

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF A SELECT GROUP OF STUDENT-  
ATHLETE MOTHERS WHO EXPERIENCED A PREGNANCY WHILE  
COMPETING AT A NCAA DIVISION I OR DIVISION II UNIVERSITY

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by

Candice D. Williams

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## **DEDICATION**

This pursuit towards a Doctor of Philosophy and the completion of my dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program. The completion of my doctorate degree would not have been possible without God and I thank him for his blessings that continue to flow into my life.

My dissertation is also dedicated to my grandparents, William and Emma Jones, Sr., and Charlie and Annie Rose Williams, Sr. Words cannot express how blessed I am to have you as my grandparents and role models. Additionally, my dissertation is dedicated to my parents and two sisters, Anita, Charlie, Jasmine and Sheri. Thank you for your love, endless support and encouragement, I love you all more than you will ever know. I hope this achievement has made you proud. Lastly, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to the amazing women who graciously agreed to participate in my study. The completion of the dissertation would not have been possible without you. Thank you for your willingness to share your experiences in an effort to help me give a voice to pregnant and mothering student-athletes competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University. Your resiliency as a student, athlete, and mother is both admirable and respected.

## ABSTRACT

Williams, Candice D., *A qualitative exploration of a select group of student-athlete mothers who experience a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University*. Doctor of Philosophy (Counselor Education), December, 2017, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II university. After an in-depth review of the literature, this study assisted in gathering the experiences of the participants by utilizing a transcendental phenomenological qualitative method. This method was implemented by utilizing semi-structured interviews with each participant. Using Moustakas's (1994) method for conducting a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, interview data was prepared for analyzing data and reporting results. Five major themes were derived after carefully coding transcriptions, and grouping common themes to describe the phenomenon: (a) pregnancy decisions, (b) on being a pregnant-student athlete, (c) available support during and after pregnancy, (d) perceived organizational support, (e) guidance and suggestions around pregnancy. The shared experiences of the women in this study offer information regarding various dimensions of dealing with pregnancy while competing in intercollegiate athletics, which may be used to educate mental health practitioners in the areas of advocacy and clinical efforts supporting pregnant student-athletes.

KEY WORDS: Motherhood, Student-athlete, Pregnancy, Female college athletics, NCAA

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Approximately 460,000 student-athletes compete in intercollegiate sanctioned sports at an educational institution approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; NCAA, 2015). As the athletic participation rates among women competing at the NCAA level continue to rise (more than 200,000 in 2014-2015) the probability of a female student-athlete dealing with a pregnancy is likely. The NCAA reported that approximately 10-15% of female student-athletes and partners of male student-athletes will be faced with pregnancy each year (Hogshead-Makar & Sorensen, 2008; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, Schweinbenz, 2012; Sorensen, Sincoff, & Siebeneck, 2008). Evidence supports that student-athletes who experience a pregnancy are at risk of feeling like they must conceal the pregnancy, feeling forced into abortion, or fearing the loss of their athletic scholarship (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Sorensen, Sincoff, & Siebeneck, 2009).

Despite the NCAA's efforts to address the health and safety of student-athletes, little focus has been devoted to managing mental health issues specific to pregnant and parenting student-athletes. A significant body of literature exists through which researchers and stakeholders examine the development and implementation of policies concerning the rights and safety of parenting and pregnant students (Erdmans, 2012; Gough, 2011; Mason & Younger, 2014; McLaughlin, 2014). However, research investigating the clinical and programmatic needs of pregnant and parenting student-athletes is lacking.

In recent reviews of pregnancy policy for student-athletes, a controversial issue has arisen with the acknowledgement of pregnancy as a medical condition. Marilyn McNeil, Monmouth University Athletic Director and former member of the Division I NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics, states, "I get upset when we talk about pregnancy being this strange thing or something that needs to be treated differently. We don't have a national policy for ankle injuries. I'm struggling with why we need a policy for pregnancy" (Hiestand, 2007, p. 20). Nora Lynn Finch, North Carolina State University Senior Associate Athletic Director shared the same sentiments stating, "I'd be shocked if a coach wanted to talk to me about a stricter policy than just treating it (pregnancy) as a medical condition" (Hiestand, 2007, p.20). There are athletic administrators who argue that pregnancy is a choice. Sue Willey, University of Indianapolis Athletic Director, asserts that allowing pregnant student-athletes to remain on scholarship is a disservice to the program and the coaches (Heistand, 2007; Sterling, 2010). According to Sterling, some interviewed coaches noted that a pregnant student-athlete should be required to relinquish their athletic scholarship. Some college coaches explained that allowing pregnant athletes to keep their athletic scholarship creates an "equivalence" for other students who could use the scholarship monies and "handcuffs" coaches by limiting the number of athletes that could use the athletic scholarship and actually play the sport (Heistand).

Sorensen, Sincoff, and Siebeneck (2009) affirm that negative opinions held by athletic directors put pregnant student-athletes at risk of receiving negative judgment and discrimination from their fellow teammates, coaches, and other athletic department staff. Additionally, Sorensen et al. suggest that coaches, athletic administrators, and teammates

may view pregnancy as the student-athlete's fault, blame the student-athlete for having unprotected sex, or penalize the student-athlete by isolating the student from participating in athletic activities. Thus, increasing the susceptibility of a pregnant student-athlete's decision to conceal or abort her pregnancy prematurely (Sorensen et al., 2009).

Contrarily, male student-athletes who are involved in a pregnancy are less likely to experience similar discrimination, public shame, and scrutiny as compared to female student-athletes (Archdeacon, 2007; Harris 2007; Sorensen et al., 2009).

The Title IX of Education Amendments of 1972 has been instrumental in mandating the protection and enforcement of rights for pregnant and parenting student-athletes. In 1975, Congress approved The Title IX athletic regulations that support equal opportunity for pregnant and parenting student-athletes in the areas of participation, scholarship, and treatment of benefits. More specifically, new athletic regulations emphasize the legal rights that protect student-athletes from discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, conditions related to pregnancy, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from pregnancy, and parental or marital status (34 C.F.R. §106.40(b)(1)). More importantly, athletic regulations were set to recognize pregnancy as a temporary medical condition in college athletics and outlines the university obligations to pregnant student-athletes.

The University of Iowa, along with Wright State University, were among the first athletic departments to take a proactive stance in developing a pregnancy policy to protect their athletes. Professor Elizabeth Sorenson of Wright State University has been instrumental in advocating for pregnant student-athletes' rights and addressing the paucity of policy across NCAA institutions. A pioneer in raising awareness on the topic,

Sorenson co-authored the 2008 NCAA Gender Equity *Pregnant and Parenting Student-Athletes: Resources and Model Policies* to support institutional pregnancy policy development. The policy and procedures handbook provides information, resources, and guidance to NCAA institutions and student-athletes to meet the needs of pregnant student-athletes (Hogshead-Makar & Harmon, 2008). As the awareness to improve policy and resources across institutions increases, the everyday life experiences of pregnant and parenting student-athletes continue to be underemphasized (Sterling, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Realizing the choice of being a mother and student-athlete is not easy. Pregnant student-athletes must decide whether to continue or terminate the pregnancy, whether to parent or place the child in an adoptive home, how to continue with academic goals and professional goals, how to pay for medical and living expenses, and how to tell significant others such as their coaches, peers, boyfriend, and family members about their pregnancy. Furthermore, the emotional, social, and financial responsibilities associated with being both a parent and student may significantly impact an athlete's overall wellbeing, especially if there is no readily apparent support to help mediate the transition into motherhood.

Young women who continue to participate in collegiate sports while pregnant are at risk for dropping out of sports and even college. Others may decide to terminate their pregnancy, perhaps due to fear of losing an athletic scholarship and receiving potentially negative evaluations by coaches, teammates, or family members. In 2007, Katie McCoy, a sophomore golfer at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY, hid her pregnancy from friends and family and denied giving birth even after her roommate found the newborn in

a residence hall trash-room. Following the discovery, McCoy was arrested for the death of her newborn daughter (Athletic Business, 2007). Similarly, Teri Rhodes, a freshman volleyball player at Mercyhurst College, denied her pregnancy to teammates, coaches, and doctors until she gave birth to and suffocated her baby girl in a dormitory shower after team practice. Rhodes was charged with murdering her newborn baby in September 2007 (Associated Press, 2007; NCAA, 2008). When questioned by the police, Rhodes told authorities that she did not know she was giving birth until she went to the bathroom and saw the baby's leg. She was later charged with homicide, abusing a corpse, and concealing the death of a child, among other counts (Associated Press, 2007; NCAA, 2008). In 2007, Rhodes was sentenced to serve 40 to 80 months in prison (Associated Press, 2007; NCAA, 2008).

The list of female college athletes who turn to extreme measures to terminate their pregnancies goes on: seven female athletes at Clemson University (Rovegno, 2006); a basketball player at the University of Louisville (Rainey, 2006); a soccer player at Wake Forest University; and a track athlete at Lafayette College (Sorensen, 2004). A death or infant homicide is a serious consequence for young women who live in fear and feel silenced about their pregnancies (Vellut, Cook, & Tursz, 2012). Moreover, a death of an infant because of an unwanted pregnancy is a serious concern among this vulnerable subgroup of student-athletes and thus requires specialized attention from counselors.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The observation that several student-athletes were concealing their pregnancies in fear of losing their athletic scholarships provided the initial inspiration to examine their experiences further. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to

describe the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in a sanctioned sport and receiving institutional grant-in-aid administered by a Division I or Division II educational institution approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The experiences of female student-athletes who were pregnant as a student-athlete at a NCAA Division I or Division II university may offer insight into the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of female student-athletes who have lived through such an experience. Therefore, understanding the personal experiences of young women in this group is vital for the development of appropriate resources for female student-athletes seeking support during and after their pregnancy (Gray, 2015).

By giving a voice to the experiences of pregnant student-athletes, the findings from this research study may help counselors (i.e. mental health counselors, sports counselors, school counselors, and academic advisors), counselor educators, coaches, and athletic administrative staff develop a better understanding of the psychosocial needs and possible barriers endured by pregnant and parenting female student-athletes. Moreover, one may consider the circumstances that influence a pregnant student-athlete's decision to disclose or conceal her pregnancy as a process of qualitative data analysis (Murthy, Dwyer, & Bosco, 2012). In addition, through this study, I aspired to add to the limited body of literature related to the everyday life experiences of pregnant and parenting student-athletes. This study served to promote further exploration concerning counseling competency and professional training in the emerging field of sports counseling within counselor education. Lastly, this study sought to address the gaps in counseling and psychological services for student-athletes on university campuses.

### **Significance of the Study**

Although similar studies have investigated the shared experiences of elite athletes as mothers, the literature does not reflect upon the experiences of pregnant student-athletes who compete at the collegiate level. It is important to note that this study can add to the literature by filling a gap in the research related to female student-athlete pregnancy while also providing a platform for female student-athletes to voice their perspectives regarding a topic that is often not researched or spoken of in the literature.

As the athletic participation rates among women competing at the NCAA level continue to rise (more than 200,000 in 2014-2015) the probability of a female student-athlete dealing with a pregnancy is likely. Faced with a multitude of decisions, pregnant female student-athletes may contemplate the options of abortion, adoption, or choosing to carry their child to term. Young women who decide not to terminate their pregnancy may be at risk of developing unhealthy coping responses (e.g. mental avoidance, denial, disengagement, alcohol/drug use) during their transition from athlete to parent.

The pressures and circumstances to excel on the field and in the classroom may influence a student-athlete's ability to seek help to ensure prenatal care for both child and mother. The stories of athletes hiding their pregnancies so that they could continue playing college sports are concerning. Despite increased awareness around the development of policies recognizing the rights and safety of pregnant athletes, they remain a vulnerable subgroup within the sporting culture. Currently, there are no data regarding the number of athletes who become pregnant during their intercollegiate athletic career. However, the stories of pregnant athletes publicized in news and through documentaries likely represent only a fraction of the instances of pregnancy that occur.

Through this study, I endeavored to contribute to the scantiness of literature by investigating the wellbeing of pregnant and parenting student-athletes. In addition, I aimed to promote the development of preparation programs and training for counselors aspiring to work with youth and adult athletes. Likewise, I sought to address the gaps in counseling and psychological services for student-athletes on university campuses by highlighting the voices of a population who may need assistance. In assessing the late gains of Title IX (1975) guaranteeing the legal protection and safety of pregnant and parenting student-athletes, it is possible universities are failing to attend to the broader need to assess the psychosocial requirements of this vulnerable subgroup of athletes.

As counselor educators apply their research and clinical skills to matters concerning athletes and sports culture, faculty and university counseling centers need to be aware of the culturally specific nuances, clinical implications, and multicultural competencies relative to the athletic population. Pregnancy can present special emotional challenges specific to female athletes that may warrant professional counseling. The timing of a pregnancy along with the threat of early athletic retirement makes pregnancy a prominent counseling concern for female athletes transitioning into motherhood.

In summary, the voices highlighted as a process of this study may be valuable in developing an understanding of the counseling and psychological needs of pregnant and parenting student-athletes. Further, strategies for support and psychological care may become apparent through the discovery process. Circumstances that influence a pregnant-athlete's decision to disclose or conceal her pregnancy will be a focus of the qualitative process. The findings from this study aimed to provide stakeholders within the sports community a better understanding of the transitional barriers female student-

athletes experience while pregnant. Lastly, through this study I strived to promote further exploration concerning counseling competency and professional training in the emerging field of sports counseling within the field of counselor education.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this section I provide a definition of terms utilizing the support of the established professional literature regarding the topic of pregnancy and student athleticism.

*College Counseling Services:* Clinical services designed to help students manage challenges and changes that may arise during their college experience (Van Brunt, 2010).

*Division I:* Division I represents one of three multi-division classifications of athletic competition in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Division I athletics signifies the most competitive level of sport participation among 346 of the 1,092 American colleges and universities sanctioned by the NCAA. Approximately 170,000 student-athletes compete at the Division I level each year totaling more than 6,000 athletic teams nationwide. Division I colleges and universities are required to sponsor a minimum number of sports with two team sports with each playing season represented by each gender. For example, seven sports for men and seven sports for women or six sports for men and eight sports for women. Compared to Division II and Division III, Division I institutions are responsible for overseeing larger athletic budgets and must adhere to the minimum and maximum financial aid award requirements authorized by the NCAA (NCAA, 2017).

*Division II:* Division II represents one of three multi-division classifications of athletic competition in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Division II athletics is an intermediate-level of sports competition among 307 of the 1,092 American colleges and universities sanctioned by the NCAA. Approximately 119,066 student-

athletes compete at the Division II level each year totaling more than 4,000 athletic teams nationwide. Division II colleges and universities are required to sponsor a minimum number of sports with two team sports represented by each gender. For example, five sports for men and five sports for women or four sports for men and six sports for women. Division II athletic programs are financed within the institution's budget similar to other academic departments on campus. In addition, there are maximum financial aid awards for each sport that a Division II institution cannot exceed as permitted by the NCAA (NCAA, 2017).

*Ecological Systems Model:* Involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

*Female College Athletics:* A subcultural context embedded in female participation in collegiate sports. Issues specific to gender disparities, sexual harassment, gender role conflict, relationships with coaches and teammates, striving for thinness, perfectionism, and the female athlete triad intersect to construct a culture specific to female athletes (Deaner, 2009).

*Motherhood:* A set of socially constructed activities involved in nurturing and caring for dependent children (Key-Roberts, 2009).

*Mothering:* Involves caring for the physical, moral, and ethical development of children and requires a significant amount of time, emotional energy, and personal investment towards overseeing a child's growth and development (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Chase & Rogers, 2001).

*National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA):* The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a non-profit association established to govern and organize athletic competition across three divisions (Division I, II, and III) at the collegiate level (NCAA, 2015).

*Parenting:* The process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting refers to the activity of raising a child rather than the biological relationship (Anand, 2011).

*Pregnancy:* Occurs when a fertilized egg-zygote implants itself in a female uterus. Pregnancy understood via three trimesters, which reflect the symmetrical breakup of the general nine-months of a pregnancy (O'Reilly, 2010).

*Perceived Organizational Support:* pertains to an employee's perception of the extent to which an organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986).

