more than like the

average person cause you're doing more; you're balancing a sport with school and to do

both. And people just expect more from you in general. And especially being a GLU

athlete, people always expect like the best from you. Doesn't' matter what it is, the

GLU student-athlete is supposed to be able to do *everything* [emphasis added].

According to the participants, many student-athletes often feel a responsibility to their

institution, whether that is because they are scholarship athletes and feel pressure to perform, or

as a point of pride in their institution and not wanting to have their performance reflect poorly

on the institution. Dominique feels a lot of responsibility when she prepares for her swimming

meets. She is very intentional about trying not to focus on the seriousness of the competition

and the pressure that surrounds her performance. She utilizes various techniques to help her

prepare and relax.

I personally tend not to focus when I compete cause it makes me panic and swim

slower, so I usually enter [the natatorium] thinking about the social part of the meet.

When I'm at the meet, then I start focusing. Being on the block, especially in-season,

competing for Great Lakes University. What I do here affects everything. Because if I

swim poorly; if our team looks bad, GLU athletics looks bad. If the athletics look bad,

the school looks bad. [There are] so many people watching Great Lakes University.

There's always a lot of responsibility.

Being an individual swimmer and a member of a team, Dominique explains the big-picture

ideals of camaraderie and commitment in the pursuit of a goal.

Well practice wise, I mean I do it cause it's fun. So I just love going and love being part of a team cause it's nice to be part of something and working with so many people, other girls who work just as hard as you. So it makes you want to go and practice. I know if I miss a practice there are 13 other girls saying "Why isn't she here? Like, we're all here." So, [when I'm competing in] the races, it's just you have put so much time in and its great trying to be the best at something.

Swimming, according to Dominique, is a high-level commitment that not everyone is willing to pursue.

Swimming is a way of life. Like, you cannot just float through swimming. I mean you can't just kind of want to do it or think it's like, this would be fun for a while. If you're gonna do it you're probably spending what 14 plus hours a week; you have doubles every day. It's you have to get up at 5:00 in the morning every morning and then go back again after whatever you do during your day. There's a lot of things in your life that get cut out because of it. I can't think a really good example of what exactly is like that – but you have to be all in.

Lucy, also a swimmer, is a 22-year old studying animal science. She attends Golden University, which is about 40 minutes from her home. Lucy comes from a close-knit family where her parents, grandparents, and aunt, "have all been huge influences" in her spiritual journey.

Just encouraging me from the time I was little, from the time I could read, reading me Bible stories and reading Bible stories with me. And I was baptized when I was really young and I've just kind of been raised that way.

In explaining how she lives out her spirituality, Lucy says:

> I go to church pretty much every Sunday and try to pray daily. I have not been doing
> well about reading my Bible lately – really need to work on that. I need to find a good
> Bible study that I can do daily. And then I have FCA meetings once a week. But I
> would say I really get my energy or my fill each week at church.

> Early in her athletic career, Lucy sought the assistance of the athletic department's sport
psychologist, who recommended journaling and reflective practices among other strategies to
help her control her pre-competition nerves. Lucy characterizes her intercollegiate athletic
experience by the relationships she has made with her teammates. Speaking of what it means to
be a student-athlete, Lucy describes it as "amazing."

> I got to experience so many things that I just didn't think I would ever get to; got to
> travel all over the country and got to meet so many people. Some of the girls from the
> team are literally my best friends.

In explaining her perspective and how she manages the time demands, Lucy said, "I kind of
compare it to having a part-time job in college. And I guess I can't really [know] what it's like
to be a normal student because I've never experienced that." Lucy describes her passion for
swimming and the didactic nature of being on an intercollegiate swim team, of it being both
individual and team-oriented.

> I just love it. It's really hard and there aren't, I mean maybe track is one other sport that
> you just put in hours and hours and hours of not very much fun training to just shave
> like tenths of a second off your time. But there's no feeling quite like when you finish a
> practice and it was grueling and hard and you cried the whole way through it, but you
> did it. And you have this incredible sense of accomplishment and just the thrill of

racing. Like it's a very individual sport but at the same time, it's very team oriented. I

wanted my teammates to swim fast just as much as I wanted myself to swim fast. So I

love that its individual but it's still a team effort. So, [pause] there aren't a lot of sports

like that.

In describing the feelings she gets while preparing for competition, Lucy explains it as a "huge

adrenaline rush."

My hands will shake every once in a while. When I'm on the blocks, I shake my fingers

and my whole team makes fun of me for it because I'll be like, ready, when they say

"take your mark," and I'll be going like this [wiggling fingers quickly] the whole time

but it's just cause I'm like nervous and I'm ready to go. So it's just kind of an

adrenaline rush, kind of like the first big drop on a roller coaster or something – you get

the butterflies and you just go.

She places just as much emphasis on team membership and the enjoyment she gets from

encouraging her teammates as she does from the challenge of competing on the Division I

stage.

It's a rush. Like my heart beats really fast, like out of just getting excited. I mean I

have the butterflies in my stomach but it's just I kind of just try to channel that energy

into excitement for my race and just its fun cheering. There's no feeling quite like it,

just screaming your head off for your teammates, experiencing that together.

Matt grew up in the college city where he attends Central State University, a Division I

institution where football is king. He is 22-years old, a junior, and plays football. He describes

himself as being "good at" football, and shows his sense of humor by explaining that he isn't

"built" to run cross country. Matt describes his upbringing as Catholic.

But my dad obviously wasn't. My dad grew up in a Catholic school and then when he got done, he never wanted to be Catholic again. He never went to church again. He was a Christian. I call him a *C* and *E* Christian – Christmas and Easter kind of guy. That's the only time he went. My mom tried to raise us Catholic, but I just kind of found my faith at a young age and stuck with it as a Christian. But even when I was younger, trying to figure out what am I or why am I here? I feel like even then I was still a spiritual person. I feel like even then it was kind of a natural thing for me.

Matt describes the student-athlete experience as being "very intense." As is the case with almost every student-athlete, the time demands are a significant challenge, especially given the fact that Matt is a Biology pre-medicine major. Matt details the complexities of being a football student-athlete at a large Division I institution.

It's very intense, especially at such a big school in a sport like football where it's such a highly recognized sport, in CSU city, in that aspect it's very intense. But it's also a lot of time and commitment and it's intense in that aspect. I think intense is the best way to put it because all the hours you put in, and just like the atmosphere, with all the fans in CSU city. Yeah it's just crazy. When I came in I didn't realize how many hours went into actually being a student-athlete. There's a lot of side things we do. We have a lot of student-athlete meetings and student-athlete speakers. We have [seminars] once a quarter usually. All the student-athletes come together for some big event. We have to like, listen to a speaker about you know drugs and sports or making right decisions, all that kind of stuff. So it's very intense.

The imagery Matt provides in describing what it is like to take the field on such a grand stage is vivid, and goes beyond the simple description of "energetic."

It's pretty crazy, especially before games where you haven't [played] in a long time. It's really, it's very movie-like. You feel almost like you're in the movie *Gladiator* coming out, you feel like it's surreal. But, you know as the games go by, towards the end of the season, it kind of settles down just a little bit, [pause] until usually you hit the Great Lakes University game.

The city where Matt attends college is also his hometown. The fact that he was close to home and the importance placed on football in his town caused Matt to struggle with his priorities as he began his college career as a student-athlete.

I would say it's been kind of an uphill climb. Because when I first came out of high school, I was a really good athlete. But when I came in I focused a lot on my athletics because it was such a big opportunity to be at Central State University, you know. Coming in I walked on, and they took me in. And like especially coming from CSU city, all my friends were excited and I really focused a lot on the athletics part of it. My grades kind of slipped. And especially being pre med, grades are everything to them. So since then it's been like an uphill battle of really having to be the student, emphasis on the student-athlete. My first quarter I had like a 2.76 and every quarter I've had to raise that GPA up a little bit. And a lot of quarters I've had like 4.0's, but its' been too hard to get that grade point average up to where med schools will consider me. It was a rough first quarter.

Matt indirectly addresses the football stereotype of student-athletes who play football as a combat sport, placing football above the educational experience.

A good way of looking at it is like a battle, almost like a war; not even a battle, but a war where there's some, a lot of wins for one side, but at any moment the other side can

take control, I mean it's up to the very end. But, like I say that you know, but I mean obviously we're not in any way soldiers. I think it's the biggest issue for people if they really invest all of their life in that sport. You know like soldiers, like I feel like in the Marines, the American soldier. That's their life. Everything is invested in that. For me it's like my whole life's not in football like my life is in other things too, and I feel like for some guys when their life is all about football, you know everything's invested in that. That's when it can kind of turn that way, when they consume themselves and act like real soldiers.

Mya, 21, a volleyball player studying to be a nurse has struggled through years of injury during her intercollegiate athletic experience at Great Lakes University. Her father played football for Central State University, and has always been seen as an athlete because her "family is just a sport family to begin with." Mya's spirituality has changed during her college years.

I was raised catholic and I came to school and met like my best friend on my team. "Mallory" and then "Sandra," our other roommate "Donna" – she plays tennis – we're all different sports. So to me it was really interesting this year. Their perspective on spirituality and then just kind of having my perspective, cause my perspective was we pray before a meal, we go to church every Sunday, the priest preaches about certain things in the Bible, but it's never I'd never really took it as like – I took it as there's a God that's looking over me, but I never really took it as a personal relationship with Christ. So I think like my spirituality kind of developed after really critically thinking about what do I believe in and praying and going to church and meeting with people and

like I think that's really when I started to define for myself what do I believe in? How is

my relationship with Christ?

To Mya, there is a lot expected of the student-athletes at Great Lakes University. There

is balance between being a student and athlete, although both are difficult and have high

expectations. GLU is known just as much for its academics as it is for their athletics. Also,

being a student-athlete is about the opportunity "to have an impact on a whole bunch of other

girls." Not only are there expectations to influence others at GLU, but there are also resources

for "anything I'm looking for, whether it's being a student, whether it's being an athlete,

whether it's finding friends to worship with, like there's just opportunities, huge thing." Being

the only student-athlete in her nationally-ranked nursing program, Mya is "respected" among

her peers for being able to balance the demands of the nursing education and intercollegiate

athletics. However, she has paid the price in developing "pretty severe anxiety [her] freshman

and sophomore years because of the balance and the stress." Mya emphasizes the challenges

and feelings of being torn between academics and athletics.