*Social Support:* The perception and fact that one is tended to, has help offered from other people, and has access to a supportive shared network. Sources of social support may include emotional (e.g., counseling), tangible (e.g., financial assistance), informational (e.g., recommendations), or companionship (e.g., friendship) and intangible (e.g., giving personal advice) (Charney, 2004; Ozbay, Johnson, Dimoulas, Morgan, Charney, Southwick, 2007).

*Student-Athlete:* A young woman or man competing in an organized competitive sport at an educational institution approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2015).

*Title IX Education Amendment Act of 1972*: Prohibits discrimination against women and men from participating in federally funded educational programs and activities on the bases of sex (20 U.S.C. § 1681 (1972)).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model provides the theoretical framework for this dissertation. The ecological systems model (Figure 1) emphasizes the process through which various environmental factors shape human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). With the individual placed at the center of the model, Bronfenbrenner incorporates a "system of nested, interdependent, dynamic structures ranging from the proximal, consisting of immediate face-to-face settings, to the most distal, comprising broader social context such as classes and culture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p.4) and asserts that development is stimulated by a set of interactions that take place through four successive levels between the person and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

The ecological systems model recognizes four major components that influence human growth and development: person, process, context, and time. Within Bronfenbrenner's model, the *microsystem* represents the most immediate social and cultural factors related to the *person* exclusively, while promoting growth and development through proximal interactions (*process*) within different environments (*context*) that influence development over *time* as these interactions become more complex (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For a pregnant female student-athlete, her on-campus microsystem may consist of athlete and non-athlete peers, advisors, tutors, trainers, faculty members, and coaches, which may be specific to either the student or athlete role

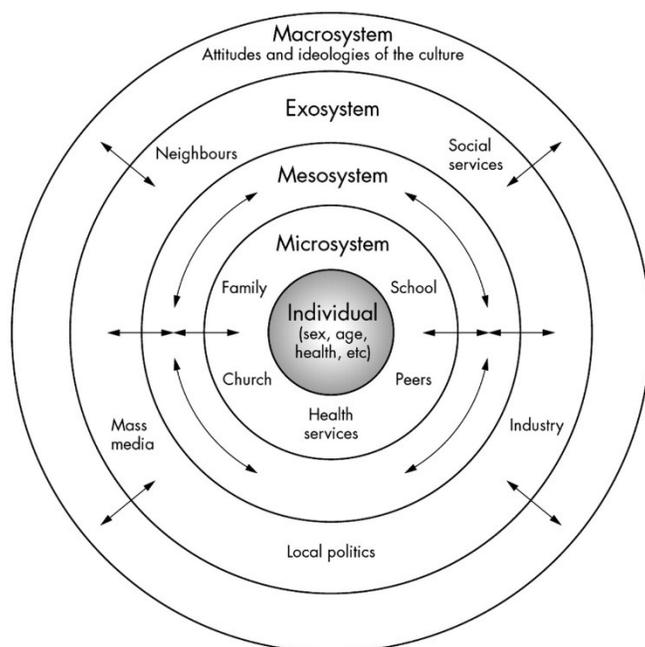
separately or influential across both roles simultaneously for the pregnant female student-athlete. In addition, settings such as the locker room, the college dorm room, the classroom, and advising centers also represent contextual elements of her microsystem.

The next level of Bronfenbrenner's model is represented by the *mesosystem*, which involves the linkage between two or more microsystem, along with ecological niches (particular areas within the contextual setting that contain specific features), which can have a positive and negative effect on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For a pregnant female student-athlete, the microsystem components of coach, academic advisor, and tutor create a mesosystem that may significantly impact the female student-athlete's academic development and athletic performance within the contexts associated with maintaining a strict and demanding athletic and academic schedule. However, a mesosystem comprised of an environment representative of negative attitudes held by teammates and coaches about female student-athletes who become pregnant may deter a pregnant student-athlete from disclosing her pregnancy or seeking the proper medical care.

Bronfenbrenner maintained that the ecological systems model also includes environmental components apart from to the individual that shape their development. Institutional policy such as the implementation of Title IX athletic regulations in 1975 and NCAA guidelines prohibiting discrimination against student-athlete due to their pregnancy or parental status are examples of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *ecosystem*. Therefore, the ecosystem is the setting in which the pregnant female student-athlete is not directly involved; however, components within the ecosystem may impact the female student-athletes actions, and the actions of individuals within her immediate

surroundings. The *macrosystem*, as stated by Bronfenbrenner (1979) includes the culture context in which the pregnant female student-athlete lives, which is the most distant level from the microsystem that is shaped by conditions or events over time.

It is important to note that there is paucity in the existing literature in which Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model has been applied and discussed related to the experiences and development of pregnant female student-athletes. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's model was utilized in order to understand the essence of the pregnant female student-athletes personal experiences as well as the experiences that helped these women to mature as student-athlete mothers in relation to their social surroundings.



**Macrosystem** – Represents the cultural context in which the pregnant female student-athlete lives. Cultural context includes balancing athletic and academic responsibilities.

**Exosystem** – Represents the setting in which the pregnant female student-athlete is not directly involved (i.e., Institutional policy such as Title IX and NCAA guidelines).

**Mesosystem** – Represents the linkage between two or more microsystem. The microsystem components of coach, academic advisor, and tutor create a mesosystem.

**Microsystem** - Represents athletic and non-athletic peers, family members, advisors, tutors, trainers, faculty members, and coaches.

Figure 1. *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979)*

### **Research Questions**

My research questions were formulated based upon an extensive review of the literature that revealed a lack of research investigating the experiences of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University. A phenomenological research design was utilized to capture the personal experiences of the participants as they described the nature of their experiences as pregnant student-athletes from their points of view. Qualitative data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews and analyzed to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University?

### **Limitations**

My research is limited to participants who meet the criteria of being a biologically female student-athlete who experienced a pregnancy while competing in a sanctioned sport and receiving institutional grant-in-aid administered by a Division I or Division II educational institution approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association. The findings were contingent upon discussions and responses to questions asked in the semi-structured interviews. Because data was collected through open-ended questions, a strong awareness of internal and external validity will be emphasized. Attention to gender and student-athlete status occurred based on the sampling procedures utilized to obtain participants for this study. This study is also limited to the self-reported experience of the participants. Finally, data collected is limited to only those individuals who self-selected to participate in the study.

### **Delimitations**

In conducting this research, I decided to study only female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in a sanctioned sport and receiving institutional grant-in-aid administered by a Division I or Division II educational institution approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2015). Another delimitation of my research was my deliberate decision to select participants who are not currently enrolled as a student-athlete at NCAA Division I or Division II universities. Included in my study were only athletes who completed their undergraduate degree and were no longer competing on the collegiate level. Therefore, their experiences were discussed from a reflective perspective rather than in-the-moment of a developing experience.

### **Assumptions**

For the purposes of this study, my assumptions were as follows: (a) the participants will understand the scope of my study, are competent in self-reporting, and are honest and forthcoming in answering questions; (b) the interpretation of the data collected accurately reflects participant experience; (c) the female student-athletes experienced their pregnancies within a social and cultural context; and (d) the methodology selected offers a logical and appropriate design for understanding the essence of the pregnancy phenomenon experienced by the student-athletes.

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into five parts that are titled as chapters. Chapter I contains the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose, significance, definitions of terms, conceptual framework, research questions, delimitations, limitations, and

assumptions. Chapter II includes a review of the literature relevant to pregnancy, motherhood, and sports and a combination of all these factors in relation to student-athlete pregnancy. Chapter III consists of a description of the research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis of the study. Chapter IV contains a description of the demographic data and the results of the qualitative analyses. Chapter V includes a summary of the research, discussion of the results, implications of my research study for counselor educators, coaches, athletic administrative staff, the NCAA, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature discussing the effect of pregnancy on athletics has been difficult to review due to the lack of research investigating pregnancy among student-athletes (Kawaguchi & Pickering, 2010). As a result, little is known about the psychological implications within the context of motherhood and college sports. Apart from studies focusing on protecting the rights and safety of pregnant student-athletes, issues concerning the psychological well-being of female student-athlete as mothers is an area that has been overlooked in the literature. Evidence supports that student-athletes who experience a pregnancy are at risk of feeling like they must conceal the pregnancy, feeling forced into abortion, or fearing the loss of their athletic scholarship (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Sorensen, Sincoff, & Siebeneck, 2009). In addition, there are health risks associated with participating in intercollegiate athletics while pregnant (Sorensen et al., 2009). The health risks that affect the safety of sports participation depending on the stage of pregnancy, including: overheating, level of exertion, risk of injury, and pre-pregnancy health status (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2002; Downs, Chasan-Taber, Evenson, Leiferman, Yeo, 2012; Sorensen et al., 2009).

This chapter serves to provide a review of literature relevant to the experiences shared by athletes as mothers. In addition, this chapter focuses on the gaps within the literature that the current study is designed to address. An extensive dive into the existing literature yielded three areas that are explored in this chapter: (a) pregnancy, motherhood, and sports, (b) college students with kids (c) student-athlete pregnancy, (d) pregnancy

policy, guidelines and practices, and (e) an ecological perspective of student-athlete pregnancy.

### **Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Sports**

Pregnancy comes with a great deal of psychological and physical change and is among several reasons why female athletes retire prematurely from competing in sport (MaGannon et al., 2012; Nash, 2011; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Slade, 2002; Spowart, Burrows, & Shaw, 2010). Bond and Batey (2005) proposed that while competing in recreational and professional sports enhances the physical and psychological well-being of women, their participation is often compromised by domestic responsibilities. However, the WNBA's Candace Parker, marathoner Kara Goucher, and the U.S. national softball team's Jessica Mendoza have demonstrated that childbearing does not have to end the career of female athletes. To date, qualitative studies in sport psychology conducted primarily with elite athlete mothers highlight the relationship between motherhood, athletic identity, and the retention of women in elite sports. This is important to note for my study because a number of student-athlete mothers are balancing multiple commitments while competing at the NCAA Division I or Division II level (McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

In recent years, the portrayals of athletes as mothers within sports media, along with qualitative research studies presented in the literature, have emphasized the psychological, social, and cultural implications of motherhood and sport. (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2015; McGannon & Busanich, 2016; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). However, despite the narratives highlighting the significance of motherhood among women who participate in competitive sports,

literature investigating the experiences of female athletes during their pregnancy and while mothering is limited (McGannon et al., 2014; McGannon et al., 2015; McGannon & Busanich, 2016). Therefore, my study was inspired by literature pertaining to the experiences of athletes as mothers. In drawing upon a synthesis of the existing literature, the research studies that follow have explored the maternal experiences of female athletes within the context of their professional careers in sports.

### **Contextualizing Athletes as Mothers**

Historically, women have been held responsible for attending to the physical, moral, and spiritual development of their children (Chase & Rogers, 2001). Petrassi (2012) noted that gendered roles and responsibilities related to caring for and parenting children are heavily influenced by societal and cultural expectations within the family structure. Within the context of sport and mothering, research studies have discovered that being a mother and athlete provides benefits that extend beyond their individual and athletic development, this particular subgroup of women have difficulty managing the responsibilities of motherhood while competing in sport (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; McGannon et al., 2015). Appleby and Fisher (2009) suggested that women might experience difficulty negotiating motherhood and athletics as a result of the gendered beliefs and expectations designated to women who are mothers.

While cultural norms related to mothering often emphasize caring for the needs of children before oneself, athlete-mothers may feel pressured to conform to cultural norms that suggest women must manage mothering, caring for their family, excelling in their careers, and maintaining a successful marriage without any interruptions (Choi, Henshaw, Baker, & Tree, 2005; McGannon et al., 2015). However, men who work

outside of the home, leaving domestic duties to women, are recognized as fulfilling traditional gender roles pertaining to fatherhood (Dixon & Wetherell, 2004).

Consequently, women who strive to *do it all* are said to be at greater risk of experiencing psychological distress as a result of attempting to master unrealistic expectation (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Choi et al., 2005; McGannon et al., 2015).

For female athletes who dedicate a vast majority of their lives to training and competing in sport, prioritizing their time to care for and support the needs of their children can place added constraints on their athletic training, participation, and identity (Appleby & Fisher, 2009). In Appleby and Fisher's (2009) study, the ten elite distance runners interviewed in their study who returned to sport after having children reported experiencing conflicting feelings about their responsibilities as mothers and as athletes. According to Appleby and Fisher (2009) women who accepted social stereotypes of motherhood felt as though they would have to sacrifice their athletic commitments or responsibilities as mothers in order to be successful at both. However, women who rejected social stereotypes of motherhood viewed their participation in sport as a positive and powerful part of their identity that needed to be maintained despite their new responsibilities of mothering (Appleby & Fisher, 2009). For instance, a number of women described that prior to getting pregnant, they felt pressured by the expectations of others, as well as their own expectations, to perform at their highest potential. According to the participants, those pressures decreased once they became mothers. This finding supports Pedersen's (2001) findings on motherhood as a social phenomenon in elite sports, which indicated that the mothers considered their involvement in elite sports as a method of self-expression and appreciated the time they had to themselves by excelling

in the sport that they loved. The mothers in this study formed new perceptions about themselves in relation to both mothering and running identities (Appleby & Fisher, 2009).

Palmer and Leberman (2009) explored the lives of nine elite athlete mothers competing in a professional sport in New Zealand. Their findings revealed that the women in their study expressed enjoyment of their roles as a mother and athlete, and described managing the various responsibilities related to their dual roles as making a significant impact on their lives. For instance, the participants indicated that becoming a mother enhanced their experiences as an athlete by fostering resilience and adaptability, which helped them to better deal with challenges associated with competing in elite sports. Yet, they expressed experiencing difficulty with balancing the time, emotional energy, and financial demands regarding their roles as both a mother and athlete.

Although the women in their study perceived balancing the intrapersonal and interpersonal challenges related to mothering as difficult, the findings revealed that they did not view them as constraints. However, the participants identified lack of discretionary time, organizational resistance and inflexibility (e.g. lack of or no support from their coaches, respective sports organizations, team management, and national sports agencies), lack of suitable child-care, as well as societal expectations and assumptions regarding motherhood and elite sport as constraining. In contrast, a number of the women acknowledged that the support they received from their personal networks of partners, parents, friends and extended family enabled them to continue competing in sport, and as a result helped them to better manage some of the challenges they faced.

In an unpublished dissertation conducted by Freeman (2008), eight elite North

American athletes who competed in the 2004 Summer Olympics and the 2006 Winter Olympics were interviewed on their experiences as mothers while preparing for and competing in the Olympic Games. The findings revealed that the integration of athlete-mother identities was linked to benefits for elite athletes that enhanced mental training and focus. However, the athletes experienced psychological distress when traveling without family or when they negotiated motherhood and athletic training demands. The participants also noted that despite having training support, support for their roles as mothers was often lacking, creating further psychological distress. The findings from this study supported Palmer and Lebermen's (2009) research suggesting that support from others was key to reducing women's distress when training, though such support was often lacking within the women's lives, team, or organization.

In their in-depth case study, Debois et al. (2012) interviewed an elite female fencer about her various transitions throughout her athletic career training, competing in the Olympics, and other domains of her life. Although this case study did not focus on motherhood per se, Debois et al. (2012) discovered that motherhood enhanced the participant's athleticism through higher resilience and adaptability when confronted with challenges following her return to elite sports. However, discussions with the athlete revealed that despite the developmental benefits associated with combining multiple identities/roles, she reported experiencing psychological distress after failing to reach her Olympic goals. The results from this study are in line with Appleby and Fisher's (2009), along with Palmer and Lebermen's (2009), findings that suggested some women experience difficulty managing athletic performance pressures while adjusting to motherhood (Debois et al., 2012).

A more recent study conducted by Martinez-Pascual, Alvarez-Harris, Fernandez-De-Las-Pena and Palacios-Cena (2014) explored the experiences of twenty Spanish elite athletes negotiating motherhood and athletics within the context of their sporting career, and observed that athletes who became mothers had a difficult time (re)negotiating and resisting societal and cultural expectations concerning motherhood. Similar to Pedersen's (2001) and Appleby and Fisher's (2009) findings, the elite athlete mothers in this study reported conflicts between maintaining their athletic and mothering identities. In addition, the participants endorsed feeling of guilt, as well as feared loss of their athletic identity when confronted with prioritizing motherhood over the pursuit of their athletic career goals.