> They expect you to get really good grades and I hope to become a nurse practitioner and
>
> looking through applications for that you have to have your GPA at a certain level and
>
> so it's kind of like it's hard to prioritize between nursing and volleyball when volleyball
>
> is paying for nursing. It's just kind of like everything is pulling, but at the same time.
>
> Once you accomplish something it's like the best feeling ever. So, I don't' know, it's
>
> like something I would never give up to be a student-athlete, but at the same time it's
>
> really challenging.

Rick is a general studies major, 22-years old, and a baseball player for Great Lakes

University. He is an avid New York Yankees fan, growing up in New Jersey, has a dream to

open a "good steakhouse in New York" one day. His relationship with his family, "a good relationship with my parents, my mother and my brother, and my sister," is of utmost importance, significant in how he relates his spirituality. After going through a difficult period of time with his family and especially his parents, Rick places special emphasis on relationships.

> No matter what I did during the day, the thought that I had was I wasn't really close to my family kind of made everything not as good as it should have been. And I was doing really well in baseball at the time, but I think having this very good relationship with the people you love, and if it's a girlfriend or your parents or your brother and sister, I think that's a very important thing and I make sure now that I'm always talking to my mom and my dad and always checking on my little brother and my older sister. I think that's something. It's not like a superstition obviously, but I always make sure that everything is good with my family and how I represent my family's name and how I act towards my parents.

> Although he describes himself as not very religious, Rick is one of the more superstitious participants in this study.

> There are a lot of things; like what I eat, what I drink, what I do the night before. But some of the things, I have this like weird thing with my shirts that I wear under [my uniform]. I've never really told anybody this. There's a certain tightness to my shirt. Like, if it's a little too tight, like mentally in my head I'll think it will stop my arm from a full range, but it won't. I have to find like – I wear the same shirt for cold and warm days the whole year.

In describing why he plays baseball and the feelings he gets during his participation, Rick openly explains some of the struggles he has encountered.

> To be honest with you, I don't know how much I really enjoy playing. I was thinking about it a couple weeks back – like it's fun, but I don't know. I don't know – maybe it's the phase I'm in right now. But I'm here because I've been very successful, but I don't think I really love it, or enjoy it. I don't know, it's weird, it's this feeling that I've been having.

Rick characterizes being a student-athlete at GLU as having the expectation "to be the best, to win, and to do well in the classroom." His academic experience is one that often befalls student-athletes who set out to pursue their ideal degree. Rick set out on his academic career to be a sport management major, but had to settle for a general studies degree due to the significant time demands of baseball.

> Unfortunately, I don't think I was able to accomplish in school what I wanted. They say you know, do whatever you want when you get into [reference college], but with the time [demands] I've noticed that the really good players are the players that really don't, hold on, let me go back here. We've had guys in pre-med. We've had art design guys. Those are the guys that are the backup, backup players, who really attend a school and get it done and aren't making [athletics] their priority. And all the guys that are our best players, that's not their priority at all. Not saying they're the worst in school. But they're the least dedicated [to their academics]. And I think that being a student-athlete really disabled me. I wanted to go to business school, or at least try, and that thought was right out the window when we're up at 6:00 in the morning running, and we're practicing 5 days a week all year round, and lifting, and by the time you get home at 6, 7

at night you are drained. And it's definitely making me a better person all this commitment and learning from all these guys around me. It's great for me as a person, but I think it didn't let me completely fulfill my expectations as a student.

Besides being "very time consuming," the student-athlete experience fosters a growing appreciation for the character development which is fostered through the intercollegiate athletic experience. Rick explains it has been "very difficult to manage everything, but I think everyone comes out of it a better person; not necessarily a better athlete or better student, but more mature and a better human being."

Sandra, 21, a thrower on GLU's track and field team is studying English, grew up in the home of a minister. She describes herself as spiritual, but shies away from the term religious, because she believes "religion is kind of a scary word."

So many people stamp religion on beliefs and I wouldn't call myself religious. I don't think that I have a set of obviously, like the Bible is set in place, and guidelines are gonna help us live a fulfilling and happy life, but they're not like set in stone. You're not gonna go to hell if you do something wrong.

In describing how she lives out her spirituality, Sandra explains:

In a typical day, I mean I try to go to bed and read my Bible every night. I try to go to a different piece of scripture just cause it's good to be in the word. I've been really bad about going to Bible study. I mean everyone it's kind of hard to just set aside time where you're able to go and meet with people that really surround you with good solid grace.

Sandra sees her intercollegiate athletic experience as "an honor to compete for Great Lakes University." Prior to her first year at GLU, Sandra was a two-sport athlete and hoped to

play basketball and track in college. There is an echo of responsibility and opportunity to the community, institution, and fellow students mentioned by Sandra. She believes her institution does a good job of "putting us on a pedestal where we're able to help other people as well as doing our job" as athletes. Her coaches have played a significant role in stressing academics first.

> If you're struggling with a class, regardless of whether we're two weeks out of NCAA [championships] or we're in just September where it's just fall training. If academics are a problem you need to figure that out cause that comes first. Cause bottom line you can't compete as an athlete if your academics aren't taken care of and [the coaches] understand that. There's life after track and field. You have 4 to 5 years of where you're gonna be competing, and it's a blast. And you're gonna make friendships with your teammates that you'll never have that kind of a bond with people in the workplace. But academics comes first.

> Steve is a 21 year-old junior baseball player studying movement science at Great Lakes University. Being "raised in the church, my dad was a pastor for ten years probably, now he actually works for the conference in youth ministry," Steve has always been around Christianity. He says he's "always believed," but hasn't really been challenged about what or why he believes until recently. A friend challenged Steve and asked him questions about his faith that he couldn't answer, so he has been spending "literally hours trying to figure out if what I believe is true,

> what I was taught is true. Cause I realized there are a lot of people out there that don't believe it and you know, who's to say I'm right? You know, all this stuff, and in doing that its spending time trying to know more, trying to understand. I've strengthened my

relationship and my belief in God and I mean there's no doubt in my mind that God

exists and he's real and he cares about us.

Steve describes the student-athlete experience as "a grind." Similar to the other student-

athletes, time management is a significant consideration for him.

Every day of the week we have minimum of probably 4 hours put in strictly baseball

related. It's you have to find a way to really manage your time well to stay on top of

your studies. I know some of the guys it depends on what courses you're taking to

decide upon how much time to set aside for studying. But it was an adjustment period

for sure. Time consuming sometimes; pretty stressful, but you work through it. You

put in the time and it will pay off.

Themes

The following section presents the four themes which emerged from the data using

phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). These themes are

characteristic of and evidenced in the student-athlete experience. The four emergent themes

which are followed by the essence of the college student-athlete spiritual experience are

identified as: Defining spirituality; inseparability of spiritual, student, and athlete;

responsibility; and influence on others.

Defining spirituality. The participants in this study expressed their understanding and

belief of what spirituality is for them, how they define the personal construct of spirituality.

Steve, a baseball player, describes his understanding of spirituality as being "supernatural, a

belief in something other than the here and now; something more than just life itself on earth."

Sandra expresses her spiritual-athletic experience as being steeped in her religious beliefs that

God is in control, and that He has given her this "gift" of athletic ability which she feels

responsible to "enjoy and to be able to bless people through." Sandra defines spirituality as

"having a personal relationship with God," and "a set of beliefs; a set of beliefs that you just

like have and live by." She makes a distinction between spirituality and religion, whereby:

> So many people stamp religion on beliefs and I wouldn't call myself religious. I don't
>
> think that I have a set of obviously like, the Bible is set in place and guidelines are
>
> gonna help us live a fulfilling and happy life, but they're not like set in stone. You're
>
> not gonna go to hell if you do something wrong. And religion is kind of a scary word –
>
> it scares a lot of people away. Spirituality is a beautiful thing that's designed for you to
>
> have a relationship with you and God; especially as athletes. There are a lot of things
>
> that are out of our control. We like to have control of things that we can, and giving
>
> God what you can't control, and giving him things that you can't control, I think, is very
>
> comforting to me because tomorrow is completely unknown. And so being able to trust
>
> in [God] and being able to kind of escape from the regular day life to just to talk to your
>
> heavenly father about your life when, I mean he's here but not necessarily chumming
>
> around as a real person with you – is comforting to me.

Rick tells of his understanding of spirituality, describing it as being based on actions and

feelings.

> Spirituality boils down to, I think, how you are as a person, an individual's actions. I
>
> feel like spiritually when people think spiritually, like if you do good things, good
>
> things are gonna happen to you. I don't think that's exactly true. I think spiritually if
>
> you do good things, you'll be happier and you might not think directly, okay, if I do this
>
> I'll be very happy, but your general mood and generally what you feel and how you talk
>
> to other people, like I'm talking to you about it and its making me happy. Even though

I'm not sitting here jumping up and down – the fact that I can tell you that I'm helping out homeless people – it brings a good sense for all the people you talk to. And you – it just kind of like in the background I know that I'm doing good things for other people, and that's spiritual. And I think it boils down to what you do to better other people and other things around you. And that will affect how you are as a person. Not necessarily what comes to you. How you are.

In clarifying what he believes spirituality to be, Rick says: "Spirituality is believing in specific things and doing specific things, and thinking about specific things that will benefit for the good or bad of your human experience."

Steve believes his spirituality is based on a personal commitment that develops. Acknowledging that he is continuously growing and learning, he explains that just because he has "accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior," doesn't mean that he hasn't had doubts or uncertainties about what he believes.

I was raised in the church. My dad was a pastor for 10 years probably. I've spent literally hours trying to figure out if what I believe is true; what I was taught is true. Cause I realized that there are a lot of people out there that don't believe it, and you know who's to say I'm right – you know all this stuff – and in doing that it's spending time trying to know more, trying to understand. I've strengthened my relationship and my belief in God and I mean there's no doubt in my mind that God exists and he's real and he cares about us.

Bob, a football player, believes spirituality to be intensely personal, a belief that may mean different things to different people.

I describe spirituality as believing that there's something bigger than yourself; whether

that be humanity in general – I consider that being spiritual, I consider that being the

entire spirit of humanity; whether it be some like, God, or even like karma or, uh, like

just people who are superstitious. I guess they're all being spiritual to a point. Cause it

means there's something there that's kind of intangible that not necessarily governs, but

kind of watches over. Um, I would consider being scientific a type of spirituality

because there are certain things you can't see. For example, e+mc2 [*sic*] – you can't

really prove it, I mean – it's a theory, but we believe it. Like we're never gonna be able

to prove that but at the same time people believe it. So why can't I believe something

that I can't? I mean I just think it's about personal opinion and just about believing in

something bigger, something that you can't control.

Bob's personal belief of spirituality is that his athletic experience with the team *is* his spiritual

experience because "[Spirituality] is about playing for something bigger than yourself." The

level of commitment to "his team" and his personal understanding of spirituality is almost

inseparable.

I especially think – Orange Nation is one of the biggest almost spiritual groups that you

can be a part of – whether it be athletics, whether it be the school itself, but honestly

when it comes down to it, when you say Orange Nation, even across into China. And

that's what it's about. It's about the "Color Orange" – it's about the "Orange Bullets."

It's about T.O. It's about Coach in his "Orange cap". That's Central State University.

It's the pride and joy of the biggest and best school in the country in my opinion;

definitely the biggest. So, I feel like it has a lot to do with spirituality in that sense.

Which I feel like that also is why a lot of my experiences, like spiritually, come through

sports.

Inseparability of spiritual, student, and athlete. According to these participants

spirituality and being a student-athlete are interrelated. Participants accept the relationship

between the two experiences; some believing the two are inseparable, while others believed the

two experiences influence each other, often resulting in personal growth and maturation. In

describing the interrelationship spirituality has with his athletic experience, Bob believes:

It all comes as one package. I would say that um they both kind of feed each other in

the way that your spirituality has a lot to do with how you conduct yourself. You know

– has a lot to do with how you approach certain problems, has a lot to do with in the

classroom and on the field; has a lot to do with the way that you treat others and has a

lot to do with just your entire outlook on [life]. It's about belief. Some guys don't

believe, and there are some guys outside the locker room that believe more than on this

side of the locker room.

Mya, a volleyball player, describes the level of commitment required for her sport as

being similar to that of her Christian faith. While Mya believes both her spirituality and being a

student-athlete are interrelated, she believes her faith has had a greater impact on her identity,

more so than her identity as a student or athlete.

They both definitely have an impact on each other, but I definitely think strength-wise

my spirituality takes – has way more of an impact on me being a student-athlete. But

because we're in this world with trials and whatever, I mean sometimes being a student-

athlete really tests spirituality, but I think ultimately, I can always come back to

spirituality over anything that I'm facing as an athlete.

Because of the interrelationship of his spirituality and his participation in intercollegiate athletics, Rick, a senior baseball player, believes the result of the spiritual-athletic relationship is personal growth and maturity.

I definitely think [spirituality] grows over time. [It takes] time to develop all these experiences and all these certain things that you do. It definitely goes hand in hand with maturity to me. And how you can analyze and go through certain experiences and certain problems in your life. And how you cope with all these things, and I think over time it definitely develops. I feel like these little spiritual things are like the things that mentally make me feel different. And for my sport and for my especially my position, I feel like because it's such a mental game – that these mental spiritual things that we do and all the guys have their little [superstitions] – I feel like, that's what makes people different.

Matt believes the credibility of your beliefs, how others perceive what you believe, is based on how good of an athlete you are. In Matt's view the interrelationship of a student-athlete's spirituality is reflected in your success as an athlete. In order for people to pay attention and hear what is being said to them from a spiritual point of view, you must be good at your sport. He states: "Being a good athlete gives credibility to your words and actions. It is often referred to as 'your actions speak louder than words.' This is a truism in athletics." Matt describes this relationship between religious credibility and athletic success with the following example, when his team was playing in a championship bowl game.

When we were out for the Fiesta Bowl 2 years ago – Sunday we have a chapel and one of the seniors – someone will come in to talk and it's not really church, kind of a miniature Bible study, but like it's really just someone talking about their faith for

maybe like 20 minutes. And when I came as a freshman there was a guy named
"Michael Penn" on the team and [he] was a good football player, played more of a
backup role his entire time, but he played a lot. He wasn't like some superstar but he
played a good amount. But he was a very solid Christian – he was a Tim Tebow.
Obviously not as hyped, but he was really involved in the Christian ministries at Central
State University. Really involved in Campus Crusade and Athletes for [*sic*] Action too.
And he was one of those guys that I felt like, "hey, my calling is not to be a football
player but to be a Christian athlete to show people what I'm' about," and he was very
forefront about it. He felt like that was his calling.

In a more specific example, Matt tells of one of his teammates who is a great athlete and
perceived to be a "good Christian." "One of the guys I really respect, James L., because you
know he goes out there and he can play and you know he balls out like he just is like an All
American, and he loves Jesus." He continues explaining his understanding of the relationship
between the credibility of your spirituality and how good of an athlete you are:

I feel like a lot of Christian athletes look at your level of Christianity almost as not like
how much you love God or how much you wanna show people Christianity, how much
you wanna do your typical biblical: what God called you to do. It's more of a level of
how good you are as a football player. And I think if Christian athletes, especially on
the football team, the people they consider the best Christians are the ones that are the
best football players that are labeling themselves Christian, but are just the best football
players. It was the best football players, it wasn't the best Christians.

Matt speaks of the relationship between spirituality and athletic success of a "well known" teammate, the public perception from what he displayed on his person would lead a casual observer to believe he was devout to his beliefs.

> I don't feel like with James, like he was a guy that was I feel like a Christian. I don't know how solid he was as a Christian – that's the only thing. But people respect him and he did work hard. He was a hard worker. He was very resilient. He had great qualities. But I just don't know how strong of a Christian he was, to be fully honest.

Matt, a baseball player, believes his understanding of what it means for him to be a Christian student-athlete is different than what is portrayed on television.

> I think the most interesting thing I've seen since I've been at Central State University is there's kind of like a separate group of people that are Christian athletes. Where it's like being a Christian is not necessarily like discipleship and loving others and like that kind of thing. But it's more of like – hey, you put stuff on your arm – you get the Jesus tattoo – you score a touchdown, you point up to the sky like – it's not exactly the same Christian as I was raised as knowing.

Responsibility. According to these spiritual student-athletes, when they attempt to fulfill the expectations of being both spiritual and a college student-athlete, there is an awareness that their actions must not only fulfill the expectation of being good at their sport and succeeding in the classroom, but also must be accountable and above reproach by what they say, do, and believe. In explaining the high expectations of student-athletes at her institution, Dominique, a swimmer, believes being an athlete at her institution comes with high expectations.

It's like, "Oh, you go to Great Lakes University." Okay, they expect a lot from you. I feel like –they always expect more than the average person cause you're doing more, you're balancing a sport with school and to do both – and people just expect more from you in general. And especially being a [reference college] athlete, people always expect like the best from you – doesn't' matter what it is. The Great Lakes University student-athlete is supposed to be able to do everything.

Dominique further explains the responsibility of being seen as a spiritual student-athlete, relaying the idea that position, experience, and education give authority to an individual.

I think it's like when you go through your life – not just doing [education, athletics, spirituality] just because. You're doing it because you have a higher purpose to what you're doing. So, everything you do, you do it with meaning. And it's not just, "oh, I go to school because I should." You go to school – I don't know – I think when I'm going to school, I go to school because no one is gonna give you a platform to stand on. Once you have a college degree or masters or something, people are like okay, [I'll listen to you now]. When I just came out of high school – no one is gonna listen to you.

Dominique further describes this understanding and the relationship between her spiritual and intercollegiate athletic experiences as being one of responsibility, fulfilling a purpose.

In everything I do I realize I was given a talent and opportunity. I mean with swimming, not everyone could be a swimmer, so I've been given a talent and use it wisely cause there's some reason that swimming puts you on a platform – people listen to you more. It's all, I mean Christianity, has to do with evangelism you know, telling other people about it and having people see you as an example. And people aren't

gonna look anything beyond your game. So anything I do – sports, trying to be the

person that people can look to.

Being aware that this position has accountability, Dominique believes people expect her to

"live out" the values and beliefs of her institution, as well as portray what it means to be a

Division I student-athlete.

Lucy, also a swimmer, believes her swimming talents are a gift from God, and with

those gifts come responsibility.

I definitely know that my talents and my abilities have come from God and I just; I try

to remember every time I finish a race and did bad or whatever –to just thank God for

giving me another race. And when I was little I used to always say a prayer before my

races and be like, "God help me to win," or "God help me to have the best time, blah,

blah, blah." I know my talents are from God and I have goals but I also know that God

has a plan for me and I'm just hoping that He can use me. Like, I know He placed me

where He needs me. And I know there are a lot of girls on my team who are not

Christians or who don't believe and if He can use me to be a good influence on them. I

think that's why I was there. So hopefully, I could rub off on somebody, who could see

something in me that was missing maybe in their own lives.

Influence on others. The participants recognize their athletic abilities as something

they have been given; bestowed to them, rather than something they have achieved on their

own. Because they are gifts, there is a responsibility felt among the student-athletes to

maximize this gift, not for personal gain, but rather to use their position to influence others for

good.

Lucy strives to be a positive influence on others. She understands that others may believe differently than she does, so she is intentional about the friends and relationships she builds.

> People just kind of know you're different and some may think you're a freak and some people might be intrigued, but I don't know what you might have in your life that they think they might be missing which would be Christ. And there's all kind of views, and the way people treat them, but I think there's a real sense of camaraderie and support definitely among the group from FCA that you know we talk to each other because we can relate to the struggle. I just think it's interesting to learn about what other people believe and some of the religions that are maybe multi-theist and stuff like that. It's just fascinating to me how some people believe some of the things they do. But it's probably fascinating to other people or scary to other people that I believe what I believe.

Because she sees her swimming talent as a divine gift, Lucy becomes frustrated when she observes her teammates, who have more ability and athletic potential than her, making poor decisions.

> I see my talent is just a gift from God and I know that I'm not the most talented swimmer, but if I was, then I would be the next Michael Phelps. But I'm not. I've been given a little bit of talent, but I've also been given other things. But there's some people on my team that have so much talent that they work hard but they also party hard. I can just try to be a good influence, but it does drive me crazy.

The spiritual experience of Steve, a baseball player, has been one of developing intentional relationships for the purpose of influencing those around him. He uses his status

among his teammates to share his beliefs with the hope that "somehow they may come to know God."

> Well, I do my best each day to like talk with people around me and opportunities that I'm given and for about a month and a half now there's been a couple of guys on the team that we talk regularly about it – guys who don't believe. And I don't know if we've gotten anywhere yet but they're' interested in the subject and obviously I am. I try to share my beliefs with them as best I can, hoping that somehow they may come to know God and pretty much anybody that I have a relationship with, if they don't believe in God you know, I don't in any way force it on them, but I try to tell them. They know that I believe and if they have questions or the opportunity arises, I try to take full advantage of the opportunity to talk about it.