While the above studies provide valuable information regarding elite athletes as mothers, continued efforts are needed to research the diverse narratives of athlete motherhood (McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2015). Appleby and Fisher (2009) argue that examining the phenomenon of athletic mothers is a significant topic to explore, as women are becoming active participants in competitive and professional sports leagues. McGannon, Gonsalves, Schinke, and Busanich (2015) added that further research is needed to explore athletics and motherhood within the context of various career transitions such as exiting/retiring from sport, retiring from sport to have children but then coming back to a sport career. Compared to elite athlete mothers, the voices of pregnant and mothering student-athletes are silent in the literature. Thus, very little is known about the lived experiences of pregnant and parenting NCAA student-athlete mothers. This study seeks to address a gap in the literature by exploring the lived

experiences of student-athlete mothers as they manage pregnancy, motherhood, and athletics.

### **College Students with Kids**

According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, college students with children represent more than twenty five percent of all undergraduate students in the U.S. (Gault et al., 2014). Among college students raising children, women make up 71 percent of all student parents, and roughly 43 percent of the total student parent population are single mothers (Gault et al., 2014). Compared to traditional undergraduate students, students raising children while in college are at greater risk of not attaining a degree while also accumulating higher student-loan debt (Gault et al., 2014).

In an unpublished dissertation conducted by Erk (2013), seven women raising children while pursuing a postsecondary education were interviewed about their experiences as women living in poverty as mothers and college students. The findings revealed five themes that included support systems, lack of college preparation, family as a priority, education as a self-fulfillment, and balance. Erk's findings were consistent with that of Houston's (2013) findings related to exploring protective factors that promote degree completion among single mothers in college. According to Houston (2013), factors that enabled the participants to successfully graduate from college included: having a support system, motivational factors, confidence in their ability to complete their degree, coping with obstacles and challenges, self-discipline and time management. Gray (2015) maintained that sources of support, such as the emotional and social support offered by loved ones, help to mitigate the physical and psychological stresses for women with dependent children in college.

Juggling academic and parenting responsibilities can present a great deal of stress and conflict for students raising children in college, especially if they do not have adequate support (Albritton, Angley, Grandelski, Hasen, and Kershaw, 2014). Evidence supports that increasing opportunities to foster educational attainment of student parents yields favorable short and long-term outcomes for children. For example, higher earnings potential, gaining access to resources, increased parental involvement in their child's educational success and a greater probability for their child pursuing a postsecondary education are favorable outcomes that benefit both parent and child (Miller, Gault, and Thorman, 2011; Attewell and Lavin, 2007). Considering the significance of parenthood to the experiences of college students, too few educational institutions focus on addressing the needs and experiences of students with children (Gray, 2015).

Moreover, childcare centers located on college and university campuses often have a greater demand by student parents than they can accommodate (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014; Eckerson, Talbourdet, Reichlin, Sykes, Noll & Gault, 2016). Likewise, a number of states provide limited access to childcare assistance for students raising children in college (Eckerson et al., 2016). In addition, funding and programs offered on the state and national level to support expecting mothers in pursuit of a college education are few and far between. Thus, addressing the risks associated with pregnancy is crucial to ensuring the success of women in college.

### **Unintended Pregnancy**

An unintended pregnancy is defined as a pregnancy that oftentimes is unplanned or unwanted at the time of conception (Brown & Eisenberg, 1995; Kim, Dagher & Chen, 2016). Approximately 51% of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended (Finer & Zolna,

2014; Herd, Higgins, Sicinski, and Merkurieva; 2016). Among women at risk for unintended pregnancy, college-aged women between 18-24 have the highest rate (64%) of unintended pregnancies among women of all ages in the U.S. (Finer & Zolna, 2011), placing this population at greater risk of failing to complete a college degree, suffering economic hardship, and experiencing psychological distress (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008,).

Having and raising a child resulting from an unintended pregnancy may also affect women's emotional and psychological well-being (Herd et al.; 2016). Unintended pregnancy has reportedly been linked to increased psychological stress related to postpartum depression and anxiety, lower degree completion rates, societal pressures associated with the decision to keep or terminate a pregnancy, financial difficulties, and future unplanned pregnancies (Holub, Kenshaw, Ethier, Lewis, Milan & Ickovics, 2007; Meiksin, Chang, Bhargava, Arnold, Dado, Rankel & Zickmund, 2010; Gray, 2015). Moreover, the stigma and prejudicial views surrounding unintended pregnancy can result in unfavorable outcomes for women, such as social isolation, concealed pregnancy, and pressure to terminate a pregnancy or place a child up for adoption (Lie, Robson & May, 2008; Brusker & Wright, 2006; Gray, 2015).

Societal expectations and attitudes regarding pregnancy decisions (i.e. parenting, adoptions, or abortion) of an unintended pregnancy may have a significant impact on a women's experience and response to an unintended or unwanted pregnancy (Smith, Turan, White, Stringer, Helova, Simpson, & Cockrill, 2016). Gray (2015) surveyed ninety-seven college-aged women between 18 to 24 years of age enrolled in a Southern university about their experiences with unplanned pregnancy. Among the women that

participated in the study, 51 (53%) continued their pregnancies, 46 (47%) did not. Narratives of unplanned pregnancy were collected using a semi-structured survey and analyzed qualitatively. The participants' narratives of unplanned pregnancy focused on the meaning and significance of their experiences. Three themes emerged for the study, including: (a) stressors and sources of support in the unplanned pregnancy experience, (b) uncertainty and residual effects of the overall pregnancy experience, and (c) supportive elements for positive appraisal of the experience.

According to Gray (2015), women who continued their pregnancy reported difficulty balancing their social life, academics, work and motherhood. In addition, physical discomfort, lack of control over important things in one's life, emotional disturbances, weight and body changes, along with lack of control over physical and psychological symptoms were the most common stressors endorsed by the participants who continued with an unplanned pregnancy.

Gray (2015) also noted differences between the participants experiences based on their pregnancy decision. Women who terminated their pregnancies reported difficulty coping with the physical and emotional consequences of aborting their pregnancy at a more pronounced degree compared to women who did not. More specifically, women who terminated their pregnancies endorsed feelings of guilt, secrecy, fear, depression, and anxiety around their pregnancy decision. For some women, the difficulty of coping with the physical and emotional consequences of terminating their pregnancy was also influenced by the perceived opinion by others even in cases these opinions were positive.

Despite the outcomes of their pregnancies, participants acknowledged various sources of support following their pregnancy decision. Supportive figures, such as family

and friends, partners, and even children they already had were identified by participants as being a source of support and having a positive influence on their overall pregnancy decision. As a result, the support offered by their social network was influential in achieving healthy pregnancy outcomes.

A more recent study conducted by Rice, Turan, Stringer, Helova, White, Cockrill, and Turan (2017) investigated norms and stigma regarding pregnancy decisions (parenting, adoption, and abortion) among 642 women aged 18-24 who attended local public health department clinics or local public university in Birmingham, Alabama. Rice et al. (2017) observed that pregnancy decisions among young women were oftentimes influenced by societal norms and stigmas around unintended or unplanned pregnancy. Perceptions and beliefs around pregnancy decision, such as parenting, adoption, and abortion are salient to the maternal health and well-being of young women affected by an unintended pregnancy (Smith et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2017).

The results of Rice et al. (2017) study revealed four subscales for pregnancy decisions (e.g., parenting, adoption, and abortion) following an unintended pregnancy. Those subscales included conditional acceptability, anticipated reactions, stereotypes and attitudes. Similar to Gray's study, Rice et al. observed perceived opinions around that expectations and attitudes of pregnancy decisions had an impact on a woman's decision to continue or terminate her pregnancy. Rice et al. (2017) reported, "more negative attitudes and stigma around a given pregnancy decision were negatively correlated with participants' perceived likelihood of choosing that specific pregnancy decision if faced with an unintended pregnancy." Consequently, Rice et al. noted that negative appraisals around reproductive norms and stigma regarding pregnancy decisions might limit

women's autonomy in reproductive decision making. Thus, resulting in adverse health effects for the mother and child.

### **Student-Athlete Pregnancy**

In the context of sports, the presence of mothering among college athletes has been a phenomenon that has yet to be explored. Anecdotal accounts over the past decade suggest that experiencing pregnancy creates several problems for college student-athletes (Sorensen, et al., 2009). Additionally, this particular population of college student-athletes have admitted to keeping pregnancy a secret in order to continue participating in competitive sports (Ford, 2004; Lehman College, 2001; Potts, 2001; Schonbrun, 2007; Sorensen et al., 2009; Willis, 2001), feeling forced to abort (Portnoy, 2004; Rovegno, 2007), feeling forced to choose between their financial aid and pregnancy (Rovegno), and fearing expulsion or other negative stereotypes (Portnoy, 2004).

More recently, there has been increased attention in the news media about specific instances of pregnancy discrimination in higher education (McNee, 2013). While pregnant students are no longer forced to drop out, they continue to face more subtle barriers to equal educational opportunities (McNee, 2013). In 2007, ESPN aired a television show titled *Outside the Lines: Pregnant Pause*, which exposed the hardships confronting pregnant student-athletes. Discriminatory practices were found to range from the outright withdrawal of athletic scholarships and requirements that the athlete earn back her scholarship by proving that she can return to competition after having her child, to the stipulation that the athlete sign a contract when joining the team promising not to get pregnant and agreeing to forfeit her athletic scholarship if she does (Nafziger & Ross, 2011). The consequence of such policies may put the pregnant student-athlete in a

position where she would have to choose between their athletic scholarship and pregnancy (Rovegno, 2007).

In 2007, Fantasia Goodwin, a college junior and student-athlete at Syracuse University, successfully hid her pregnancy from her coaches and teammates (Brake, 2008). Two months before giving birth, this varsity women's basketball player managed to play basketball into her third trimester. On the night before the team's final game, Fantasia told her coach about her pregnancy. After hearing the news, Fantasia's coach responded by directing her not to compete in the final game. At the time, Syracuse University had no written policy on student-athletes who become pregnant; therefore, the only course of action was to regulate the student-athlete's participation in contact sports. When asked in an interview about her decision compete while pregnant, Fantasia declined to respond; however, she acknowledged that she concealed her pregnancy. She stated, "Everyone found out the same time", "I was playing pregnant, yes, and no one knew about it. And they found out, that's why I didn't play (the last game)" (Schonbrun, 2007). Following the birth of her daughter, Fantasia returned to the court her senior year. However, she did not complete her undergraduate degree. Instead, Fantasia moved overseas to pursue her professional career in Women's Basketball in Germany. Despite a successful playing season in Germany, Fantasia retired from professional basketball to focus on motherhood and went on to complete her degree in Communications and Rhetorical Studies from Syracuse University.

Fantasia's story is not a unique or rare occurrence, and has become increasingly common among female athletes faced with a pregnancy. In 2012, Tameka McKelton, a student-athlete at the Florida A&M University competed during the 2010-2011 basketball

season while pregnant. News reports confirmed Tameka concealed her pregnancy from everyone except for a trusted teammate. In an interview with *Fans-N-The-Stands*, Tameka shared with following about playing while pregnant, “I basically just gritted my teeth, went to practice every morning even though I was sick, flew on the planes and just played as hard as I could, but carefully, because I knew what was going on inside” (Marshall, 2012). Tameka’s decision to compete while pregnant was motivated by fear that she might be restricted from competing if the coaching staff found out about her pregnancy. Tameka consulted with her doctor who informed her that it was okay to remain physically active while pregnant. Despite the potential health risks associated with playing while pregnant, Tamkea continued to play. Three months into the basketball season, Tameka’s head coach was made aware of her pregnancy and she was directed to sit out the remainder of the season. Five months later, Tameka gave birth to her daughter and immediately stepped into her role as a parenting student-athlete. When describing her new role as a student-athlete and mother she shared, “It’s pretty challenging as far as being able to keep track of everything...the past year has really put life into perspective for me as far as knowing what’s important. God, family, school, everything. It’s helped me mature” (Kahn, 2013). With the help and support of the coaching staff, teammates, family, and boyfriend, Tameka was able to fulfill her role as mother, student, and athlete. Soon after, she graduated from Florida A&M University with her undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice.

The experiences of Fantasia and Tameka speak to a neglected and under-examined unavoidable truth for many female student-athletes: motherhood. University of South California basketball player Brynn Cameron, North Carolina University women’s

basketball player Waltiea Rolle, Florida State University women's basketball guard Shante Williams, University of South Florida's basketball player Rae Rae Sayles, and University of Louisville's women's basketball player Connie Neal have learned to balance school, sports, and motherhood. Female student-athletes who find themselves in a pregnancy crisis have to consider the affect a pregnancy can have on their academic and athletic careers. The threat of a pregnancy interrupting their athletic participation can impact their ability to seek social support, prenatal care, and counseling. Thus, a female student-athlete who decides not to abort her child may feel pressured to conceal her pregnancy to protect her right to play.

### **Paternal Fraternity**

Presently, there have been no documented accounts of male student-athletes being pressured to suspend financial aid or athletic participation as a consequence of becoming a parent (Sorensen et al., 2009). This occurrence can be explained in part by the association between gender roles and parenting/childcare responsibilities. While the physical burden of pregnancy is predominantly placed on female student-athletes, male student-athletes are also affected by pregnancy (Hogshead-Makar & Harmon, 2008). Palmer and Leberman (2009) suggested the need for and potential value of comparing and contrasting the perspectives of fathers in sport with the experiences of mothers. Like female student-athletes, male student-athletes have to consider the personal obligations and responsibilities associated with caring for and raising a child (Hogshead-Makar & Harmon, 2008; Sorensen et al., 2009).

Although male student-athletes are affected by pregnancy the consequences are significantly different for female student-athletes. The National Collegiate Association of

Athletics (NCAA) acknowledged that pregnant female student-athletes are exposed to insensitive criticism against pregnancy, whereas male student-athletes seem to be in an invulnerable position (Hogshead-Makar & Sorensen, 2008). Archdeacon (2007), Harris (2007) and Sorensen et al. (2009) observed that male student-athletes' participation in pregnancy and child rearing are often minimized or highly publicized. For example, former Ohio State University linebacker Marcus Freeman who in 2007 was featured in the Dayton Daily News Marcus in a news article titled *Freeman Relishes Role as Father-OSU Linebacker from Wayne Learns to Balance School, Sports and Fatherhood*. In the article Marcus shared his experiences as a parenting student-athlete and how his role as a father influenced his ability to be a leader both on and off the field. Freeman's coach commented his parental efforts by saying, "He's really handled it well...for some kids, it would be a devastation or distraction. But he's been very mature, very responsible. I can say I've seen a little change in him. He takes (being a father) very seriously. Obviously, you don't want to encourage kids to do that, but in Marcus' case, it helped him" (Harris, 2007).

Although Marcus experienced some judgment by the coaching staff, teammates, and peers for having a child out of marriage, he escaped the pressures of having to conceal his girlfriend's pregnancy in order to avoid the consequence of losing his athletic scholarship. Marcus later graduated from OSU and went on to pursue a career a professional athlete in the National Football League.

In 2015, CBS Sports featured eleven male student-athletes in an article titled *Parental Fraternity: The Overlooked Reality Behind So Many College Athletes' Daily Lives as Fathers* (Norlander, 2015). Like Marcus at OSU, these young men shared their

experiences around fatherhood, family, and their futures as athletes. At the age of 16, Branden Dawson, a senior NBA prospect at Michigan State University learned that he was going to be a father. Branden recalled hearing the news for the first time by sharing “She [his child’s mother] was really scared to tell me...when she told me, I kind of freaked out. I just wanted to run away [from it]. I was afraid to tell my mom” (Norlander, 2015). After hearing the news about the pregnancy, Branden had to face his biggest fear and tell his mother he was going to be a father. Branden reported that he experienced severe anxiety about the pregnancy, his future as a college athlete, and fatherhood. As a result, he lost a significant amount of weight due to his inability to eat consistently because of his anxiety. Following the birth of his son, Branden accepted an athletic scholarship to attend Michigan State University as a member of the men’s basketball team. The article also highlighted Branden’s efforts to balance his responsibilities as a student-athlete while making the commitment to spend with his son. Branden graduated from Michigan State University in 2015 and is currently a professional athlete in the National Basketball League.

Unfortunately, narratives of student-athlete parenthood in the popular press have neglected to incorporate the admirable efforts of female student-athletes as they balance motherhood, academics, and athletics. McGannon et al. (2012) note that the unfavorable representation of pregnancy and child rearing of athletic mothers in the media may impact the psychological experiences and athletic pursuits of athletes who are mothers.