For Rick, spirituality comes from lived experiences, the outcomes of deeds. Family and how he represents his family's name, and the superstitions he practices as a part of his competitive routine, are all significant factors affecting Rick's spirituality. He believes that spirituality and what you get out of it are very personal, and the result of your spirituality will influence others. "I believe in the better you are to other people, the better off you'll be for yourself, and just having my superstitions, and I really have tried to help out a lot of other people." He illustrates his desire to display his spirituality by making a difference in the lives of others, the less fortunate.

> I run all these things. I go to Panera Bread every Tuesday night and grab all their extra food and bring it to a food shelter. And I've been doing it for months now, and I don't do it for like personal satisfaction. People [don't] hear that I'm doing it cause I don't

really tell anybody. But it's a team thing that I run and I started. But spiritually, I feel

like because I'm helping out these other people, good things will happen to me.

Because Steve understands the "majority of people don't share the same beliefs" as he

does, and spirituality is "not something that gets discussed in public very often," he dedicates

himself to influencing others.

Spending time studying the word of God and trying to understand more, trying to learn

more, trying to grasp him instead of just going to church and doing your good deeds and

all that stuff. Trying to have a personal relationship that's more than just a prayer in the

morning and when you go to bed.

Sandra, a thrower for the Great Lakes track and field team sums up her spiritual student-

athlete experience as being a role model; setting an example of living an exemplary life. She

fulfills the responsibility of being a spiritual student-athlete by setting herself apart from

"typical" college activities.

So it then becomes our job to be the salt and the light of the world. Being fed then as

Christ followers; being able to go out and be a witness and be able to live a life that's

exemplifying to the Lord and not to yourself. So even situations where a teammate

doesn't have a ride and making sure you're taking your teammates and when they offer

you money just being like – it's not a big deal – like don't worry about it. Being selfless

when you know that you have something that other people don't have, being able to

give that to them. And just being able, I mean, everyday life you wake up and say [to

God], "use me in the way you want to use me today." Maybe [in] a way that we may

never know until we graduate; we may make an impact on people that we don't even

know. So being able to walk around and live a life that I think is a blast. I don't have to

wake up in the morning and be like who is this guy next to me, or am I pregnant, or

what did I do last night?" There's just a lot of stress that is taken off for not having sex

and not drinking. Those are just two activities that a lot of college people participate in,

that there are a lot of people that look at our group of friends and kind of think we're

crazy, but I think [they] really really respect us in the sense that, what is it about them?.

Essence of Student-athlete Spirituality

This study sought the essence of the spiritual experience of student-athletes who

participate in intercollegiate athletics. The data reveal the essence of the spiritual experience

for the participants of this study is that the student-athlete experience is a gift, and because their

athletic talent offers them status or a position of influence, there exists a responsibility to utilize

their athletic talent and position of influence to the best of their abilities, influencing others in

the best possible manner. There is a desire among spiritual college student-athletes to use the

platform their athletic achievement provides to make a difference among their circles of

influence. In short, the essence of the college student-athlete spiritual experience is student-

athletes desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others.

Summary of Results

The research question for this spirituality study was: What is the spiritual experience of

student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics? Four themes emerged from semi-

structured interviews and field notes with NCAA Division I student-athletes. It was discovered

through the dialogue with the eight participants that spirituality and the intercollegiate athletic

experience were "interconnected" for the participants in this study. The many challenges and

trials associated with the student-athletes' intercollegiate athletic experience often led to

spiritual growth. Their spiritual nature was often utilized as a resource and source of strength

during difficult or challenging times faced both inside and outside competition. The data reveal that spirituality and the student-athlete experience are separate experiences, although each has an influence on the other, and spirituality is seen as an extension of the student-athlete's complex identity.

Among the participants, the interviews confirmed their acknowledgement that they are in fact people with spiritual beliefs. The data reveal that student-athletes view their athletic ability as a gift received, given to them by a "higher power" or God. Acknowledging this position, the student-athlete chooses to accept this appointment as a challenge and responsibility not only to perform well, but to also model the values and expectations of someone to whom others would aspire. From this platform, being a Division I student-athlete, these athletes have chosen various avenues through which to display their spirituality. The student-athletes in this study believed their athletic talents to be "a gift," not something which has been earned.

Furthermore, the spirituality of the student-athletes coupled with their athletic skills makes possible influencing others in a positive way. While the student-athletes in this spirituality study acknowledged valuing spirituality at the outset of the study, it is emphasized that the intercollegiate athletic experience does, according to the participants, play a significant role in providing adequate "challenge and support" of the student-athlete spiritual experience, developing them into mature people who identify themselves collectively, individually, and equally as students, athletes, and spiritual beings. The data did not reveal noticeable differences between student-athletes who participated in individual or team sports. However, there were differences in the participant's ability to articulate an understanding of spirituality and the intercollegiate athletic experience among participants who were in the beginning years of their

college experience versus those who were at or near the end of their amateur athletic career. Finally, this study identified the essence of the college student-athlete spiritual experience as being the student-athletes' desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others.

CHAPTER 5

Results II

Chapter 4 presented student-athlete characteristics and experiences related to spirituality

gathered from the eight individuals who agreed to participate in this spirituality study. Four

core themes emerged: (a) defining spirituality; (b) inseparability of spiritual, student, and

athlete; (c) responsibility; and (d) influence on others. The spiritual essence of these student-

athletes' experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics was also presented.

Chapter 5 presents the sub-themes as they stood out from the analysis of the data.

Sub-themes

Through analysis of the data, four sub-themes emerged in this study. Sub-themes are

identified as observations about the participants' experience, which were expressed or implied

as significant to the student-athlete experience, discovering the essence of the student-athlete

spiritual experience made while participating in intercollegiate athletics. The first sub-theme

emerged as being student-athletes take pride in the tradition and reputation of their university.

The second sub-theme to emerge was that as the student-athlete progresses through their

intercollegiate athletic team experience, devotion to team and teammates increases, while

commitment to the coach wanes. The third sub-theme which emerged from the data was that

for student-athletes, winning isn't [*sic*] everything. The final sub-theme to emerge was that

student-athletes value and look up to high profile student-athletes who profess and live out their same beliefs and values.

Institutional pride. While each of the participants in this spirituality study valued their athletic participation and acknowledged the significance playing their sport had in their college experience, a number of them emphasized institutional reputation when speaking of their experience. Steve, a baseball player at Great Lakes University, in describing what it is like to take the baseball field, describes the respect he has for his school.

> To go out there and compete against the best players in the nation at your age and at like one of the most well-known schools, it's very exciting. Very, feel very honored. And you know I just try to make people proud, you know, represent the university as best I can when I'm out there.

When asked what it is like to be a student-athlete, Sandra, the track and field student-athlete, responded with the following comment.

> It's a really broad question. I mean through numerous interviews, I mean it's been like so what's it like competing? This question has been asked before and I've always come back to saying: it's an honor to compete for Great Lakes University. I understand it's a good institution that you're proud of whether it's – I mean if you don't walk out of here as an accomplished athlete. There are girls on my team that probably like travel to maybe 5 meets out of their whole career but are graduating with a Great Lakes University degree, and even one time in competition is a huge success. Tradition has always been a word that Great Lakes University has used and we follow a great – just great people that have come before us academically and athletically, and so it's an honor to compete for Great Lakes University. Just because being recruited – I remember

getting the Great Lakes University letter and it was on the letterhead and I was like:

"Oh, my, gosh," like we've arrived, like you're cool. Great Lakes University is a cool

university. I remember being in Africa – South Africa and looking out a window of my

car and there's like a little African boy walking the streets in like a Great Lakes

University t-shirt and I was like this is like surreal – it's weird. Like Great Lakes

University is everywhere. And so I mean, serving in the ring as a Great Lakes

University athlete is an honor, but it's also like you've arrived. Like, to me, unless

you're going pro, that's the level you wanna be at as an athlete.

Bob's institutional pride comes across in his "being a part of something bigger than

yourself."

Orange Nation is one of the biggest almost spiritual groups that you can be a part of –

whether it be athletics, whether it be the school itself. But honestly, when it comes

down to it, when you say Orange Nation across into China, somebody is going to think

Central State University.

Dominique sees the prestige of her institution, Great Lakes University, as a motivating

factor, an inspiration.

What I do here affects everything Great Lakes University, which is something that I'll

never forget because if I swim poorly, if our team looks bad, Great Lakes University

athletics looks bad. If the athletic [program] looks bad, the school looks bad and it's

just like, so many people watching Great Lakes University.

Dominique's institutional pride is evidenced in her dislike for rival institutions. She states:

We all hate Central State. We all hate "Our Lady." We all Hate "Great Lakes" State.

And then it gets specific for sport like who hates who. "Midwestern," number one.

Great Lakes University women's swim team hates "Midwestern." There is like no two ways about this. They're number one on the list for sure. And then next would be, we all hate Central State. Great Lakes State doesn't really have a swim team. I think they do, but they're not our competition. And then "Our Lady University," it's like a fun rivalry. We don't really care. But it's kind of like, we always think Our Lady is good, and then we're like, really, no you're not. But Midwestern for sure – number one.

From coach to team. As members of an intercollegiate athletic team, student-athletes affirm the leadership roles espoused by their coaches as well as the relationships which develop with their teammates. Early in his athletic career, Rick expressed the desire to perform well for his coach, the person who recruited him and awarded him a scholarship, giving him the opportunity to be an NCAA Division I student-athlete. He stated:

When I first got out there as a freshmen I felt like I had, it was like very nervous, always good crowds and all. And it was more of like I better not do bad kind of thing. When I went out there and I wanted to really, when I ran out onto the field I really felt like I had to please my coaches when I first got to school. And very nervous and I mean I've always done okay to really well in my seasons just cause I'm pretty good, but this first year and a half I was really trying to please my coaches and then as I got more comfortable and gained more experience, I'm not nervous anymore. I get put in all the situations – the toughest ones, and now I want to learn from my team. And I wanna win so my teammates, so all we've done together, we have a good result. And it's not I don't care – the coaches are great people, but I wanna learn from my teammates and for all the time and effort we've put in. And I feel like they're behind me when I'm on the mound. I have their support, they're right behind me and I'm not nervous.

He continues, speaking about taking the advice he received from an All-American peer who was about to be drafted into Major League Baseball, over that of his coaches.

> He would always see me really stressed out if I didn't do well. I was always worried about what coach was gonna say, what's gonna happen now. And he's like: Eric, you got here cause you're good. And you wouldn't be here if you weren't good. So really go out there, and they're gonna tell you and they're gonna teach you good things, but do what's best for you. Do what you feel most comfortable doing. And if you don't like some things they say, you may put it in one ear and out the other. That's what he did. And I was able to you know, mix and match what I needed to learn from them and what I was already good at.