### **Support for Pregnant Student-Athletes**

It is a common misconception that participating in competitive sports decreases the risk of mental and physical health problems in athletes (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000;

Wolanin, Hong, Marks, Panchoo & Gross, 2016). According to the literature, balancing academic and athletic requirements (Pinkney, 1991), coping with physical injury (Parham, 1993), dealing with role conflict predicated by athletic participation (Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989), developing outside social and leisure interests (Austin, 1978; Lanning, 1982), forming interpersonal relationships, managing sports-related career transitions (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), and maintaining optimal physical conditions (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993) are common triggers that can increase stress levels in collegiate student-athletes.

For many athletes, the advantages of participating in intercollegiate sports extend beyond their athletic and academic achievements (Despres, Brady, & McGown, 2008; Schaal, Tafflet, Nassif, Thibault, Pichard, Alcotte, Guillet, Helou, Berthelot, Simon, Fossaint, 2011). For example, participating in athletics is associated with fostering psychosocial gains such as leadership skills, teamwork, and time management, while also promoting psychological strengths such as resilience, setting realistic and measurable goals, and maintaining high levels of self-control (Despres, Brady, & McGown, 2008; Schaal, Tafflet, Nassif, Thibault, Pichard, Alcotte, Guillet, Helou, Berthelot, Simon, Fossaint, 2011). However, competing at the intercollegiate level oftentimes involves managing several conflicting commitments that place a considerable amount of strain on both a student-athlete's psychical and mental health (Beauchemin, 2014; Killeya-Jones, 2005; Settles, Sellers, & Damas, 2002; Thompson & Sherman, 2007).

Obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experience of a pregnancy from the point of view of the female student-athlete might provide valuable insight in assisting this at-risk population. The concerns and challenges of assisting female student-athlete during

pregnancy is not a new campus issues; however, understanding the meaning of maternity for college student-athletes may help in enhancing resources for female student-athletes confronted with challenges linked to pregnancy while competing in intercollegiate sports. Data on how many student-athletes experience a pregnancy and become mothers is absent in the literature. The NCAA reported that approximately 10-15% of female student-athletes and partners of male student-athletes will be affected by pregnancy each year (Hogshead-Makar & Sorensen, 2008; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, Schweinbenz, 2012; Sorensen, Sincoff, & Siebeneck, 2008). The recognition of female student-athletes who have concealed their pregnancy to avoid losing their athletic scholarship has initiated national dialogue among the NCAA to protect the rights and safety of pregnant and parenting student-athletes (Sorensen et al., 2009).

The presence of student-athlete pregnancy within college sports is significant when one considers the myriad risks associated with participating in intercollegiate athletics while pregnant (Sorensen et al., 2009). For instance, pregnant and parenting student-athletes have to deal with personal and societal expectation with in the private context of intercollegiate athletics (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). The commitment required for training and competing may cause pregnant student-athletes to negotiate the health risks associated with competing while pregnant (Sorensen et al., 2009). Experiencing a pregnancy encourages student-athletes to evaluate their personal, athletic, and academic goals (Sorensen et al., 2009). Furthermore, Sorensen et al. (2009) maintain that experiencing a pregnancy is as much of a crisis to a student-athlete as suffering a season-ending or career threatening injury. Consequently, female

college student-athletes are at risk of becoming overwhelmed with the physical and psychological challenges associated with pregnancy (Sorensen et al., 2009).

College women who experience a pregnancy while pursuing an undergraduate degree are nearly twice as likely as college women without a pregnancy to withdraw from college without graduating (Bradburn, 2002). In reviewing the literature, several researchers have noted challenges, such as child care, employment, student loans, and housing as potential risk factors that increase dropout rates among pregnant women on college campuses (Clery & Harmon, 2012). Although the dropout rate of college women pursuing post-secondary education at 4-year and graduate institutions due to pregnancy is lacking, research on women enrolled in 2-year institutions suggests that pregnancy threatens college retention and completion among pregnant and parenting students (Bradburn, 2002; Clery & Harmon, 2012; Prentice, Storin, & Robinson, 2012). Prentice et al. (2012) discovered that women who have a child while pursuing a post-secondary degree struggle scholastically. Twenty-seven percent of college mothers reported reducing their semester credit hours or withdrawing from school due to issues with child care (Prentice et al., 2012; The National Campaign, 2008b). Moreover, pregnancy might also signify major emotional changes and have been linked to increased psychological stress that can lead to antenatal and postpartum depression and anxiety (Holub, Kershaw, Ethier, Lewis, Milan, Ickovics, 2007; Meiksin, Chang, Bhargava, Arnold, dado, Frankel, Zickmund, 2010).

The effects of social support on women's health during pregnancy (e.g. favors, advice, information gathering, esteem support, emotional support) have been found to be a buffer for stress in many health situations, including pregnancy and postpartum

(Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003; Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Syme, 1985; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986; Hall, Williams, & Greenberg, 1985). Despite available resources to assist pregnant and parenting students on college and university campuses, the need for social support is complicated by fear of added stigma associated with revealing an unplanned pregnancy (Gray, 2015). Student-athletes with pregnancy-related conditions, and the choices they make as a result of their pregnancy are heavily influenced by the treatment or lack of support they receive from the university's athletic department following the disclosure of their pregnancy (Sorensen et al., 2009; Sterling 2010). Sterling (2010) argued that factors such as institutional views on policy, social support, and availability of resources impact the experience of pregnant and mothering student-athletes. Sterling (2010), along with Sorensen et al. (2009), suggested that integrating on-campus resources such as college health services, clergy, legal services, medicine, nursing, psychological counseling, and women's centers might provide valuable information, support, and perspective in assisting student-athletes faced with a pregnancy.

Palmer and Leberman (2009) found that when offered support from their respective organizations (i.e. coaches, respective sports organizations, team management, and national sports agencies) the participants highlighted a sense of control in their ability to negotiate multiple responsibilities associated with being both a mother and athlete. For instance, receiving encouragement and invitations to return to training from their respective sport organizations, being offered flexibly training schedules, and receiving monetary support from a national sports agency to assist with educational and sport-related expenses were instrumental to aiding women's continued participation in elite

sports (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). However, lack of support from national sports organizations, coaching staff, and team management might leave athlete's feeling used, abandoned or discriminated against based on their pregnancy or mothering status. Palmer and Leberman (2009) suggested that creating organizational policies that acknowledge the importance of child-care resources and emphasize strong social supports for pregnant sportswomen will enable athletes who are mothers to continue to participate in their sport to the fullest extent possible.

Similarly, Sorensen et al. (2009) argued that athletic departments should make it their priority to accommodate the needs of pregnant and parenting student-athletes in an effort to support their physical and mental health, ensure academic progress, and comply with federal law and NCAA bylaws to prohibit pregnancy discrimination. Athletic departments that neglect to adhere to a pregnancy policy that protects the health and safety of pregnant and parenting student-athletes could interfere with the NCAA's mission to regulate harmful practices and promote the wellbeing of student-athletes confronted with pregnancy (Sorensen et al., 2009). Although the NCAA has expanded its focus on ensuring the rights and safety of pregnant and parenting student-athletes, understanding the transitional barriers associated with pregnancy is vital to aiding student-athlete who become pregnant. Thus, the experiences of pregnancy among student-athletes may lead to a greater understanding and the development of more congruent support and resources for student-athletes faced with a pregnancy crisis (Gray, 2015).

## **Pregnancy Policy, Guidelines, and Practices**

Wide variation among institutional practices makes it essential for every college and university to have its own published policy about student-athlete pregnancy (Sorensen et al., 2009). The NCAA has been instrumental in supporting the athletic and educational success of student-athletes on the field and in the classroom. Colleges and universities, athletic departments, and student-athletes rely heavily on the NCAA for direction on aspects governing athletic participation at the collegiate level (Sorensen et al., 2009). Drawing from legislative history and judicial actions, this section highlights the protections for pregnant and parenting student-athletes developed under the Title IX athletic regulations approved by congress in 1975 following the implementation of the NCAA Model Pregnancy and Parenting policy in 2008. In particular, institutional and policy changes concerning pregnant and parenting students on campus will be discussed.

### **Title IX**

In order to examine the lived experiences shared by pregnant student-athletes, it is important to understand the historical and legal circumstances that resulted in the passage of Title IX Educational Amendments of 1972. In 1975, Congress approved the Title IX athletic regulations that explicitly prohibits discrimination against student-athletes on the bases of pregnancy or legal abortion (34 C.F.R. §106.40(b)(1)). In addition, the Title IX athletic regulations (1975) legally protect students from discrimination or exclusion from any class, program, or extracurricular activity on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy or recovery from pregnancy unless the student voluntarily requests to participate in a separate activity (34 C.F.R. §106.40(b)(1)). The passage of the Title IX athletic regulations in 1975 have strongly incentivized NCAA

guidelines protecting pregnant and parenting student-athletes on the field and in the classroom. As a result, the NCAA has developed and released a model policy surrounding the treatment of pregnant and parenting student-athletes (Brown & Nichols, 2013).

While many believe Title IX's (1972) purview is exclusive to gender equality in sports, the statute was specifically ratified to prohibit sex discrimination in education (Edwards, 2010; Walters & McNeely, 2010). Modeled after Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX (1972) was enacted by congress to end discrimination on the basis of sex. Title IX states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (20 U.S.C. §1681 (1972)). The two core objectives of Title IX include: (1) avoiding the use of federal funds to support discriminatory practices and (2) providing individuals with effective protection against discriminatory treatment (20 U.S.C. §1681 (1972)). In addition, to ensure compliance with the law, Title IX (1972) requires that federally funded institutions evaluate their current policies and practices, adopt and publish grievance procedures, develop and implement a policy against sex discrimination, and appoint at least one employee to coordinate efforts to comply with Title IX (1972).

Since its passage, Title IX (1972) has been utilized to prevent and respond to gender discrimination against women and girls across a wide range of academic arenas. In particular, Title IX (1972) has increased female participation in high school and collegiate sports (Women's Sports Foundation, 2015) as well as women's participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs (Mason &

Younger, 2014; Pieronek 2000). The legislation also addressed issues of sexual violence and harassment in elementary schools, high schools (Sherer, 1992), and college campuses (Steinberg, 1991). As beneficiaries of Title IX (1972), women and girls have received special accommodations to enhance their educational opportunities, benefits, and resources. While Title IX (1972) has succeeded in prohibiting sex discrimination in various academic arenas, inequities and barriers still remain.

### **Pregnancy Discrimination**

Despite the enactment of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 and the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993, pregnancy discrimination remains an issue of concern in the workplace (Fox & Quinn, 2015). As stated by Fox and Quinn (2015), discriminatory treatment of women in the workplace can influence a woman's psychological well-being, job satisfaction, job commitment, and her ability to balance work/life responsibilities. Researchers suggest that the discrimination and marginalization of pregnant women can result in psychological and physiological health concerns for women during pregnancy and postpartum (Adkins, Wang, Dupre, van den Oord, Elder, 2009; Boardman & Alexander, 2011; Geronimus, 2001; Hall, Kusunoki, Gatny, and Barber, 2014; Lewis, Everson-Rose, Powell, Matthews, Brown, Karavolos, Sutton-Tyrrell, Jacobs, & Wesley, 2006).

When Fox and Quinn (2015) examined pregnant women at work, particularly the role that stigma plays in a woman's intention to leave the workforce, they found a discrepancy between anticipated and experienced stigma among women. More specifically, their findings revealed that anticipated stigma (e.g. anticipating discrimination after the disclosure of a pregnancy at work) partially mediated the

relationship between workplace factors (e.g. workplace support) and psychological well-being (Fox & Quinn, 2015), while experienced stigma (e.g. experienced discrimination after the disclosure of a pregnancy at work) partially mediated the relationship between workplace factors (e.g. workplace support), job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and turnover intentions (Fox & Quinn, 2015). These findings parallel with the findings of Palmer and Leberman (2009) suggesting that the extent of managerial and organizational support offered to pregnant and mothering athletes impacts the recruitment, retention, and continued development of women and mothers in their professional sport.

Jayakumar and Comeaux (2016) maintained that the organizational culture of intercollegiate athletic departments influences the experiences of college athletes to a significant degree. An illustration of this organizational culture comes from the reports of female athletes concealing their pregnancies to avoid losing their NCAA eligibility. Sorensen (2012) argues that the discriminatory practices in college athletics involving pregnant athletes create unsafe health environments. Moreover, the anticipation of negative views held by a coach, teammate, and campus community may motivate a pregnant athlete to conceal her pregnancy or feel forced to choose abortion prematurely (Sorensen et al., 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the potential risk that influences student-athletes' experiences during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Therefore, the voices highlighted in this study might be valuable in developing an understanding of the counseling and psychological needs of pregnant and parenting student-athletes.

### **Ecological Perspective of Student-Athlete Pregnancy**

Intercollegiate athletics represents a phenomenological environment wherein its function is to assist in the athletic, academic, and personal development of its athletes (Despres, Brady, & McGowan, 2008; Schaal, Tafflet, Nassif, Thibault, Pichard, Alcotte, Guillet, Helou, Berthelot, Simon, & Fossaint, 2011). Several studies describe participating in organized sport as an ecosystem associated with fostering psychological gains, such as leadership skills, teamwork, and time management, while also promoting psychological strengths such as resilience, setting realist and measurable goals and maintaining high levels of self-control (Cote, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Domingues & Goncalves, 2013). However, competing at the intercollegiate level oftentimes involves managing several conflicting commitments that place a considerable amount of strain on a student-athlete's overall health and academic and athletic pursuits (Beauchemin, 2014; Killeya-Jones, 2005; Settles, Sellers, & Damas, 2002; Thompson & Sherman, 2007). Thus, the association between individual, cultural, familial, and relational variables within intercollegiate athletics might impact developmental trajectories for student-athletes who become pregnant and opt for motherhood (Araujo Pedrosa, Pires, Carvalho, Canavarro, & Dattilio, 2011; Appleby & Fisher, 2009; McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

To date, previous studies focusing on maternity among athletes have concentrated on the difficulties women face post-birth compared to their experiences during pregnancy (McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Appleby & Fisher, 2009). Accordingly, this study utilizes Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model to describe the phenomenon of student-athlete pregnancy as it explores the varying

ecological levels of the student-athletes' life and the interconnectedness between each level. The ecological systems model emphasizes the process through which various environmental factors shape human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). With the individual placed at the center of the model, Bronfenbrenner incorporates a "system of nested, interdependent, dynamic structures ranging from the proximal, consisting of immediate face-to-face settings, to the most distal, comprising broader social context such as classes and culture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p.4), and asserts that development is stimulated by a set of interactions that take place through four successive levels between the person and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

The ecological systems model (Figure 1) recognizes four major components that influence human growth and development: person, process, context, and time. Within Bronfenbrenner's model, the *microsystem* represents the most immediate social and cultural factors related exclusively to the *person*, while promoting growth and development through proximal interactions (*process*) within different environments (*context*) that influence development over *time* as these interactions become more complex (Bronfenbrenner, 2009/1994). For pregnant female student-athletes, her on-campus microsystem may consist of athlete and non-athlete peers, family members, advisors, tutors, trainers, faculty members, and coaches, who may be specific to either the student or athlete role separately or influential across both roles simultaneously. Also, settings such as the locker room, college dorm room, classroom, and advising center also represent contextual elements of her microsystem.

As the athletic participation rates among women competing at the NCAA level rise to more than 200,000 in 2014-2015, the probability of a coach, advisor, faculty-

member or athletic trainer encountering a female student-athlete dealing with a pregnancy is increasingly likely. Therefore, the likelihood of a pregnant student-athlete seeking guidance from individuals within her microsystem is also increasingly likely. As a result, individuals from within her microsystem might serve as a supportive person within the student-athletes' support system.

The next level of Bronfenbrenner's model is represented by the *mesosystem*, which involves the linkage between two or more microsystem, along with ecological niches (particular areas within the contextual setting that contain specific features), which can have a positive and negative effect on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). For a pregnant female student-athlete, the microsystem components of coach, academic advisor, and tutor create a mesosystem that could significantly impact the female student-athlete's academic development and athletic performance within the contexts associated with maintaining a strict and demanding athletic and academic schedule. However, a mesosystem comprised of negative attitudes held by teammates and coaches about female student-athletes who become pregnant might deter pregnant student-athletes from disclosing pregnancy or seeking the proper medical care.