Mya, the Great Lakes University volleyball player, explains that her support comes from teammates and relationships she's built, rather than from coaches and other adults.

> Well it is kind of like the game of life. You gotta try to stay afloat and if you hit the ball down on the other person's court – I guess not really – I mean if you get the ball hit down on your court you gotta pick it up and hit it again. Help each other out. I mean, I guess that is kind of a good analogy. Because volleyball is such a reactionary sport and I mean you just have to deal with whatever is happening. So, and like you have to be able to prepare and have to be able to block some things out of your life just like volleyball, and I think that's actually a really good analogy. There's just so many ways I could compare it. I mean defensively you have to be able to I don't know – defend your house. Yeah, I mean you do. Even like teamwork when you're setting you have to have people around you, and when you're going up to block you have to have people around you to support you and tell you what's up, like friendship groups. Even when

you have a bad game or something, like having that team, you need others around you in life just to help support you through your troubles and to get you to find success.

Winning isn't everything. Intercollegiate athletics is about competition, one individual or team trying to defeat the other. While winning is acknowledged as a primary pursuit of intercollegiate athletics and student-athletes, it is not the only pursuit. Many of the participants acknowledged there "being more to life" than athletics. Steve describes his attitude toward pursuing success.

Sometimes I'll be praying for good results and you know they don't always come, which is fine. It's not a pray for whatever you want and you're just gonna get it. Although sometimes we wish it was that easy. Um, for the most part I just try to do my best when I'm out there to try and play the way I live my life I guess – an honest hardworking way, not to win at all costs way. Cause I love to win, but I don't like to win that much.

Mya, faced with injury, and the end of her athletic career, faces the reality that athletics comes to an end and you have to move beyond the athletic experience. She states:

With volleyball, I'm injured – my arm kills right now. And I just, I signed my papers yesterday for my medical scholarship, and it's something that most people would just be so upset about. And I'm upset about it, but at the same time, like I know that there's a reason for it and I know like somewhere down the road I'll figure out the reason behind it. So I just like am a firm believer of making the best out of the situation and praising God through troubles, and I think that's just like a huge, that's like a huge part of like me looking to God.

Rick realizes that how well he pitches impacts more than his feelings. It has the

potential to alter the career of his coach, but for Rick, baseball is still just a game.

I think in regard to college and collegiate athletics, with the coach you're playing for

people in high school, you're playing for a teacher who has another job. But this is how

they feed their kids – these coaches – this job is what puts really the food on their table.

If personally, if I go out there and I don't pitch well, we don't win, if we don't win, our

coach doesn't get a job. And if my coach doesn't get a job, it affects his family. So this

is the first time in my life, it's the same thing as working for a boss. But the first time in

my life I'm playing, its' not actually – it's hard to say that, but my what I do on the field

and how I perform not only is big for me, but it is tremendous on these people that

coach for me every day. And I think that's kind of a different side of it. I've never

played for anything like this and how serious it is to these coaches. Cause in high

school he's also a teacher and he also does this. But this is what they do. And this is

how serious they are. And I think that's another spiritually you've gotta be able to

understand the importance of it, but also you've gotta revert back to, it is just a game for

you. And you've gotta be able to manage how serious it is and realize what you're

doing. It's still just a baseball game.

Matt, a Central State University football player, makes a conscious effort not to make

playing football a priority. He states:

I feel like I try to keep football a game, a sport. And I've tried not to make it my life. I

try to not put so much emphasis in it that I'm asking God to make us win the game or

stuff like that kind of thing. Not that there's something wrong with that, but I try to

almost de-emphasize my sport. Just cause I, as a fear of my own, I don't want to put my emphasis on football if that makes sense.

Peers as exemplars. The student-athletes in this spirituality study referenced God, a "higher power," inspirational scriptures, and relationships as resources for motivation and encouragement. While these resources are noted as influences to the college student-athlete spiritual experience, two student-athletes from this study specifically named Tim Tebow as someone who models their beliefs and values.

Matt, speaking of student-athletes who display religious references or images on their person, references Tim Tebow.

> For guys like Tim Tebow– I wanna hate the man for what he did to us – I really do. I wanted to hate Tim Tebow. I've wanted to hate Tim Tebow for years, but I can't and he seems like a very nice guy.   And like he –Tim Tebow is one of the very, I think I've always been very hard on Christian athletes especially cause I've been around them most of my life and Tim Tebow is one of the guys I feel like – I'm a pretty strong Christian, and I feel like I believe he is also a strong Christian.

Matt further expresses his belief that the most credible Christian athletes are those who are also good athletes.

> A lot of the guys I've been around, they look to athletes like that, the best Christians are the ones that can play football the best and have it, but wear the eye-black and stuff like that.   People think Tim Tebow is one step below Jesus and it's because he's a good football player.   But I honestly do think Tim Tebow is the most solid Christian person out there too.   Don't get me wrong but I think football guys don't need to know any of the other stuff, they don't' need to know oh he's on a missions trip or whatever. They

just know that he wears the eye-black and that he thanks God in an interview, and that's

all they need to know to think of him as a solid Christian.

Sandra references Tim Tebow in her description of having a good attitude and being

patient.

You have to have a lot of patience for people and for yourself and coaches and I'm not

patient at all. Like I told my dad I don't have patience, and he was like, you have to

have it, it's one of the fruits of the spirit. I was like, dang it. I think just like, you gotta

remember like, I mean I hate to say – bring Tim Tebow into it – he's a great example of

giving the glory to God because we wouldn't be here, I don't deserve to be playing

Division I or whatever. God's put us here for a purpose.

Summary of Results II

The purpose of this research was to identify the essence of student-athletes' spiritual

experience while participating in intercollegiate athletics. The research question which guided

this study was: What is the essence of the student-athlete spiritual experience made through

participation in intercollegiate athletics? The data revealed four sub-themes about the student-

athlete experience: (a) institutional pride, (b) from coach to team, (c) winning isn't everything,

and (d) peers as exemplars. The first sub-theme revealed that student-athletes, especially those

at Great Lakes University, not only feel a sense of institutional pride, but also feel a part of

something greater than themselves. The second sub-theme revealed that student-athletes'

relationships with their peers and teammates become more significant and influential as they

progress through their academic career. The third sub-theme to emerge was that student-

athletes who participated in this study found intercollegiate athletics to be just one aspect of

their college experience. While intercollegiate athletics is important and winning is part of the

goal of being an athlete, life is bigger and more important than the games we play. The final theme to emerge from this study was that not only do student-athletes see themselves as models for others, but they too see others, especially Tim Tebow, as models and exemplars to whom they can admire and model.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of the spiritual experience of student-athletes while participating in intercollegiate athletics. Chapter 4 presented the student-athlete spiritual experience related to their spirituality. Four themes emerged from an analysis of the data: (a) defining spirituality; (b) inseparability of spiritual, student, and athlete; (c) responsibility; and (d) influence on others. The essence of the student-athletes' spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics was presented as: Student-athletes desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others. Chapter 5 presented the four emergent sub-themes. The first sub-theme revealed that student-athletes feel committed to the history and tradition of their university. The second sub-theme revealed the increasing commitment to the team and teammates over that of their coaches over time. The third sub-theme to emerge was that college student-athletes believe there is more to their college experience than winning athletic competitions. The fourth sub-theme revealed that student-athletes look up to peers who model and live out their beliefs and values. This chapter will discuss the findings of the previous two chapters.

Spirituality

Among the findings of this research is the separation and delineation of spirituality from faith and religion. Although these terms are similar, as has been discussed previously,

spirituality is a distinct construct and must be treated as such. Mayhew (2004) believes that

"while some may perceive spirituality as synonymous with faith and religion, others may

understand these constructs as conceptually distinct" (p. 649). For the purpose of this research,

spirituality was defined as: A universal lived human experience wherein meaning-making is

sought in order to fully understand the human experience; an honorable pursuit toward

interconnectedness with self, others, community, and a higher power.   The participants in this

study collectively described spirituality as something greater than themselves; whether it was

Bob being an active member of "Orange Nation;" Rick having a quality relationship with his

family; Lucy's definition of "some sort of higher power;" or Sandra who believes spirituality to

be "having a personal relationship with God."

Research which errantly combines or uses these familial terms (faith, religion, and

spirituality) synonymously makes a significant error. While they are apparently similar, for

college students and especially the participants of this study, they are understood to be distinct

and can be opposing. This affirms the work of Nash (2002) who stated, "many students refuse

to equate the 'spiritual' with the 'religious' realm, because, for them, the latter connotes a kind

of sectarian dogmatism" (p. 43).The participants in this study agree with Nash, making

distinctions between what they considered to be religiousness and spirituality. For example,

Sandra was enthusiastic about participating in this spirituality research. However, when our

discussion led to her beliefs about religion, the conversation became somewhat negative. She

believes religion to be a divisive term, stating that "religion is kind of a scary word – it scares a

lot of people away."

Spirituality is a complex construct, one which encompasses a broad range of meaning

and beliefs. The participants varied descriptions of what they believed spirituality to be further

supports the need for a research-based definition of spirituality. Therefore, spirituality must be defined at the outset of related dialogue, and cannot be assumed as a commonly understood concept.

Spirituality of Participants

This spirituality study explored the spiritual experience of student-athletes who compete at the highest level of American amateurism, NCAA Division I. Because there is a growing interest in research related to the spirituality of college students, as well as for research which explores the experiences of college student-athletes, this research is of value to those who seek to better understand the student-athlete spiritual experience. Research has shown, and this study affirms for college student-athletes, that college students are interested in spirituality (Bryant, Choi & Yasuno, 2003; Cherry, 2001; Lee, 2002). It was established for the student-athletes who participated in this study that spirituality is not just an underlying belief or feeling, but rather spirituality is a core component of their identity, permeating throughout the whole person and becomes a fulfilling aspect of their student-athlete identity.

Although often competing interests among NCAA Division I student-athletes, to be a student-athlete is to be both, equally, student and athlete. The athletic and academic requirements of student-athletes require them to not only manage, but to succeed in the two realms (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). The same goes for student-athletes who value spirituality. Throughout the college years students develop and change. Their identity consequently is shaped by their experiences. The student-athlete identity, complex in nature due to the varying athletic experiences, is made more diverse when spirituality is introduced and accepted to be a universal construct.