Bronfenbrenner maintained that his ecological systems model includes environmental components that are separate from to the individual, but also shape development. Institutional policies such as Title IX and NCAA guidelines that prohibit discrimination against student-athlete due to their pregnancy or parental status are examples of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *ecosystem*. Therefore, the ecosystem is the setting in which pregnant female student-athletes are not directly involved, but might influence the female student-athletes' actions, as well as the actions of individuals within her

immediate surroundings. Finally, the *macrosystem*, as stated by Bronfenbrenner (1979), includes the cultural context in which the pregnant female student-athlete lives, which is the most distant level from the microsystem, and is shaped by conditions or events over time.

An extensive review of the literature and the objective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model suggested that negotiating the social and cultural expectations of motherhood might influence the development of female athletes who participate in competitive sport. Thus, for this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model was utilized to understand the essence of the pregnant female student-athletes' lived experiences, as well as the experiences that helped these women to mature as student-athlete mothers in relation to their social surroundings, methods by which these student-athletes coped with complex transitions during and after their pregnancy, and the impact of pregnancy on their individual, parental, familial, athletic, academic, and career trajectories.

### **Chapter Summary**

Given the potential consequences of pregnancy and childbearing, a better understanding of the influential, multilevel factors among female college student-athletes is essential. Pregnancy comes with great psychological and physical change and might create significant problems for college student-athletes (Gray, 2015; Slade, 2002; Sorensen, Sincoff, & Siebeneck, 2009). Although some women have support and healthy pregnancies, seeking support for a pregnancy could be difficult for young women. The number of decisions demanded by a college student-athlete dealing with a pregnancy can be overwhelming both academically and emotionally (NCAA, 2008). Media reports over

this past decade show that pregnant student-athletes conceal pregnancy, feel forced into terminating their pregnancy, or lose their scholarships as a result of being pregnant. In addition, navigating difficult transitions might be hard for student-athletes who decide to carry the pregnancy to term.

Although similar studies have investigated the shared experiences of pregnant women in educational, cultural, and work environments, there has been no study to date describing the lived experiences of pregnant student-athletes in college sports. Additionally, the experiences and perceptions of pregnant and parenting female student-athletes might offer insight into enhanced policy and programming. Thus, college health professionals and faculty could play an influential role in advocating for the expansion of legal protection and resources for pregnant student-athletes.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

By modifying previous research studies that have investigated the experiences of professional athletes as mothers, this phenomenological study sought to describe the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in a sanctioned sport at an NCAA Division I or Division II university. The content of this chapter contains the methods used in this study to answer the following research questions: what are the lived experiences of a select group of female athletes who were pregnant as a student-athlete at an NCAA Division I or Division II University. In this chapter, I describe the methodology used for this qualitative study. This chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) a rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology, (b) selection of participants, (c) informed consent, (d) instrumentation, (e) role of the researcher (f) data collection, (g) data organization, (h) data analysis, (i) methods used to ensure trustworthiness, and (j) summary.

#### **Phenomenology in Qualitative Methodology**

After an in-depth review of the literature, I was unable to locate past research studies that specifically addressed the lived experiences of pregnant female college athletes. The majority of current published studies focused on the experiences of pregnant female elite athletes as mothers (McGannon et al., 2012; Nash, 2011; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Spowart, Burrows, & Shaw 2010). However, Sterling (2010) discussed the influence pregnancy has on the student-athlete, in particular, the issues facing pregnant student-athletes and the need for resources and social support to assist in successful transitions for pregnant student-athletes. Therefore, to explore the perceived

influence that pregnancy had on each participant's lives during their collegiate athletic career, participants in this study included female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in a sanctioned sport at an NCAA Division I and Division II university.

Phenomenology as a research methodology seeks to explore and communicate participants' lived experience—the invariant *constituents* and the *essence* of an experience (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2012) describes phenomenology as a philosophical study of individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon. Van Manen (2014) suggested that phenomenology is primarily a method of questioning than answering, recognizing that insights come to us in the mode of musing, reflective questioning, and obsessing over sources and meanings of lived meaning. Therefore, I implemented a transcendental phenomenological method espoused by Moustakas (1994) in order to gain insight into the lived experiences of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in a sanctioned sport at an NCAA Division I and Division II university. For this qualitative study, I used the necessary criteria provided by Moustakas to include the following: (a) epoche, (b) data collection (c) phenomenological reduction, (d) imaginative variation, and (e) synthesis.

### **Epoche**

The epoche is the most basic and fundamental requirement for the utilization of Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological method. As explained by Misiak and Sexton (1973) the epoche is a process that includes the dismissal of any leading biases, theories, beliefs, or habitual modes of thinking. Giorgi (1997) affirmed that Husserl developed this stage of phenomenological inquiry as a methodological device to help

authenticate the research findings more accurately. Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2008) maintained that one way to gather reflexive data from the qualitative researcher is through interviewing (debriefing) the interpretive researcher. Additionally, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008) believed that debriefing interviews promotes reflexivity by encouraging the qualitative researcher to reflect on their *situatedness*, or the biases they bring to the study, and their personal investment in and commitment to the inquiry. For my study, peer debriefing was utilized as a means to reflect and bracket my overall experiences throughout the research process.

Peer debriefing is one of five commonly used types of debriefing (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Lincoln and Guba noted that peer debriefing is a technique in which one's feelings about various aspects of the research study are exposed. According to Onwuegbuzie et al., interviewing the interviewer has significant potential for transforming the interview process in qualitative research studies, going far beyond the use of field notes. This form of debriefing requires the researcher to be debriefed by a colleague or person who is not directly involved with the research. This person is often referred to as a "disinterested peer" or the "debriefing" (p. 308). The debriefer can also serve as a support for the researcher who may experience countertransference, a phenomenon that occurs when the researcher unknowingly transfers his or her own feelings and beliefs onto the participant, including negative reactions that might occur for the researcher when interviewing a participant who discloses traumatic experiences (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2008).

## **Data Collection**

Following the epoche, the second step in my study involved the collection of data through an interview process. Moustakas (1994) maintained that a long interview is the typical method of collecting data when conducting a qualitative research study. Specifically, this method is a natural interactive process that involves the use of open-ended questions to collect rich and detailed data regarding how the participants experience, comprehend, and explain events in their lives (Kvale, 1996). As suggested by Moustakas (1994), every effort was made throughout the interview process to create a comfortable atmosphere and encourage each participant to share their experiences as pregnant student-athletes while attending an NCAA Division I or Division II University. The research questions presented in Appendix D guided the interview process.

## **Phenomenological Reduction**

Following data collection, the next step in the research process was to engage in phenomenological reduction. For the purpose of my study, I implemented phenomenological reduction as defined by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas defined phenomenological reduction as the description of the phenomenon in textural language. Through phenomenological reduction, one derives a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomena, along with the constituents of the experience in consciousness. Phenomenological reduction “takes on the character of graded pre-reflection, reflection, and reduction, with concentrated work aimed at explicating the essential nature of the phenomenon” (Husserl, 1931, p.114).

To incorporate phenomenological reduction in my qualitative study, I utilized reflective journaling to record my values and interests throughout the research process.

Banks-Wallace (2008) maintained that journaling provides a platform for reflective practice. According to Blake (2005), reflective practice is a process of examining one's own experiences in order to enhance performance and professional growth. In the same vein, Banks-Wallace (2008) noted that journaling helps researchers to interpret and present theoretical conjectural ideas, assists in identifying influences of or restrictions to connections with the researcher and others, and provides an in-depth understanding of the cultural context in which the researcher is embedded. Therefore, as I conducted my research, I journaled my thoughts, reactions, and feelings before and after each interview, and reported my internal beliefs in the data analysis section. Journaling this information allowed me to evaluate my personal growth and understanding of my role as a researcher, interviewer, and interpreter of the data.

### **Imaginative Variation**

Following phenomenological reduction, the next step in of my research study was to engage in imaginative variation. As stated by Moustakas (1994), imaginative variation uncovers potential meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions. Imaginative variation reveals the underlying and precipitating factors accounting for the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). More specifically, imaginative variation aims to uncover the "how" that speaks to conditions describing the "what" of experience (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation complements phenomenological reduction because it allows the researcher to derive structural themes from the textural descriptions revealed by the phenomenological reduction. Thus, through imaginative variation the researcher is able to

identify multiple realities intimately connected with the essences and meanings of an experience (Moustakas, 1994).

For the purpose of my study, imaginative variation was implemented by engaging in the following four steps as described by Moustakas (1994). To begin, I searched for different structural meanings that accounted for the textural meanings. Next, by referring back to the interview transcripts and thoroughly assess each participant's statements for compatibility, I incorporated the concept of "reduction and elimination" to determine if the participants' expressions emerged into a specific theme or set of themes (Moustakas, 1994, p.120). I then grouped the participant's statements into core themes and discarded any statements irrelevant to the subject of interest. From there, I presented an overall understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Synthesis of Meaning and Essences**

The fourth and final step of the phenomenological process was synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994) synthesis is the process of developing multiple textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences that develop the meaning and essence of the phenomenon. During this step, I processed the data from each participant to derive meanings. I developed textural and structural themes to describe the participant's experience with the phenomenon being explored.

### **Participants and Sampling**

When selecting participants for this study, I utilized criterion sampling, which refers to the selection of participants based on a set of specific criteria desired by the researcher to be studied (Given, 2008). Criterion sampling is a non-probability sampling

technique used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate (Creswell, 2012). Participants were intentionally selected using criterion sampling because they all were experiencing the phenomenon that was being researched. The target population for this study included participants who were biologically female, experienced a pregnancy while competing in collegiate athletes, and were no longer enrolled at a NCAA Division I or Division II university as a student-athlete or competing at the collegiate level.

### **Informed Consent**

Each participant was provided a disclosure statement related to the procedural requirements and potential risks of participation. I obtained a verbal agreement for participation and record agreement following a review of the purpose of the study and its requirements. According to Neuman (2006), a written agreement, also known as an informed consent form, is required for participants to volunteer information for research. In addition, obtaining consent entails informing participants of their rights, purpose of the study, procedures of the study, as well as the potential risks and benefits of participation (Neuman, 2006). Furthermore, acquiring informed consent is a basic ethical principle that requires the researcher find willing participants to volunteer for research (Neuman, 2006).

In order to find participants, I recruited participants based on anecdotal reports in news media of female student-athletes who reported experiencing a pregnancy while competing at a Division I or Division II university. Once potential participants were identified, I contacted them via direct message through their social media pages/profiles (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn) in the form of a recruitment flyer. In addition, I

posted bulletins via social media platforms, such as LinkedIn groups, Facebook, and Twitter to recruit potential participants to volunteer in my study. Participants were provided a referral letter with a recruitment flyer to give to potential subjects who may be interested in participating in my study and were asked to refer women they knew who were eligible to participate in my research study. Each participant received an e-mail or phone call introducing the study, research design, importance of participation, and explanation of voluntary participation. In addition, participants received a copy of the informed consent and statement of confidentiality.

The study's procedures along with explanations of the risks, benefits, and rights of the participants, were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants identified in the informed consent. In addition, all participants were advised that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were encouraged to read all documents in their entirety before signing. Once the procedures of the study were understood and each participant had been made aware of their rights, I provided each participant with an opportunity to ask questions about the study and their rights to participation before conducting semi-structured interviews.

### **Instrumentation**

For this study, a variety of demographic data was collected from each participant, which included personal demographic data, contextual information regarding the participant's involvement in college athletics, and descriptive information regarding the participant's pregnancy history. Once the participants were recruited, I worked with each participant to schedule a time to conduct the interviews. Once informed consent was

obtained, each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to the semi-structured interview being conducted (see Appendix A).

A semi-structured interview design (see Appendix B), commonly used in qualitative research, was utilized to examine and collect data related to the lived experiences of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in collegiate athletics (Creswell, 2012). A semi-structured interview design is particularly appropriate for qualitative studies whereby the researcher creates a set of advanced questions, but has the freedom to modify the order and wording of the questions based upon the conversation flow (Robson, 1993). According to Kvale (1996), interviewing is a skill set that does not adhere to content-and context-free guidelines, but relies on the judgment of the qualified researcher. As a result, the interviewer must exercise appropriate empathy, knowledge, and sensitivity in order to gather relevant data.

As such, I asked each participant 14 grand tour questions in order to obtain information regarding their experiences. Grand tour questions serve to explain a series of events or describe oneself in detail (Lichtman, 2013). Spradley (1979) noted that the application of grand tour questions constitutes an emergent quality of the interview process that leads to subsequent questions, and is common in semi-structured interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012). I invited each participant to engage in a 45 to 90-minute interview to share their thoughts and experiences related to the questions asked. To ensure that each participant clearly understood what was being asked, each question was read slowly, thoroughly, and when solicited, clarification was sought. I also asked follow-up questions specific to the context of the individual participant to allow for a full reflection of the lived experience of each person interviewed.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, researchers are considered the main instrument for data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation (Paisley & Reeves, 2001). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) researchers serve as the instrument of choice in qualitative research. Thus, researchers bring his or her own inherent biases that need to be acknowledged and identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the researcher, my own experiences were used as a part of this study. As a clinician having worked directly with both collegiate and retired professional athletes, I understood the context and culture of the athlete population, knowing that some athletes may opt out of sharing personal details about their experiences. For example, athletes may struggle with sharing intimate details about their personal lives with individuals who are not familiar with the sport culture. Greenspan and Andersen (1995), as well as Waston (2005), agreed that student-athletes may feel uncomfortable seeking help outside of the athletic department from service providers who might not understand special concerns, needs, and pressures faced by student-athletes. My background helped me to relate, facilitate rapport, and build trust with the participants.

**Researcher bias.** Researcher bias may present challenges and thus will be bracketed and attended to throughout the process of data collection and analysis. With a personal and professional investment in the field of sports counseling, I have a bias regarding the psychological and physical wellbeing of athletes. I am an African American female licensed professional counselor who is currently employed as a clinical program manager for a labor organization representing professional American football players in the National Football League located in Washington, D.C. I was born in Huntsville,

Texas where I participated in competitive sports as a child through my adolescent and teen years. As a former female student-athlete, I brought my professional and cultural experiences in sports experience to this research study. Therefore, although I acknowledged my biases and how they affected the data collection and interpretation processes by implementing debriefing interviews and research reflexivity, and although measures were taken to limit researcher bias, the possibility of influence remained.

**Bracketing.** I utilized a method known as bracketing to address any personal biases, perceptions, and assumptions that might inadvertently affect the collection and interpretation of the data. According to Carpenter (2007), bracketing is a technique used in phenomenological inquiry that involves voluntarily disclosing one's own thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon being explored. Bracketing can occur both during and after the research process has been completed. To acknowledge my beliefs and how they might influence the data collection and interpretation process, an interpretive researcher interview was employed to ensure accuracy and eliminate potential researcher bias (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008) interviewing the interpretative researcher is one of six debriefing techniques used in qualitative research to raise the researcher's consciousness throughout the research process. This technique involves the researcher being interviewed by a peer on one or more occasions over the course of the research study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). According to Onwuegbuzie et al., the debriefer or peer conducting the interview is someone who is not directly involved in determining the findings of the study; however, they have experience conducting qualitative research and are knowledgeable on the subject matter under investigation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). In following the

framework developed by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008) a series of debriefing interview questions (see Appendix C) were asked by a debriefer. This interview was audio-recorded and phenomenological themes that emerged from the interview were coded as well.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, I collected data in the form of an in-person semi-structured interviews that were audio recorded by the interviewer. One grand tour question was asked, followed by a number of related questions, to gather information regarding each participant's experience (see Appendix B). Each participant was invited to focus on their past experiences as pregnant student-athletes while attending an NCAA Division I or Division II University. In addition, each participant was encouraged to share detailed information related to their experience specific to the challenges they faced while pregnant and how they dealt with those challenges. Open-ended questions were employed to give participants the flexibility to respond to the questions based on their lived experiences. In addition, other sources of communication, such as the participant's body language, facial expressions and physical reactions were included. After each initial interview, I transcribed each participant's responses in a Microsoft Word document, which were saved in an encrypted file on my personal computer.

### **Credibility**

To establish the trustworthiness of my study, member checking was used to legitimize my findings. Member checking is a technique that is frequently used in qualitative research whereby the researcher seeks to enhance the truthfulness, plausibility, and validity of the data collected during research interview (Barbour, 2001; Coffey &

Atkinson, 1996; Harper & Cole, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking includes offering participants the opportunity to review findings, allows participants to affirm the accuracy and completeness of their responses, and enables participants to share their opinions or evolution of the findings (Creswell, 2007). One advantage of utilizing member checks is that it assists the researcher in verifying the credibility of the findings, which helps to increase the validity of the study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

To implement member checking to this study, participants were given an opportunity during and after the interview to verify the accuracy of their responses. First, I restated or summarized the responses shared by each participant during the interview and ask questions to clarify the participants' responses if necessary. Following the completion of the interviews, written transcriptions were returned to the participants prior to the analysis and interpretation of the data. Lastly, the participants were asked to review the themes that emerge from the data and provided me with feedback regarding the exactness of the data interpretation.

### **Data Organization**

As stated by Moustakas (1994), it is preferred that data be in written form for the sake of organizing qualitative research. Thus, the interviews were transcribed prior to the data being organized and analyzed. In addition, I applied Moustakas' seven steps adapted from Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) phenomenological data analysis for analyzing the transcribed interview for each research participant. Moustakas' seven steps are described in detail in the following section.

## Data Analysis

Ambert, Adler, Adler and Detzner (1995) noted qualitative research is a cyclical rather than linear process. In addition, they suggested researchers should briefly explain the approach they used and the ways in which they collected and interpreted the data, along with how preliminary findings influenced subsequent data gathering and analysis (Ambert et al., 1995). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stated that data analysis involves “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them down in to manageable units, synthesizing, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 157). More specifically, phenomenological data analysis focuses on the depth and meaning of the participants’ experiences rather than generating a theory (Moustakas, 1994; Hays & Singh, 2012).

The first step involved horizontalization, which is described as placing all participants’ responses on one level and subsequently eliminating redundant parts. The second incorporated the concept of “reduction and elimination” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120). To achieve this step, I determined if the participants’ expressions emerged into a theme or an overall horizon of the phenomenon, meaning that participants whose experiences did not correspond with the major themes were not considered as on the horizon of the phenomenon. As a result, each participant’s expressions were carefully reviewed, and those that were redundant or vague were eliminated or presented in a more descriptive manner.

The third step required clustering and identifying cores themes from the steps mentioned above. The fourth step, which involved validating the themes that were identified in Step 3, involved my checking the transcribed data in order to validate the

theme. If the theme corresponded with the participant's words and experiences, it remained as a theme. Contrarily, if the theme did not correspond with the participant's words and experiences, it was deleted. In step five, I included an "Individual Textual Description" (Moustakas, 1994, p.121) for each participant's interview and provided examples from the transcribed interviews. It was important that I pay close attention to the participant's non-verbal communication because those cues provided examples beyond the transcribed data. The sixth step involved formulating an "Individual Structural Description" (Moustakas, 1994, p.121) with the intention of describing the participant's words and analyzing how the themes relate to one another.

To make sense of the interviews, I engaged in data coding, which is an integral part of the interview data analysis process (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011) and entails the assigning of codes to raw data (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). To ensure meaningful labels, codes are assigned to chunks of data, usually phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that are connected to a specific context or setting (Miles & Humberman, 1994). For example, I utilized a color-coded process to separate themes in order to organize and separate the data into groups and explored the connections and relationships in each interview. The codes were then operationalized in a codebook. The codebook then was used to explain the coding process and acted as a guide for locating themes within my study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Many perspectives exist regarding the importance of establishing validity and reliability in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Multiple researchers (e.g. Angen, 2000; Eisner, 1991; Lather, 1993; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;

Wolcott, 1994; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Whitemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001) have adopted approaches to assess the trustworthiness or merit of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2012; Krefling, 1991). These approaches have different purposes and methods, and therefore different ways of defining trustworthiness for qualitative studies (Krefling, 1991). For my research study, I adopted Guba's Model of Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research because it is well developed conceptually and has been used by qualitative researchers for a number of years (Krefling, 1991). Guba's (1981) model recognizes four aspects of trustworthiness that are relevant to qualitative research: (a) truth-value, (b) applicability, (c) transferability, (d) dependability, (e) confirmability, (f) credibility, (g) consistency, and (h) neutrality.

**Truth value.** In qualitative research, *truth value* refers to the researcher's ability to establish confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects or participants and the context in which the study was undertaken (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, it verifies how confident the research is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, participants, and context (Krefling, 1991). I utilized the following strategies to enhance the truth value of my research: reflexivity, member checking, interview technique, peer examination, thick descriptions, and low inference descriptions.

**Confirmability.** In qualitative research, confirmability refers to a researcher's comparable concern to objectivity. To establish confirmability, I included an external auditor to foster neutrality throughout the research process. As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the external auditor considers the entire process of the research study including the product, data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations. Similar to confirmability, reflexive analysis is another technique that I used to reflex on my role as a

researcher. According to Ruby (1980), *reflexivity* refers to the assessment of the influence of the investigator's own background, perceptions, and interests on the qualitative research process. Admodt (1982) states the researcher is part of the research and it not separate from it. Similar to Admodt (1982), Krefling (1991) notes that "the research is a participant, not merely an observer" (p. 177). I reflected on my own feelings, perceptions, and experiences throughout the research process. In addition, I reflected on my experiences as a woman working in sports and how my work experiences influence my role as the researcher in this study.

In addition to reflexivity, I utilized *member checking* to decrease the chances of misrepresentation of the data. Member checking is a technique that is used in qualitative research to ensure that the research has accurately translated the participants' viewpoints into data (Krefling, 1991). In this study, transcriptions of taped interviews were be confirmed with participants for their responses to ensure the final presentation of the data reflected their experiences accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Applicability.** In qualitative research, *applicability* is defined as the degree to which the results from the study can be applied to other contexts and settings or groups; it is the ability to generalize the results to larger populations (Krefling, 1991). Applicability was not realized or relevant to this research project. As noted by Lietz and Zayas (2010), "qualitative research studies are not generalizable according to quantitative standards, because probability sampling is not employed" (p. 195). For this study, I utilized a purposive criterion sample of participants who experienced the phenomenon being studied, which is typical in qualitative research (Lietz & Zayas, 2010).

**Transferability.** Although qualitative research does not seek to establish generalizability, *transferability* is achieved when the findings have applicability to another setting, theory, practice, or future research (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). To attain transferability, I identified key aspects, also known as *thick descriptions*, of the context from which the findings emerged and the extent to which they were be applicable to other contexts (Devers, 1999). The findings, along with the implications that followed, may be transferable to other purposive samples similar to the participants utilized for this research study.

**Dependability.** Similar to member checking, I utilized *peer examination* to increase credibility by checking categories developed out of data and by looking for disconfirming or negative cases (Krefting, 1991). Krefting (1991) noted peer examination “involves the researcher’s discussing the research process and findings with impartial colleagues who have experience with qualitative methods” (p. 178). Lincole and Guba (1985) suggested peer examinations present an opportunity for researchers to develop working hypotheses and discuss the evolving design of the study.

**Consistency.** According to Krefting (1991) the key to qualitative research is to learn from the participants rather than control them. Qualitative research emphasizes the uniqueness of the human situation or phenomenon being observed (Filed & Morse, 1985). The structure of my design reflected the unstructured and spontaneous strategies employed in qualitative research. My approach was to evaluate the range of experiences rather than the average experience described by each participant in the study. Moreover, participants’ experiences were considered important and utilized to explore common themes observed related to the context and breadth of the research topic.

**Neutrality.** As stated by Krefting (1991), qualitative researchers seek to increase the worth of the findings by decreasing the distance between the researcher and the participants. Guba (1981) defined neutrality as the degree to which the findings are a sole function of the participants and conditions of the research rather than other biases, motivations, and perceptives of the researcher. In this study, I utilized peer debriefing to bracket potential biases that might influence the research process. In addition, I also used member checking to ensure that the participant's responses were accurately understood. Finally, I employed peer examination to discuss the findings and analyze and corroborate common themes revealed from the data collected for this research project.

### **Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter described the methodology and design of my research study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact pregnancy has on female student-athletes. The information presented in this chapter also included the methods whereby I sought to answer the following research question: what are the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who were pregnant as a student-athlete at an NCAA Division I or Division II University? Using a phenomenological research design, data was collected from a criterion sample of twelve female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in a sanctioned sport and receiving institutional grant-in-aid administered by a Division I educational institution approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Prior to selecting participants for my study, an application for permission to conduct my research study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Sam Houston State University (SHSU). Once approval from the IRB was granted, participants were recruited through

various social media groups/pages and were asked to participate in my research study. To analyze the data, Moustakas's (1994) adaption of Van Kam's (1959, 1966) interview analysis was utilized to analyze the data. In addition, issues concerning trustworthiness were addressed by describing reliability, member checking, credibility, validity, and peer examination were detailed.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II university. Chapter IV presents results after thematically exploring and examining twelve interviews of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while in college. Through an in-depth thematic exploration, the participants' perceptions of their experiences during the course of their pregnancy emerged as reflected in the subsequent themes.

I utilized a phenomenological qualitative research method to demonstrate the essential essence that emerged from the interview data I collected and analyzed. Phenomenology, as a research method allows researchers to understand and explore in detail participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). In Chapter IV, the experiences of the participants are revealed after undergoing the data analysis process discussed by Moustakas (1994).

#### **Qualitative Data Collection Process**

The following research question guided my phenomenological study: What are the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University?

I employed a semi-structured interview protocol for the collection of qualitative data, in which interviews were conducted by Skype or Google Hangout. Contact was initiated via direct message in the form of a recruitment flyer, which summarized the study and requested participants who voluntarily agreed to take part in the research study,

to each participants' social media pages or profiles (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn).

Upon completion of the interviews, each interview was transcribed by a professional transcriber and the transcriptions were analyzed by the principle investigator on a line-by-line basis. Data were analyzed by utilizing Moustakas's (1994) adaption of Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) interview analysis in order to account for an overall understanding of each phenomenon. Data analysis and organization were performed by hand without the use of qualitative software. I implemented a color-coding process to organize and categorize the data into groups or themes. I also created a matrix allowing for further analysis of the themes that emerged. Next I examined the responses to each question, which provided a pass for discussing the qualitative data.

### **Participants' Profiles**

#### **Demographic Information**

Before beginning the interviews, twelve participants ( $n = 12$ ) completed a demographic questionnaire, which contained items for participants' to report their gender, age, race, marital status, educational level, employment status, college sports participation and scholarship history, and pregnancy history (see Appendix B). Table 1 serves as a summary representation of the participants' demographic information.

As shown, the ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 35 with a mean age of 26.75. The participants' years since last participating in a collegiate sporting activity ranged from 0 to 10 years with a mean of 3 years. All participants (100%) reported receiving an athletic scholarship during their career as a student-athlete. In addition, seven (58%) reported they competed in college sports for 2-4 years and five (42%)

reported they competed during all 5 years of their athletic eligibility. Six (50%) of the participants identified as Black or African American, four (33%) as Multiple Heritage, and two (17%) as White or Caucasian.

Among the twelve athletes who represented the research sample, eleven (92%) reported that their pregnancy was not planned and one (8%) reported that their pregnancy was planned. Ten (83%) participants reported being in a committed relationship during the time of their pregnancy and two (17%) reported being single during the time of their pregnancy. Nine (75%) of the participants reported participating in collegiate athletic activities (i.e. practice/or a game) during their pregnancy and three (25%) reported they did not participate in any collegiate athletic activities while pregnant. When asked if they were made aware of their legal rights as a pregnant student athlete by anyone on the athletic department staff, five (42%) reported they were informed, while seven (58%) reported they were not. Nine (75%) participants reported returning to their sport following the birth of their child, and three (25%) reported they did not return to their sport following the birth of their child due to graduating from college or financial reasons.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristic of Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Marital Status	NCAA Division Institution	Sport	Last Participated Collegiate Sporting Activity	Was Your Pregnancy Planned
Elizabeth	25	Multi Heritage	Single	I	Track and Field	0-2 years	No
Laura	27	Black	Single	I	Basketball	4-6 years	No
Marilyn	25	Multi Heritage	Single	I	Volleyball	2-4 years	No
Niecy	25	Black	Married	I	Basketball	2-4 years	No
Kim	35	Black	Single	I	Tennis	6-10 years	No
Missy	34	Multi Heritage	Single	I	Track and Field	6-10 years	No
Grace	23	White	Married	II	Volleyball	0-2 years	Yes
Mia	23	Black	Single	I	Basketball	0-2 years	No
Tiffany	24	White	Singe	I	Volleyball	2-4 years	No
Emily	22	Multi Heritage	Single	I	Track and Field	0-2 years	No
Jenean	33	Black	Divorced	I	Track and Field	6-10 years	No
Jessica	25	Black	Single	II	Basketball	0-2 years	No

**Participant #1: Elizabeth**

Elizabeth was 25 years old at the time of the interview, a single Multiple Heritage Latino female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 23 during her junior year in college. A women's track & field athlete who competed at the Division I level, Elizabeth was the first person in her family to attend college. At the time of the interview, she was in the process of completing her bachelor's degree. When she entered college as a freshman, Elizabeth reported that she envisioned her college career would be dedicated to excelling in her sport, stating "this is just my ability to run more and then hopefully get something else out of it." It was not until after she gave birth to her daughter that she started to take her college education more seriously.

Elizabeth reported that she was five months pregnant when she learned of her pregnancy and reported feeling scared when she first heard the news. Prior to learning that she was pregnant for a second time, Elizabeth reported that her first pregnancy, which she had experienced during her freshman year resulted in an abortion. Elizabeth described her initial thought when she found out she was pregnant for the second time was that she would lose her scholarship. She stated:

Definitely lose your scholarship, is the number one thing. What a lot of people don't know is, they'll tell you that before the season starts. Every new girl they are like, pregnant, you're gone. The coaches will tell you that off the bat. Of course, obviously when the situation is presented it's different, but they try to put that fear in you, which I get.

Elizabeth acknowledged that she kept her pregnancy a secret out of fear of being judged by people around her. Elizabeth reported her life as a pregnant student-athlete was met with emotional highs and lows, pregnancy discrimination from her coaches and teammates, and lack of support from her daughter's father. She explained that prior to informing her coaches of her unplanned pregnancy, she sought the help of a counselor to help her process her emotions around her previous abortion, her decision not to terminate her second pregnancy, as well as help with sharing the news of her pregnancy with her coaches. Elizabeth described that her coach's response to her pregnancy was a reaction that she had anticipated hearing. She reported, "He was like, 'you know, I want you to run, but I'm not going to say it, but you do what is best and we'll support you.'"

Following the birth of her daughter, she returned to her sport and reported that she had to rely on the assistance of financial aid, her parents, and income from a job to help with the financial commitment associated with caring for a child and continuing her education. While she received an athletic scholarship for track & field, the scholarship only supported 50-74% of her total cost of attendance. Therefore, Elizabeth had to seek outside resources to assist with the cost of continuing her education and costs associated with caring for her child. She reported having her daughter has matured her as a woman and parent.

### **Participant #2: Laura**

Laura was 27-years old at the time of the interview, a single African American female, former student-athlete, professional women's basketball player, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 23 during her junior year in college. A women's basketball athlete who competed at the Division I level, Laura

reported that her family inspired her to play basketball at the collegiate level. When she entered college her freshman year, Laura reported that she envisioned herself majoring in sociology and pursuing a career in social work. Laura reported she found out she was pregnant during her visit at the doctor's office for a back injury, stating:

So my back went out right before the NCAA tournament. They took a blood test. I don't know why they took a blood test for your back going out. After that they said I was six to nine weeks pregnant and I was like 'What? Okay. They said 'okay we're gonna get an ultrasound to make sure it wasn't like an ectopic pregnancy . . . She (the nurse) was like getting ready to do it and she put it on there and she was like, 'Honey, I don't know who lied to you but you're not six to nine weeks pregnant, you are six and a half months pregnant.

She described her reaction to her pregnancy by stating:

I played basically the whole season pregnant with her (daughter) and it was around the NCAA time, and basically I had to play. That year I won defensive player of the year, I got first team All-Big Ten, we won the conference and this is all while I was pregnant, I didn't even know.

Laura recalled feeling nervous and scared when she found out she was pregnant and stated she didn't want to disappoint her coaches, teammates, or family.