For the student-athletes in this research, spirituality brought meaning to their sport participation. It became inseparable from who they are as student-athletes. They recognized their position as student-athletes presented them with a platform from which to influence others. This position and opportunity was recognized by Rousselow-Winquist and Winquist (2001), "athletes have access to a unique platform when they enter the playing field." Dominique recognized that both by obtaining a college degree from GLU and being a NCAA Division student-athlete gives her a voice she would not otherwise have. She states:

> I realize I was given a talent and opportunity – like I mean with swimming not everyone could be a swimmer so I've been given like a talent and use it wisely cause there's some reason that swimming puts you on a platform – people listen to you more.

The essence of the spiritual experience for the participants centered around utilizing their athletic talent, the gift they had received, to positively influence others. This "influencing others" is also at the core of the NCAA's CHAMPS program, emphasizing student-athlete character development and improving student-athlete involvement into the campus community. The roots of this initiative can be traced back to the pioneering initiative of Charles Kingsley's muscular Christianity.

The participants also believed their spirituality was something they felt compelled to "live out," a lived experience. Sandra spoke of how Tim Tebow, University of Florida quarterback (now playing in the NFL for the Denver Broncos), is a model of "giving glory to God." She further emphasized what an honor it is to be competing at the Division I level.

> I don't deserve to be playing Division I. God's put us here for a purpose, and it's not just – I don't deserve to be getting paid $1,100 a month to throw a ball around – like,

that's silly. So, just remembering that we don't deserve to be here, and every day is a

gift that we're given.

 Lucy, a swimmer, described her understanding of the gift she's been given and having

confidence in the results if she is faithful in following through on her responsibility of using her

talents to influence others.

> I know my talents are from God and I have goals, but I also know that God has a plan
>
> for me and I'm just hoping that he can use me. Like, I know he placed me where he
>
> needs me and I know there are a lot of girls on my team who are not Christians or who
>
> [don't believe in God], and if he can use me to be a good influence on them, I think
>
> that's why I was there. So hopefully I could rub off on somebody – who could see
>
> something in me that is missing maybe in their own lives. Whether it's going my way
>
> or not, God has a plan for me, and his plan is better and greater than my plan. [Quoting
>
> this biblical text] Jeremiah 29:11 is the verse that I have written in my journal and I
>
> have tattooed on my foot. It's just what it all comes back to – every time when I'm
>
> struggling, it's just – "these are the plans I have for you – plans to prosper, not to harm
>
> you."

Parry et al. (2007) state that spirituality "is the embodiment and the lived experience of beliefs

and values that inform and provide the backdrop to people's lives" (p. 3). The participants in

this spirituality study reflect this idea. Rick, a senior baseball player, believed that "spirituality

boils down to how you are as a person, and [an] individual's actions. I think spiritually, if you

do good things, you'll be happier."

Student-athletes who compete at the Division I level and who are seen competing on

television are increasingly seen wearing their beliefs on their person, as tattoos or writing

biblical references on eye-black (although the NCAA has recently banned this practice). The athletes in this study believe it takes more than Jesus tattoos to be a credible influence on others. Collectively, the participants realize that in order for others to listen to them, or to notice their actions on and off the field are for some reason different than their own; that in order to accomplish the ideal of being a positive influence on others, spiritual student-athletes at the Division I level must be (a) good at their sport, and (b) model exemplary behavior on and off the competitive venue. Matt explained that he observes people, especially those on the football team, who believe that the most looked-up to are the ones who excel on the field, and not just the ones who are good Christians.

> I think of Christian athletes, especially on the football team, the people they consider the best Christians are the ones that are the best football players; [not just those] that label themselves Christian, but are just the best football players. It was the best football players, it wasn't the best Christians, if that makes sense.

Dominique, a swimmer, further emphasizes this idea that personal actions have impact on the degree to which others will pay attention to what she is saying, or will even inquire as to what makes her different; why does she make the choices she does.

> It helps when so many people are watching you to be a good person I guess, because the path that you have chosen helps me towards being a good person. People are always going to be watching me [after I say what I believe]. I need to make the decision to be a certain way and act a certain way.

> Among the "recent surge" in spirituality research is Nash and Murray's *Helping College Students Find Purpose* (2010). In their timely text they posit the purpose for guiding students through their search for meaning during the college years.

We try to encourage our students to engage in what we think of as true liberal learning. We want them to explore their biases both for and against the religio-spiritual content in the courses that they take and in the experiences they have outside their classrooms. We want them to understand as much as possible what the world's major religions hold to be true and why. We want them to engage in some deep, personal meaning-making. We want them to explore what they believe or disbelieve about religio-spirituality and why. We want them to draw out of their diverse campus experiences what is intensely personal as well as what may be content-rich. Evidently, students throughout the United States want exactly this type of educational experience as well. (p. 60)

The student-athletes who participated in this study are apparently the types of students Nash and Murray propose are the aspiration of their text, and believe that "what they all have in common is the need for something to believe in, something to hold onto, something to get them out of themselves when they are too full of themselves" (p. 56).

Although this study did not pursue student-athlete developmental changes among the different domains (cognitive, faith, identity), it was evidenced by the participants that spirituality and intercollegiate athletic participation had an influence on their development. The college years are developmental years whereby students and athletes change (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The participants in this study affirm that spirituality plays a specific role in their college athletic experience and has impacted their growth and development, leading to maturation. This growth can be seen in Rick's experience, when he faced physical, emotional, and physical challenge through his college academic, social, physical, and spiritual experiences. He concluded that his athletic and spiritual experiences led to growth and maturity during his college years.

Spirituality I definitely think grows over time. I mean there are instances where it is static, but I definitely think it's – it has to do with how you are – who you are as a person in maturity. Like spiritually – you can be very spiritual, and if you're very immature about it – I mean really don't believe. If you're very young and immature and spiritual, I think you kind of fall into like – it's kind of like a big joke and you're not really serious about [your spirituality] and I think you need that time [the college years] to develop all these experiences and all these certain things [experiences]. It definitely goes hand in hand with maturity to me; and how you can analyze and go through certain experiences and certain problems in your life; and how you cope with all these things and I think over time [your spirituality] definitely develops.

In expressing the role spirituality has played in his maturing, Rick related his spirituality to his ability to cope with difficulty and the superstitions he practices.

I think [athletics has] definitely affected my spiritual development and maturing and like I said coping with these I can't even tell you – I've failed so many times. I've had so many days where I went home and I've been upset and I didn't do well and I've had so many days where I've done well the other way. But spiritually, and these failures have taught me to be able to overcome other things in my life and break-ups with close girlfriends, and problems with my family, and not doing well in school and sports have spiritually helped me in my mind get over these things – and immediately think about what I have to do to change it and make these things better. Cause right when I do bad in a game; like I'll change up [the superstition that didn't work], what I eat, or the thing I wear, or I'll change what I say to his bat, to make this baseball experience better. And

spiritually that has helped me with everything. So it's definitely something – I've

matured and I've learned how to cope with things that don't go my way for sure.

During these developmental years, these student-athletes realized changes in their faith,

cognitive, and identity development through trials and the milieu which is competing at the

Division I level as a spiritual student-athlete. Although I did not explore specifically times of

hardship with the participants, it was apparent they were affected by the complexities of the

spiritual student-athlete experience. Many of the participants described times of physical

challenge or injury which Parks (2000) would consider times of "shipwreck" or disequilibrium,

where the athlete faced physical and emotional struggle, questioning their ability to return to the

field as well as the identity challenges that accompany such thoughts. Spirituality was often

described by the participants as a "coping mechanism" in managing their struggle.

The participants in this study also affirm Parks' (2000) work of identifying the "young

adult" years. This timeframe fits well with the experiences of these student-athletes. Many of

them process through the components of faith development discussed by Chickering et al.

(2006). It seems evident that most, if not all, of the student-athletes in this study have

evidenced, possibly not fully, but to a degree, or has shown evidence of reaching Parks' Stage

4: Mature Adult Faith. Chickering et al. (2006) describe an individual who has achieved Stage

4 as one who "recognizes interdependence and interconnectedness with communities and

individuals outside the immediate environment. Mature Adult Faith involves becoming open to

the ambiguity and doubt that exist even within tested convictions" (p. 61). This recognition is

evidenced among the athletes as being their faith commitment, but also to their willingness and

with the intentionality they give to "being a light in a dark world," or making a difference to

those around them. Although Parks believes that this stage is rarely ever achieved before

"midlife," it is possible to posit that due to the complex and challenging nature that student-athletes who compete at such a high level and face significant trials and pressures as discussed in this research, they are likely to achieve this stage as a "young adult."

Torres et al. (2003) bring to light the idea that student-athletes, as individuals, develop holistically. Their identity is shaped by their surroundings, people of influence, and their experience. The data revealed that "spiritual" is an inseparable term from student-athlete and should be considered as part of the student-athlete identity, given the notion of the universality of spirituality because the three are so interconnected. Oftentimes, spirituality is an influence on the student-athlete experience, while the experiences of student-athletes can affect the depth of an individuals' spirituality.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of the spiritual experience of student-athletes while participating in intercollegiate athletics. Chapter 4 presented the student-athlete spiritual experience related to their spirituality. Four themes emerged from an analysis of the data: (a) defining spirituality; (b) inseparability of spiritual, student, and athlete; (c) responsibility; and (d) influence on others. The essence of the student-athletes' spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics was presented as: Student-athletes desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others. Chapter 5 presented the four emergent sub-themes: (a) institutional pride, (b) from coach to team, (c) winning isn't everything, and (d) peers as exemplars. In Chapter 6 a discussion of the themes and sub-themes was presented. This chapter presents the implications for those who work with student-athletes as well as for those who work outside intercollegiate athletics that concern themselves with the holistic education and development of student-athletes. Following the recommendations for future research and the limitations of this study is the research summary.

Implications

Student-athletes are a unique student population; facing challenges beyond those experienced by traditional non-athlete college students. It is important for those who work with student-athletes to understand the significant place spirituality holds among student-athletes.

Kiessling (2010) acknowledged the need for those in higher education to recognize the value of

spirituality among college student, and the importance of including spirituality in the education

of future student affairs professionals. "Even though the profession of student affairs espouses

the goal of holistic student development, student affairs professionals do not consistently

integrate spiritually-infused practice as a component of their work" (p. 8). Coaches, faculty,

and advisors need to not only accommodate the student-athlete in their desire to "live out" their

spirituality, but also should openly support and encourage activities and opportunities through

which the student-athlete is able to display their spirituality, enhancing the student-athletes'

pursuit of answering the big questions related to spirituality.

With regard to policy and the implications of this research, it is proposed that the

NCAA and similar organizations tasked with supporting student-athlete character development

and community involvement (e.g., the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics

[NAIA]) Champions of Character) to acknowledge the role and value spirituality has in the

lives of college student-athletes. With the inclusion of developmental programs specifically

designed for student-athletes coupled with the findings of this research, the NCAA would

enhance the learning of college student-athletes by incorporating "spirituality" as an integral

construct to their fourth pillar of "service." Based on the "spiritual essence" of the student-

athletes in this study, that student-athletes desire to use sport as a means to positively influence

others, it is recommended that spirituality be incorporated into the fourth pillar of service within

the CHAMPS program. Through this inclusion, the natural desire of spiritual student-athletes

to make a difference in the lives of others, there exists an opportunity for student-athletes to

fulfill the service component of the CHAMPS program. It has been acknowledged in previous

research and is supported by the data collected from the participants of this spirituality study

that athletes have a unique opportunity and platform to impact others positively. Because of this, and the NCAA's (and the NAIA's) desire to develop student-athletes beyond the playing field, spirituality should be an acknowledged construct within the teaching and training materials within the CHAMPS program, and other service-oriented programs designed specifically for student-athletes.

Recommendations for Practice

It is recommended that coaches, athletics administrators, and other professionals who work with college student-athletes provide opportunities for student-athletes to display or live-out their spirituality. Lucy, Dominique, Rick, and Matt all referenced using their position as NCAA Division I student-athletes to make a difference in the lives of others. Rick found fulfillment by delivering bread from Panera Bread Co. to an area homeless shelter. Lucy and Dominique saw it to be important to act intentionally different from that of their teammates, peers, and social groups, to the point and with the goal of begin asked: Why are you different? Specifically, athletics departments and student development professionals can work collaboratively to inform student-athletes of the opportunities which exist within the local community. As individuals who desire to "positively influence others," student-athletes should be supported and given the necessary resources to have opportunities to model and interact with, even mentor youth. It is the goal of many youth to emulate these student-athletes. Because there is a mutual desire to interact, student-athletes with those who will be influenced or impacted by the modeling, and youth who desire and admire elite student-athletes, these relationships should be encouraged and fostered. Examples of these opportunities could be for student-athletes to work with the local elementary schools in reading programs, youth centers such as Boys and Girls Clubs, or it could be as simple as providing a comprehensive list of

local not-for-profit organizations with which the student-athletes could serve. Furthermore, coaches and athletic administrators can work with local youth sports organizations, giving student-athletes the platform and opportunity to share their talents, experiences, and goals with impressionable youth. Finally, coaches and administrators should allow their student-athletes access to and encourage involvement with para-church organizations whose mission it is to encourage and foster the spiritual lives of student-athletes. By supporting student-athletes in this manner, they are more likely to develop a richer, more meaningful college experience, resulting in an improved college community.

Faculty play a primary role in the educational success of student-athletes. In addition to the student outcomes research which "shows that informal (out-of-class) interaction between students and faculty increases faculty influence on undergraduate students' values, beliefs, and behaviors" (Lindholm & Astin, 2008, p. 199), Lindholm and Astin (2008) found that faculty's spiritual beliefs are "especially instrumental in reaffirming a commitment to contribute more fully to the well-being of their institutions, their students, and the larger community" (p. 201). There exists a need for faculty to use their position of influence in the lives of college student-athletes to validate and encourage the spirituality of college student-athletes, both inside and outside the classroom. Among the opportunities for faculty to encourage the spiritual development of student-athletes include: (a) acknowledge and communicate their own spirituality with student-athletes, (b) provide avenues where students may express their spirituality inside the classroom, (c) foster interactions with student-athletes outside the classroom which may encourage a spiritual dialogue between student-athletes and faculty.

Among the opportunities for student affairs professionals, as the "gatekeepers for much of what occurs in the arena of student life on campus" (Dalton, 2006, p. 150), is the opportunity

to develop and enhance the spiritual culture among students. Dalton (2006) explains the "important role" of student affairs professionals in creating a spiritually-welcoming campus culture.

> Student affairs professionals play an important role in the creation of social and cultural environments that enable students to find a spiritual home, a sense of belonging and being at home within themselves. Finding a spiritual home in college is critical because it enables students to entertain and reflect on the deep questions of meaning, purpose, and authenticity that are inevitable in the process of learning and growing in college. (p. 150)

 Considerations and recommendations proposed by Dalton (2006) are presented here in support of meeting the important spiritual needs of students and student-athletes alike.

1. Advocate for spirituality throughout the learning environments of student-athletes

2. Improve the spirituality training for those who work directly with student-athletes

3. Provide opportunities where student-athletes can "practice" their spirituality

4. Provide personnel who are trained in understanding the "big questions" student-athletes are asking and how best to support and encourage development

5. Make known the "spiritual resources" available to student-athletes

6. Work with other student-athlete support services to develop mentorship programs.

In addition to these recommendations, it would be beneficial to identify student-athlete peers who can support and encourage student-athletes with similar beliefs and values. Research has shown that college student peers are one of the most "influential other" groups to student-athletes (Astin, 1994; Bruening et al., 2008; Lally & Kerr, 2005). There exists a unique opportunity for non-athletes and student-athletes to interact spiritually. The student-athlete

experience is different than that of their non-athletic peers. However, interactions between these two student populations will provide an avenue through which many will gain a more complete understanding of each other. These interactions could be in the form of probing conversations, exploring "big questions," as well as interactions where increased understanding among diverse groups can occur. It would be beneficial for the college community for student-athletes to interact with others in order to "live out" their spirituality, while simultaneously creating an opportunity for students and other campus constituents to interact with this unique student population, student-athletes.

Opportunities should be sought by coaches and student affairs professionals to collaborate on programs and activities which build on the spiritual interests of students and student-athletes. These initiatives could include community service projects, providing diverse experiences for students and athletes who are searching to fulfill the void in their lives that spirituality can fill. It would be beneficial for coaches to encourage athlete participation in para-church organizations on campus (e.g., Athletes In Action, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, I am Second). Taking advantage of collaborative opportunities, coaches and others will be able to holistically educate and fulfill the goal of providing a comprehensive program designed to meet the needs of this special student population. It is important to note that student-athletes are busy. Their time is their most precious commodity and should be protected. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for coaches and student affairs professionals to seek incorporating spiritual activity and programming into already sponsored programming and the like.

Furthermore, spirituality has been recognized within this research and other college student research as a potential coping mechanism during times of distress (Baldwin et al., 2003;

Herndon, 2003; Jackson, 1998; Watson & Nesti, 2005). Spirituality may be considered one avenue to support and encourage student-athletes who may be facing physical challenges, slumps, poor performances, or even career-ending injuries.

It is also encouraged that colleges and athletic departments adopt or employ professional staff or ministers who are educated in the spirituality of student-athletes and can assist players and coaches in enhancing the athletic experience (and possibly performance) of the athletes. Athletic chaplains are individuals who may not necessarily be employed by the college or university, but rather are individuals who are invested in the spiritual lives of college student-athletes. These individuals may be volunteers, professionals, and others who have been trained to meet and answer the spiritual needs of college student-athletes. These professionals will provide the "open office" where athletes can come with questions or personal concerns, possibly an extension of the university counseling center, or even the sports psychology area. It is important to realize and acknowledge that student-athletes during the college years face struggles and times of personal challenge. This time in their lives is a prime opportunity to enhance their spiritual development, planting the seeds of potential growth that has shown to influence more than just the individual athlete or team. The interconnection of the student-athletic and spiritual experiences has the potential to make a significant and meaningful impact on the team, athletic department, local community and beyond.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study realized the essence of the spiritual experience of student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level as being the student-athletes' desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others. The spirituality literature continues to expand, but is fallow related to the spirituality of student-athletes. It has been noted earlier

within this study that a number of organizations and associations are pursuing to better understand the interactions between sport and spirituality. Although increasing, little scholarship has been completed on the experiences of college student-athletes, especially related to spirituality. Little research has explored empirically the spirituality of student-athletes and its antecedents.

Therefore, it is recommended that future research continue to delve into the spirituality of college student-athletes. Qualitative studies could go beyond this study, digging deeper into the lived spiritual experiences of student-athletes, taking into consideration the environments in which the athletes compete. It is of further interest to more fully understand the role of spirituality among athletes during competition. To what extent does student-athlete spirituality influence the success of an individual or team? There would also be value for those concerned with student success to explore the spirituality of students and athletes who are of different religious affiliations and beliefs (and non-beliefs). Mayhew (2004) began this work, discovering in his qualitative study of different worldviews that "spirituality is the human attempt to make sense of the self in connection to and with the external world" (p. 666). Further research related to the spirituality of student-athletes from all faith traditions is encouraged.

A sub-theme which emerged from the data revealed that student-athletes transition "from coach to teammates." This is an interesting finding and has important implications for coaches and teams alike, if there is empirical data to support such a finding. Is this finding case specific to this research, or is there more to the relationships between coaches and their players? More research needs to be conducted in this area.

The essence of the spiritual experience for the participants in this study was student-athletes desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others. What implications does this desire have on those they influence? Research needs to be conducted to examine the outcomes and influences of student-athletes on others. Do athletes actually have the ability to influence those they encounter, or are such initiatives for the sole benefit of the student-athlete?

Quantitative analysis needs to explore the various demographic characteristics and any indexes toward spirituality and related traits, and their potential relationship to each other. Questions that should be asked relate to the differences between female and male athletes, students who participate on team sports and or individual sports, is there a relationship to the characteristics of one group of student-athletes to others on the HERI spirituality scales. Recent research utilizing the HERI scales has identified that spiritual growth appears to be impacted by intercollegiate athletic participation (Astin, A. & Astin, H. 2010). Is there a significant difference among athletes who participate in "major" sports like football and basketball and those who do not? Also, is there a difference among the HERI spirituality scales between students who are engaged in high-dedication activities within the university experience, such as marching band, music, and theatre as related to what is known of student-athletes? Because student-athlete spirituality research is in its infancy, there exist significant opportunities to better understand this important student population.

Limitations

As is the case with most qualitative research which seeks to discover the essence of an experience, especially one with such a personal nature as spirituality, these findings are not generalizable beyond the participants of this study. I have identified additional limitations to this spirituality research. Although intentional effort was made through the methodology and

epoche to set aside personal bias, hearing the experiences of the participants freshly – as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994), the interpretation and analyses were likely influenced by the researcher's previous and different experiences. A final limitation of this study is the time limitations associated with researching intercollegiate student-athletes, especially those who participate at the NCAA Division I level. Student-athletes are very busy, even during the "off-season."