She reported that she had to balance the responsibility of becoming a mother with the responsibility of being a student-athlete. With the help of her daughter's father, who was also a student-athlete, as well as her family, coaching staff, and the athletic department, Laura was able to make the transition into motherhood and return back to her

sport. Laura earned her bachelor's degree and is now a professional women's basketball player.

### **Participant #3: Marilyn**

Marilyn was 25 years old at the time of the interview, a single Multiple Heritage female, a former student-athlete and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 20 during her junior year in college. A women's volleyball player who competed at the Division I level, Marilyn reported she could not have envisioned attending college without playing sports, stating "I started playing volleyball in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then I always wanted to play it like forever." For Marilyn, being a student-athlete meant dedicating her time and commitment to excelling in her sport, stating "it's a job."

When she enrolled at her university, Marilyn reported that she envisioned her college experience as an opportunity to major in an area of study that would provide her with the knowledge she needed to pursue a career in social work. Marilyn stated she changed majors twice prior to becoming a sociology major. She reported, "I ended up switching to sociology when I got pregnant because sociology has more online classes." Marilyn recalled the moment that she found out she was pregnant, stating "I was devastated when I found out I was pregnant." Prior to discovering she was pregnant, Marilyn had made the decision to end her athletic career as a college volleyball player. That decision was due to lack of funding that was promised prior to transferring to the university she was attending to compete in volleyball. She reported "I played for about two seasons with them, and right before the second spring, I was like . . . I needed money, so I told him I quit and during the winter break is when I found out I was pregnant."

Marilyn's reported her decision to discontinue playing the sport she loved coupled with the news of her pregnancy was overwhelming for her. She stated, "My teammate was texting me saying 'coach, really wants you back,' and I had all these different things going on at the time." Marilyn described being in denial and shocked when she found out she was pregnant, stating "I took five pregnancy tests. All of them were double lines, so I was pregnant." Marilyn reported that no one knew about her pregnancy except for one of her closest teammates and her child's father.

Marilyn reported that making the transition out of college athletics and into motherhood was a challenge for her because her coach insisted on her returning back to the team to compete. She shared, "The struggle was the fact that he (my coach) kept pushing for me to come back after I found out, and that was really difficulty for me and even after he found out I was pregnant, he still-after I had my daughter-wanted me to come back (and play volleyball)." Her decision to move on from the sport she had played since middle school was influenced by her new identity of becoming a mother. Following her retirement from her sport, Marilyn gave birth to her daughter, earned her undergraduate degree, and at the time of the interview was pursuing a master's degree in education.

#### **Participant #4: Niecy**

Niecy was 25 years old at the time of the interview, a married African American female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 19 during her sophomore year in college. A women's basketball athlete who competed at the Division I level, Niecy reported that when she entered college she envisioned that she would major in criminal justice and pursue a career as a criminal

investigator with the federal government. Niecy reported she was shocked when she first learned of her pregnancy, sharing “my first thought was ‘how am I going to tell my parents?’” She recalled learning about her pregnancy for the first time stating, “I didn’t know I was pregnant. I was at practice. I was lifting weights.”

A first generation college student, Niecy shared she felt that she would be letting her family down by getting pregnant. She reported that her boyfriend, who was also the father to her twins, was shocked as well when she shared with him that she was pregnant. She stated, “He didn’t imagine that it’d happen so soon. He just told me that whatever I decide, we’ll get through it together.” Niecy described her relationship with her children’s father, stating “(w)e have a really good relationship. We’re still together. We are actually married now.” She reported her relationship with her now husband, along with the support that she received from her athletic academic advisor and family members, helped her to balance her role of being a mother and student-athlete.

#### **Participant #5: Kim**

Kim was 35 years old at the time of the interview, a single African American female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 22 during her sophomore year in college. A women’s tennis player who competed at the Division I level, Kim reported that she did not have a specific vision for herself when she entered college her freshman year. She stated, “I really didn’t know going in. I really wasn’t sure what I wanted to do, so I really didn’t have a vision for how I thought things were going to go or even what it was going to be like.” Kim recalled having mixed emotions when she discovered that she was pregnant. Kim reported she

kept her second pregnancy a secret until she felt it was necessary to tell her coaches and parents.

Having already had a child prior to entering college from a previous relationship, Kim reported that balancing school and two children would not have been possible if it had not been for the support of her coaching staff, teammates, child's father, and family members. Kim described her overall experience as a pregnant and parenting student-athlete by sharing "everyone was really cool and understanding." Kim completed her undergraduate degree and went on to pursue a career in college athletics.

**Participant #6: Missy**

Missy was 34 years old at the time of the interview, a single Multiple Heritage female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 21 during her junior year in college. A women's track & field athlete who competed at the Division I level, Missy was the first person in her family to attend college. One of twenty-seven children on her father's side, Missy reported her parents did not have the financial means to support her college education, nor did they encourage the pursuit of a college education. She shared "going to college was very linear for me...my parent's didn't have a lot of money and they also didn't necessarily push college or anything and I'm not sure how that value was instilled other than my mentor." When she entered college as a freshman, Missy reported that being a college student-athlete was a means for her to earn a college degree and one day pursue a career in the medical field. Missy stated "I think I took a lot of pride um, in realizing that . . . That I was using my time and energy and my effort in addition to the school work and rigors to pay for my college."

Missy reported she found out that she was pregnant shortly after ending her relationship with her ex-boyfriend who was the father of the child. She described feeling awful when she first learned of her pregnancy, as she had not given much thought to one day being a parent. She described her relationship with her child's father as one that was short lived that lasted for two to three months. Missy recalled sharing the news with her ex-boyfriend stating that his response was "Okay, well I don't want anymore (kids)." In addition, Missy reported that her coach was not in favor of her pregnancy either, suggesting she should abort her pregnancy.

Missy reported her life as a pregnant student-athlete was met with emotional highs and lows, pregnancy discrimination from her coaches and teammates, and lack of support from her son's father. Despite the challenges she faced as a pregnant student-athlete, Missy reported her decision to have her child was her own and one that she does not regret. Missy graduated college with a 4.0 GPA and went on to pursue a career in the medical field.

#### **Participant #7: Grace**

Grace was 23 years old at the time of the interview, a married Caucasian female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 21 during her junior year in college. A women's volleyball athlete who competed at the Division II level, Grace reported that her pregnancy was planned. Grace reported that she and her husband, who was also a student-athlete, made the decision to have a child after getting married their sophomore year in college. When she entered college as a freshman, Grace reported that she envisioned her college career would be dedicated to succeeding in in her sport. She reported, "I just wanted to succeed at the

college level and do well and then I eventually wanted to go on and become a teacher.” Eager to start a family, Grace reported that her pregnancy was no surprise and that it was planned. “We wanted a family . . . I decided to forego my senior year, and we got pregnant, and I just decided that I wanted to finish my last season . . . so I could get my education paid for.”

Grace reported that she and her husband were excited when they learned that they would be expecting their first child. Grace admitted that pausing her athletic career as a volleyball player and student to care for their son was not an easy decision for her to make. After having her son in the off-season four months prior, Grace returned back to her sport to compete that following spring semester. According to Grace, the transition from student-athlete to mother had its challenges but her husband supported her every step of the way. Grace reported that both she and her husband took equal responsibility in caring for their son. In addition, the support she received from her coaching staff, professors, family members, and teammates helped as well. Grace and her husband went on to complete their undergraduate degrees, and she now works as a resident manager at a university.

#### **Participant #8: Mia**

Mia was 23 years old at the time of the interview, a single African American female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 19 during her freshman year in college. A women’s basketball athlete who competed at the Division I level, Mia reported that her family inspired her to play basketball at the collegiate level. When she entered college her freshman year, Mia reported that she envisioned herself excelling in her sport with the aspiration of one day

playing women's basketball at the professional level. She stated, “There were certain goals I wanted to accomplish in my conference; whether that was making first team or player of the year or whatever.” At the end of her freshman season, Mia was named Newcomer of the Year in her conference and she received the Honorable Mention All-Freshman Teams award.

Mia reported that she found out she was pregnant at the end of her freshman year. She shared that when she first learned of her pregnancy, she was shocked. She reported, “I actually played a couple of games knowing I was pregnant but found out towards the end of the season.” Mia reported her mother was the first person she told about her pregnancy. Mia described her mother’s response was intuitive and supportive, she shared “she (her mother) kind of knew.” Mia reported that her first thought was that she would lose her scholarship once she disclosed the news of her pregnancy to her coaches. Mia shared that she referenced the Student-Athlete Handbook at her university to see if she was protected from losing her athletic scholarship. Mia reported that while she was protected from losing her athletic scholarship, she would not be protected from the perceived stereotypes of being a pregnant student-athlete.

Mia described her overall transition from student-athlete to mother as one that has helped her to mature for the better. With the help of her child’s father, coaches, teammates, professors, and family members Mia reported that she does not regret having her son. Mia reported that she and her son’s father are still together and are both committed to parenting their son. Mia went on to earn her undergraduate degree and at the time of the interview was taking the necessary steps to pursue a career overseas as a professional women’s basketball player.

**Participant #9: Tiffany**

Tiffany was 24 years old at the time of the interview, a Caucasian female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 22 during her senior year in college. A women's volleyball athlete who competed at the Division I level, Tiffany reported that when she entered college she envisioned herself playing volleyball competitively as an opportunity to get a degree. She shared "I saw myself participating in a program where we'd be developing, trying to reach that next level of competition, so building a program that wasn't very strong before, which did happen."

Tiffany reported that she didn't find out that she was pregnant until after volleyball season was over. She shared "I didn't find out until I was 20 weeks, so it was quite a lot of time." Tiffany described that she felt both fearful and uncertain about her post-collegiate athletic career following the news of her pregnancy. A senior, Tiffany reported that in addition to retiring from her sport, she was also faced with the reality of becoming a mother. Tiffany reported that while she received a great deal of support from her teammates, her child's father, and coaches following the news of her pregnancy, sharing the news with her family was particularly difficult for her. Tiffany shared "family life and everything was definitely a big shock, rocked the boat a little bit as far as what people in my family, how we were raised and the kind of ideals that a lot of my family members hold to."

Although her pregnancy was not planned, Tiffany reported that having a child while in college helped her to mature as a young adult. With the help of her child's father, who was also a student-athlete, Tiffany reported her priorities shifted and the

decision she had to make concerning her future (i.e. future academic goals, career goals, socializing with peers, etc.) were influenced by her role and responsibilities as a mother and co-parent to her child. With the assistance of her family, child's father, and support of her teammates and coaches, Tiffany completed her degree and is now coaching volleyball at the high school level with the hopes of pursuing her master's degree in the near future.

**Participant #10: Emily**

Emily was 22 years old at the time of the interview, a Multiple Heritage Latino female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 19 during her sophomore year in college. A women's track & field athlete who competed at the Division I level, Emily reported that competing at the collegiate level afforded her the opportunity to fund her college education. When she entered college as a freshman, Emily reported that she envisioned her college career would be a balance between athletics and her academic responsibilities. Emily reported that when she initially learned that she was pregnant, she immediately thought about how her pregnancy would impact her athletic career. She shared "track was the only thing on my mind." Faced with an unintended pregnancy, Emily described feeling hopeful about her decision of becoming a mother while competing in collegiate sports. She stated:

I had a teammate that had a son and I knew that she like successfully completed her schooling and competed so that kind of gave me a little bit of hope and I knew it would be possible while I know that for some period of time athletics would be over.

Emily reported that sharing the news about her pregnancy with her coaches was much harder than telling her family members. She stated:

I think it was almost harder to tell them (coaches) then it was to tell my own family because being a student-athlete it was like that's your ticket to a degree. It's almost as if like okay, I don't continue to be a student-athlete, how am I going to get my degree because I couldn't afford college on my own.

A soon to be new mother, Emily reported her life as a pregnant student-athlete was met with emotional highs and lows, and lack of support from her daughter's father's family as well as her coaching staff. Emily described feeling isolated from her teammates, coaching staff and athletic department during her pregnancy. In addition, she reported feeling pressured by individuals in her life to make a decision to terminate her pregnancy.

Faced with so many questions and the uncertainty of balancing academics, with athletics and motherhood, Emily stated that having her daughter is a decision she does not regret. Despite the challenges and hardships she faced during her pregnancy and following the birth of her child, Emily reported that her daughter is her biggest motivator. Emily returned to her sport following the birth of her child and graduated college with her undergraduate degree.

### **Participant #11: Jenean**

Jenean was 33 years old at the time of the interview, an African American female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was pregnant at age 19 during her freshman year in college. A women's track & field athlete who competed at the Division I level, Jenean reported when she entered college as a

freshman, she had no idea of what to expect. Her motivation to pursue athletics at the collegiate level was influenced by the various coaches that were recruiting her to compete at their universities. She reported, “To actually consider going for a team in college, so that is what, that . . . somebody wants me, I am special, and I am needed.”

Jenean reported that when she first learned of her pregnancy, she was shocked. She recalled going to the hospital to get an x-ray after sustaining an injury at track practice and finding out she was pregnant. She stated “they (hospital staff) wouldn’t do an x-ray unless I do a pregnancy test. And I literally said ‘I’m not pregnant...and it turned out the test came back positive and I was just sitting there in shock.” Faced with having to share the news with her coach, Jenean reported that her coach was supportive of her decision to continue with her pregnancy and assured her that she would not lose her scholarship. In addition, Jenean and her coach were aware that her priorities would change following the birth of her child.

Jenean reported preparing to become a mother at the age of 19 was not easy. Although she had the support of her coach, Jenean reported she had to prepare for motherhood on her own without the assistance and support of her family members. She reported “her (grandmother) words to me, when she put me out of the house, were, ‘You’re not gonna be able to learn again, you’ve ruined your life, you’re not gonna be able to finish school with a baby.’” Jenean returned back to her sport after giving birth to her daughter and graduated college with 4.0 GPA.

### **Participant #12: Jessica**

Jessica was 25 years old at the time of the interview, an African American female, former student-athlete, and mother. She reported that she first discovered she was

pregnant at age 25 during her senior year in college. A women's basketball athlete who competed at the Division II level, Jessica reported that when she entered college as a freshman, she envisioned her college career would be dedicated to excelling athletically in her sport rather than academically in the classroom. She shared "If I could just play basketball and just . . . I'd do that. But unfortunately I gotta go to school too. So it was more athletics for me".

A senior, Jessica was a four-year letterman in women's basketball at her university. As she faced the transition of retiring her collegiate athletic career, Jessica had to prioritize her focus towards completing her undergraduate degree. She stated, "So I had already played my four years. But I had . . . I think I had six credits I had to complete. So I had to go back for a second semester. No basketball just straight school". She added, "I've never gone any type of my life without playing a sport while going to school. So this is new."

Jessica reported that retiring from her career as a college athlete, coupled with her pregnancy, was overwhelming for her. Faced with so many questions and the uncertainty of completing her degree and becoming a mother, Jessica shared "I was thinking . . . do I even want to go to school? I'm pregnant now and I want to keep the baby. How am I going to provide? Like what am I gonna do? I haven't even graduated college yet." Jessica reported that she kept her pregnancy a secret for six months until rumors started to circulate amongst her former teammates and coaches about her pregnancy.

Jessica reported that making the transition out of college athletics and into motherhood was challenging. Although she had the support of her family, teammates, and coaches, Jessica reported retiring from college athletics and becoming a mother were

two things she had not anticipated after graduating from college. Following the completion of her degree, Jessica envisioned that she would be starting her professional career as a Women's Basketball player competing overseas. However, since having her son, her priorities changed. At the time of the interview, Jessica had earned her undergraduate degree and reported aspiring to pursue her master's degree in the near future. While she still desired to compete at the professional level, caring and providing for her six-month-old son while balancing her future career goals were at the top of her priority list.

### **Emergent Themes**

For the purpose of my study, phenomenological themes were identified based on statements of at least two or more participants (Maxwell, 2009). The phenomenological data gathered from participants yielded five major themes and twelve subthemes (see Table 2) with major themes being: pregnancy decisions, on being a pregnant-student athlete, social support during and after pregnancy, organizational support, advice and recommendations.