Summary

College student-athletes are an important sub-population in higher education institutions. They are an asset to their respective institution not because they aid in meeting enrollment numbers, or enhance the revenue streams of the athletic departments for which they compete, but because they are valued members of the university community. Student-athletes face similar growth and development challenges as do their non-athletic peers during the college years. However, due to the competitive milieu, and the many differing challenges faced by this special student population, college student-athletes are a unique student population in need of study. There has been an increase in the interest of spirituality among higher education researchers. Consequently, there is a growing interest in the spirituality and spiritual development among college students. There exists little research of the spirituality of college student-athletes and even less of the essence of the spirituality of college students while participating in intercollegiate athletics.

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of student-athletes' experiences related to spirituality while participating in intercollegiate athletics. For the purposes of this study "participating in intercollegiate athletics" was operationalized as college student-athletes who are current members of an intercollegiate athletic team. The research question which

guided this study was, what is the spiritual experience of college students who participate in intercollegiate athletics?

A review of literature was conducted examining the intersections of college students, spirituality, and intercollegiate athletics. The review included the following sections: Spirituality, sport and religion, intercollegiate athletics, purposeful athletics, spirituality in American higher education, college student development, college student spirituality, and college student athletes. The Spirituality segment examines the differences and similarities in the literature between spirituality and religiousness or religiosity, their relationship to faith and the place of spirituality within the higher education literature. A historical section follows, examining the course of spirituality in American higher education from Ancient Greece to modern day, providing a brief historicity of sport and intercollegiate athletics. The next section of the literature review examined the interplay of spirituality and sport, while the next to last segment presents the literature surrounding spirituality and college students, including related student development theories. The final section investigated the research of college student-athletes, and specifically research related to NCAA Division I athletes.

In an effort to examine the essence of the spiritual experiences of student-athletes, qualitative research was conducted. This research followed the transcendental phenomenological procedures put forth by Moustakas (1994). Participants were selected using purposeful criterion selection. The participants in this spirituality study met the following criteria:

1. Student-athletes competing at a NCAA Division I university.

2. Student-athletes having completed at least one competitive season of intercollegiate play (e.g., used at least one year of eligibility).

3. Student-athletes who place value in spirituality.

4. Student-athletes who acknowledge and accept the researcher's definition of spirituality for the purpose of this study.

Student-athletes were identified from personal contacts. In an effort to achieve maximum variation, the assistance of these personal contacts was made to not only identify student-athletes who profess a traditional Christian faith, but also student-athletes who fit the selection criteria and who also ascribe to a different or no faith tradition. Data were collected using semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The data were electronically recorded, transcribed, and two methods of triangulation were performed: member-checking and peer review.

Four themes and four sub-themes emerged from the data analysis using the Moustakas (1994) method. The four emergent themes for this student-athlete spirituality study were: (a) defining spirituality; (b) inseparability of spiritual, student, and athlete; (c) responsibility; and (d) influence on others. According to the participants, the many challenges and trials associated with their intercollegiate athletic experience often led to spiritual growth. Their spiritual nature was often utilized as a resource and source of strength during difficult or challenging times faced both inside and outside competition. The data reveal that spirituality and the student-athlete experience are separate experiences, although each has an influence on the other, and spirituality is seen as an extension of the student-athlete's complex identity. Among the participants, the interviews confirmed their acknowledgement that they are in fact people with spiritual beliefs. The data reveal that student-athletes view their athletic ability as a gift received, given to them by a "higher power" or God. Acknowledging this position, the student-athlete chooses to accept this appointment as a challenge and responsibility to not only perform well, but to also model the values and expectations of someone to whom others would aspire.

From this platform, being a Division I student-athlete, these athletes have chosen various avenues through which to display their spirituality. Based on the interviews, the student-athlete determines the extent to which they will be spiritual and what that means for them. The spiritual experience for the student-athlete is a personal decision and is manifested in different ways. The participants acknowledged their unique college experience provides a platform by which they may influence others, often in encouraging and ecumenical ways. These unselfish actions, evidenced in many of the participants, reveal a mature understanding of life beyond playing sports.

The data reveal the essence of the spiritual experience for the participants of this study is that the student-athlete experience is a gift, and because their athletic talent offers them status or a position of influence, there exists a responsibility to utilize their athletic talent and position of influence to the best of their abilities, influencing others in the best possible manner. There is a desire among spiritual college student-athletes to use the platform their athletic achievement provides to make a difference among their circles of influence. In short, the essence of the college student-athlete spiritual experience is student-athletes desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others. In short, the essence of the student-athletes' spiritual experience made through participation in intercollegiate athletics was presented as: Student-athletes desire to utilize sport as a means to positively influence others.

The sub-themes which emerged from the data analysis are: (a) institutional pride, (b) from coach to team, (c) winning isn't everything, and (d) peers as exemplars. The first sub-theme emerged as being student-athletes take pride in the tradition and reputation of their university. The second sub-theme to emerge was that as the student-athlete progresses through their intercollegiate athletic team experience, devotion to team and teammates increases, while

commitment to the coach wanes. The third sub-theme which emerged from the data was that for student-athletes, winning isn't [*sic*] everything. The final sub-theme to emerge was that student-athletes value and look up to high profile student-athletes who profess and live out their same beliefs and values.

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APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research Form

DATE

INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS: A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE?

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the spiritual experience of NCAA Division I student-athletes as they participate in intercollegiate athletics. This study is being conducted by Mark Raikes (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Kandace Hinton (Faculty Sponsor), from the Department of Education, Leadership, Administration, and Foundations at Indiana State University. This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you compete at an NCAA Division I institution and have been identified from a personal contact or acquaintance as a student-athlete who places value in spirituality.

As a study of college student-athlete spirituality, this study defines spirituality as:
Spirituality is a universal lived human experience wherein meaning-making is sought in order to fully understand the human experience; an honorable pursuit toward interconnectedness with self, others, community, and a Higher power.

If you do not agree with this definition of spirituality, you should not sign this consent document and decline to participate.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study. The information you provide will be published as a doctoral dissertation. If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview at the location of your choice. The interview should take about one hour to complete, and will not be more than 90 minutes. I would like to audiotape (digitally record) the interview to make sure that our conversation is recorded accurately. The discussion topics will include the aspects of spirituality related to your athletic experience. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but will provide benefits to faculty, coaches, administrators, advisors, and others who concern themselves with the programs and services which support, enhance, and encourage the college student-athlete holistic living learning experience.

I plan to publish the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you. Following our interview, a third-party transcriptionist who has signed a confidentiality agreement which provides guidelines for the safety, security, and treatment of your data will be hired to transcribe the data. To keep your information safe, the digital audio file of your interview will be placed on a dedicated external hard drive which is password protected. As soon as this research is complete, the

recordings, transcriptions, and related data will be securely archived for at least three years. The researchers will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected. To protect confidentiality, your real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. It is the intention of the researchers to keep this study data indefinitely for future research about the spirituality of intercollegiate athletes. Individuals from the Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. Should the data be published, no individual information will be disclosed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. By signing the Informed Consent Form you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason and you can stop your participation in the research at any time.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Mark Raikes (Principal Investigator), 1251 S Valhalla Street, Upland, Indiana, (765) 998-7114, mraikes@indstate.edu; or Dr. Kandace Hinton (Faculty Sponsor), Indiana State University, ELAF Department, Terre Haute, IN 47809, (812) 237-2897, Kandace.hinton@indstate.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or if you feel you've been placed at risk, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN, 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or by e-mail at irb@indstate.edu.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be part of the study. Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

I agree to be audiotaped as part of the study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Mark Raikes   Indiana State University
1251 S Valhalla St   Institutional Review Board
Upland, IN 46989   # 10-150
(765) 998-7114   Approved: 19 May 2010
mraikes@indstate.edu   Expires: 05 May 2011

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

1. What is it like to be a student-athlete at (institution)?
2. What does it feel like to take the (competitive venue)?
3. Are there routines that you follow prior to or during competition? Tell me about them.
4. Describe for me your experience as a student-athlete.
5. Why do you play (insert sport)?
6. How would you describe the feelings you get when you play your sport to a non-athlete?
7. What is playing your sport most similar to? Why?
8. Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person? Why or how so?
9. How do you define or describe spirituality?
10. In your own words, can you describe the essence of spirituality?
11. In what ways is your spirituality lived out?
12. Explain from where your understanding of spirituality comes from.
13. Besides, or other than an experience where you made some form of a "faith commitment," please describe a spiritual experience you have had.
14. Is there a time that you would say you have felt most spiritual? Can you describe that time?
15. Is spirituality static, or is it something that grows and develops over time? Can you explain?
16. How do you understand spirituality as it relates to your participation in your sport?
17. How is your spirituality affected by your participation in intercollegiate athletics?
18. Are there similarities or differences between your spirituality and how you participate as a student-athlete?
19. How do believe your athletic experience has affected your spiritual development?

APPENDIX C

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes (digital recordings) and documentation received from Mark Raikes, Principal Investigator, related to his doctoral study on the Spirituality of College Student Athletes (Indiana State University IRB approval #10-150, expires May 5, 2011). I understand that the audio files will be hand delivered and placed in my possession in digital form to be transcribed electronically, are not to be transmitted electronically by email over the Internet, and that electronic files and copies are to remain in a secure, safe, and password protected environment. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;

2. To not make copies of any audio files or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Mark Raikes, Principal Investigator;

3. To store all study-related digital audio files and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;

4. To return all digital files and study-related documents to Mark Raikes in a complete and timely manner.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio files and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D

Peer Debriefer Letter

Dear Colleague:

I am approaching the final stages of conducting a research study for the partial fulfillment of completing a Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations at Indiana State University. The focus of my study is to explore the essence of the spiritual experience of student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics.

Attached you will find my study, which takes the reader from the statement of the problem on to the findings of the study. What I would like to request of you is a review of the attached document and provision of feedback regarding the accuracy of how my initial questions and interpretations speak to one another as well as search for any biases or areas that need more reinforcement of the findings.

Thank you in advance for your valued time in assisting me with this important part of the study. Please let me know if any clarification is needed by contacting me by phone (765-998-7114) or by email (mrraikes@taylor.edu).

Sincerely,

Mark H. Raikes
1251 S Valhalla St.
Upland, IN 46989

Adapted from McCutchan, J. A. (2010). *The experience of baccalaureate degree seeking nursing students undergoing the process of clinical evaluation appraisal* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3404448).