Table 2

*Summary of Results*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
Pregnancy Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Response to pregnancy</li> <li>➤ Deciding to have a child</li> </ul>
Being a Pregnant and Mothering Student-Athlete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pregnancy experience</li> <li>➤ Effects of being a student-athlete on motherhood</li> <li>➤ Effects of motherhood on being a Student-Athlete</li> </ul>
Social Support during and after Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Spouse/partner support</li> <li>➤ Support from family</li> <li>➤ Support from friends and the community</li> </ul>
Organizational Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support from coaches</li> <li>➤ Support from teammates</li> </ul>
Advice and Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Advice to pregnant student-athletes</li> <li>➤ Recommendations for athletic departments</li> </ul>

### **Pregnancy Decision**

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked about what motivated them to pursue athletics at the collegiate level and what it meant to be a student-athlete. In addition, the participants were encouraged to share what they envisioned doing when they entered college during their freshman year prior to becoming pregnant. The majority of the participants reported that their motivation to pursue athletics at the collegiate level was an opportunity to play competitively to fund their college education. Interestingly, only one of the women interviewed deliberately planned her pregnancy, while the rest of

the participants reported their pregnancies were unintended. All but one of the participants noted that they gave birth to their first child while in college. One participant, Kim, admitted to having a child prior to entering college and being a sophomore when she found out she was pregnant with her second child.

**Response to Pregnancy.** All participants were asked to describe their reactions, thoughts, and feelings when they discovered that they were pregnant. Each student-athlete mother shared her initial response, which revealed that eleven of the twelve participants did not make a deliberate decision to enter motherhood or become pregnant in college. Eleven of the participants found themselves pregnant unexpectedly.

When Elizabeth discovered that she was pregnant for a second time, having had a previous pregnancy experience that resulted in an abortion, she recalled that her initial thought was that she would lose her athletic scholarship. As a result, Elizabeth reported she did not disclose her pregnancy for some time:

I kept it (pregnancy) a secret for a long time. I told a few of my teammates. The rest of them didn't know. They thought, 'cause I had torn my hamstring two years prior, they thought...my coaches told them I was out due to a hamstring injury again. And you know, like I said, I was scared of the judgment . . . so it was hard for me to know that I was giving that up (track) and what people would think about me . . . I was scared to be judged and it was hard.

Similarly, Jessica remarked,

I told no one . . . So I went until I was six months pregnant before anybody found out. Like, no one knew. And then eventually the word got out and they told my coach . . . He was like "Oh my god, you're not even showing." I'm like, "Yeah, I

kept it under wraps.” ‘Cause obviously it was hard for me to adjust. Like I did not . . . I was in denial all nine months that I was pregnant. All nine months.

Tiffany also discussed her reaction to her pregnancy and noted the relationships with the people around her started to change. She said, “I definitely saw some of the relationships shift in a way just because I wasn’t at the time experiencing the same period of life as other students. I think there were a couple people that were a little disappointed.” She added,

It definitely took a while to settle into the joy and excitement of having a baby just because with my family life and everything it was definitely a big shock, rocked the boat a little bit as far as what people in my family . . . It was definitely a struggle at some points.

Of the twelve participants, eleven endorsed emotional responses such as shock, fear, guilt, and embarrassment after discovering that they were pregnant. When Marilyn discovered she was pregnant, she described feeling devastated. She recalled, “I took five pregnancy tests. All of them were double lines, so I was pregnant.” Jenean had a similar experience adding, “The test came back positive and I was just sitting there in shock, so my first thought was, ‘I gotta tell coach’. . . I’m like, “I’m eighteen . . . are you serious? I have an athletic career of a lifetime”.

Three of the twelve participants reported they feared that they would lose their athletic scholarships as a result of being pregnant. Mia stated,

I started searching and scrambling through the Student-Athlete Handbook that we have . . . to see if I was protected. The one thing that was nice is if you do find out that you are pregnant, the school will support you with whatever decision you

make and that they can't kick you off the team. That was one thing that kind of reassured me.

Niecy and Elizabeth both commented on the fear of losing their athletic scholarships. Elizabeth, summed her reaction by saying, "definitely 'lose your scholarship', is the number one thing. What a lot of people don't know is, they'll tell you that before the season starts." Niecy further added, "I felt like I was going to lose my scholarship, but my coach gave me an option to think about it and let her know. When I told her I wanted to come back and play, she red shirted me that year." Niecy remembered sharing her fears about losing her scholarship with her coach, she recounted, "I expressed it to my coach, I told her I felt like I was going to lose my scholarship, and she told me not to worry about."

**Deciding to Have a Child.** Of the twelve participants, eleven of the participants reported that their pregnancies were not planned. Therefore, their decision to become pregnant during their collegiate athletic careers was not intentional. Realizing the possibility of becoming a mother while competing in college athletics was a conscious decision these women had to make while considering the impact a child could have on their life. In addition, the decision to parent, abort, or give their child up for adoption were options each of the women reflected on when planning for their futures. All of the participants reported that they continued with their pregnancies after the initial discovery of their pregnancy and made the decision to parent their child after giving birth.

Missy, a women's track & field athlete who competed at the Division I level weighed making a decision regarding her unplanned pregnancy against the possibility of balancing athletics, academics, and motherhood:

I had a lot of energy put towards researching and trying to figure out, and you know, my analysis, goes in spider webs right? Like, go one direction and say “Okay if I didn’t (have this child) then how do I feel about this? And what will I feel like a year or two from now? . . . and then I go in the opposite direction like “Well how the heck would I make this work? And do I even want to be a parent? And what about school? And what about track, and what about working? What does that mean for my career later?

Jessica, a women’s basketball player competing at the Division II level had a similar experience when contemplating her decision to have her son. She shared:

I’m pregnant now and I want to keep the baby. How am I going to provide? Like what am I gonna do? I haven’t even graduated college yet. Who am I to have a baby? I don’t even have my life together right now and I’m thinking about having a baby?

One participant (Grace) deliberately planned to begin her family after she and her husband, who was also a student-athlete, got married their sophomore year in college. She said, “We wanted a family . . . the season after I decided to forego my senior year, we got pregnant.” Grace made the decision to pause her athletic career in college to start family. While she had the support of her husband, she shared “it wasn’t an easy decision.” After having her son in the off-season four months prior, Grace returned back to her sport to compete that following spring semester.

All of the participants noted that while the timing of their pregnancies were less than ideal, they did not have any regrets about their decision to have their child. As Emily

stated, “You’ll always be an athlete to an extent, but like being a mother is something that is forever.” Similarly, Mia summed her experience by saying,

This experience meant the world to me. I wouldn’t change one moment of it.

That’s one thing I would tell people. I would not change anything. I am so happy with the decision that I made to have my son and I think from the time my freshman year till now I have grown so much.

Marilyn shared this about her decision to have her daughter, “She’s the best thing. She’s the thing I look forward to seeing every day: talking to her, seeing her. She’s just amazing.”

### **Being a Pregnant and Mothering Student-Athlete**

All participants were asked about how their experience as a student-athlete affected their role as a mother. As the participants began their return to training and competing in their respective sports, they reported a mixture of both positive and negative experiences. Nine of the participants reported returning back to their sport and three reported they did not return back to their sport following the birth of their child. Each student-athlete mother recalled their experiences balancing their parenting responsibilities with the demands of training and competing at the collegiate level. In all cases, participants described their roles as a student-athlete and mother as a balancing act. The sub-themes that emerged were: pregnancy experiences, effects of being a student-athlete on motherhood, and the effects of motherhood on being a student-athlete.

**Pregnancy Experience.** It is important to note the experiences of student-athlete mothers during their pregnancy and after giving birth. All participants were asked about the challenges, if any, they faced following the discovery of their pregnancies and after

giving birth, how they coped with those challenges, as well as what they discovered about themselves throughout the process. While participants discussed the challenges they were confronted with during and after their pregnancy, they also discussed numerous ways in which children enhanced their lives. Only one of the participants reported that she could not recall a time or instance during her experience while pregnant or as a parent student-athlete that was particularly challenging for her or when she had to cope with difficult moments related to her experience.

All of the participants shared their experiences of being a pregnant while competing at either the Division I or Division II level in their sport. All participants were asked to provide the interviewer with detail a detail description of a typical day in the life of their pregnancy experience as a student-athlete. Of the twelve participants, two (Tiffany and Jessica) reported that they discovered their pregnancies during their senior year at the conclusion of their athletic season. While one participant (Marilyn) reported she discovered her pregnancy after making the decision to retire from her sport her junior year. Therefore, when asked to share a typical day of their experiences being a pregnant student-athlete, all three women detailed what their pregnancy experience was like while being on campus but no longer competing in their sport or being affiliated with a team.

It is important to note that all of the participants in this study decided to continue with their pregnancies and parent their children after giving birth. Among the twelve participants, nine reported that they participated in collegiate athletic activities (i.e. practice/or a game) during their pregnancy compared to the three participants who reported they did not. Nine participants reported that they participated in collegiate athletic activities (i.e. practice/or a game). In addition, all nine of the participants except

for one (Mia) disclosed that they were not aware of their pregnancies prior to participating in any collegiate athletic activity for their respective sports.

Laura, Mia, and Niecy discussed participating in collegiate athletic activity while pregnant and how those experiences ultimately led to the discovery of their pregnancies.

Laura summarized her experience by sharing,

I played basically the whole season pregnant with her (daughter) and it was around the NCAA time, and basically I had to play. That year I won defensive player of the year, I got first team All-Big Ten, we won the conference and this is all while I was pregnant, I didn't even know.

Niecy reported a similar experience and said, "At first, I didn't know I was pregnant. I was at practice. I was lifting weights. I just so happen to feel sick." Mia explained, "I actually played a couple of games knowing I was pregnant but found out towards the end of the season." After learning about their pregnancies, and sharing their initial reactions of shock, embarrassment, and guilt, each of the participants recalled their day-to-day experiences of being a pregnant student-athlete.

For most of the participants, pregnancy symptoms such as morning sickness, fatigue, and forgetfulness were common among their experiences when they reflected on that period in their lives. Grace summarized her day-to-day experience as a pregnant athlete stating, "It was hard. I was sick a lot. It was tough." Similarly, Jessica reported,

. . . it was terrible. It was terrible. Like I said, this is the first time ever me having to go to school without playing a sport. So . . . mind you this is the worst pregnancy I have ever experienced. I was sick all nine months."

Niecy endorsed having a similar experience saying, “Being sick all the time, weak, having cravings all the time.” In addition, feelings of isolation, judgment, and embarrassment were feelings endorsed among the women when describing their overall experiences being both pregnant and a student-athlete. Jenean described her experience as a pregnant student-athlete by saying “it was humiliating.”

Jessica shared a similar response saying, “I really felt like I was losing my mind. In a deep hole just depressed. I wouldn’t say depressed but it was probably a step to it.” Elizabeth echoed similar sentiments by saying,

it’s not pretty . . . people expected a lot from me and it was hard, especially being the first female at my college who has a child . . . there’s a lot of men that have children that go to my college, but you don’t see them walking around with it (pregnant). But me, it was stamped on me. So it was very hard but I, just like everything else, you learn to live with it and you push forward, especially if you’re trying to continue to have something.

Emily summarized her day-to-day experience being pregnant while training, sharing:

I was training up until I was five months pregnant and I defiantly felt very I guess isolated because my teammates were all training for one specific goal and that was to compete that season. Whereas I was just kind of going through the motions . . . you definitely feel like alone because there’s nobody you can relate to.

Mia shared a different experience by saying,

It just wasn’t comfortable, so I would just come in baggy swats and sweatshirts. Most of the people really didn’t have any idea up until I left in November when I

had my son . . . at this time, news already got out. Obviously our campus is pretty small so things spread around really fast.

**Effects of Being a Student-Athlete on Motherhood.** One of the greatest challenges in returning back to sport after becoming a mother was in finding the time to meet the all demands-child care, training, traveling, and for some, work and school. Mia remembers how, as a new mom, “just realizing that there was another person that was there that I had to make sure was okay and they are priority at the end of the day.” When asked how her experience as a student-athlete affected her role as a mother, Mia stated:

The next season, when I started playing that much, I had to travel. I was gone a lot and, obviously, he couldn't come with me. There were days where I'm sitting in the hotel room, I'm crying and I'm upset just because I miss him

Mia summed up her experience by stating,

It was almost like I had to switch over and make sure that I was focusing on basketball. It was hard being away from him especially in the beginning when I started traveling. It got easier as I went along, but one thing I told people is when I was playing basketball I tried to focus on playing basketball.”

Similarly, Grace described her initial return back to competing and completing her degree as she shared,

Missy and Emily discussed the pressure of having to prioritize training and competing over motherhood and vice versa. Emily remarked that her role as a student-athlete after pregnancy and childbirth impacted how she cared for and parented her daughter. She explained “it's really stressful and I think both roles kind of like intertwined with each other and kind of impact each other both positively and

negatively.” Missy echoed the same sentiments of having to consider her sport before her son, “I constantly had to choose . . . and not just chose but make it work for both.” Emily said that when she started training and competing again, “there were times that I had to bring Peyton to the track at 6:00 am because I had lifting or a morning run . . . when practice would run late, I’m like ‘Okay, am I gonna make it to daycare in time to pick her up before it closed?’”

Interestingly, Tiffany noted that the leadership skills she developed as a student-athlete helped enhance her role as a mother. Tiffany said of making the transition from student-athlete to mother,

I think a lot athletics is performing under pressure. It’s a lot of staying calm under high stress situations. Things like that are going to come up with your child . . . I think just the toughness factor just mentally carries over a lot with raising your child because you have a different perspective about what failure is, what progress is.

On the contrary, Elizabeth noted the following when sharing her experience on how being a student-athlete affected her role as a mother by saying,

It affected it . . . I feel like sometimes I wanted to stop running. I could see how my love for track was fading, which was weird. It was like, I ran...track was the only thing that I did love. It was the only thing that I felt loved me back in my life.

**Effects of Motherhood on Being a Student-Athlete.** Emily explained that once she became a mother and returned back to training and competition, she experienced a renewed motivation and passions to excel in her sport. Emily explained,

Athletically, every time I leave for a meet, the last thing I say to myself before the race is this is for Peyton. That's my constant reminder or if I get nervous or I don't particularly want to be at that meet or I'm not feeling confident I just repeat to myself like this is for her. You have to do it for her if you're not gonna do it for yourself or for your teammates.

Emily added that returning back to her sport after having her daughter, she was able to recognize gains in her maturity level and found that to be very satisfying. She said "I would say that my role as a mother probably impacted my role as a student-athlete in a more positive manner than being a student-athlete impacted my role as a mother." Like Emily, Missy said,

I think the piece of me being mom while I was a student-athlete was, I hate to call it a badge of honor, but kind of the super human and, this probably the toughest thing that I've ever gone through.

Elizabeth also shared:

Of course becoming a mother, it made me see that it's not about me anymore...I held onto the dream to finish my eligibility, which was hard . . . there was times where I didn't go to class. I didn't go to class. I didn't do a lot of things because it was hard to balance every single thing . . . it becomes a choice now. Once you have a child . . . "What do you want to do? You're either going to stop and just be a mom . . . especially for single mothers. My experience might have been different if I would have had her father around.

### **Available Social Support During and After Pregnancy**

The majority of the participants reported that they received some form of support from their families and surrounding communities, and they all expressed how influential this support was to their pregnancy and mother experiences. As shared by the participants, the social support they received from those closest to them provided the emotional, physical, and financial support needed to raise their child while balancing athletics and academics. It is important to note that ten of the participants reported being in a committed relationship with their spouse/partner during the time of their pregnancy compared the two participants who reported being single during their pregnancy experience. The theme is divided into three sub-themes: Spouse/partner support, support from family, and support from family and friends.

**Spouse/partner support.** Seven of the participants discussed the importance of the support they received from their husband/partners. Ten of the participants in this study described herself as either married to or in a committed relationship with the father of her child(ren), and they shared responsibility with the practical aspects of child care. As previously discussed, one of the participants (Grace) married her husband prior to starting their family and spoke highly of the support she received from her husband during her pregnancy and after giving birth. She said,

It was definitely nice to have a husband, and a support . . . My husband. He was very supportive in letting me know that this was just a small, small time period, and it was going to pass. He would watch the baby on the few road trips that I was away.

Similarly, six other participants shared the same sentiments about the support they received from the fathers of their children when reflecting on their pregnancy and mothering experiences. Kim recalled the support she received from her child's father when she first discovered her pregnancy by saying "he was super cool . . . he was cool with my family and I'd known him for a while...I had not problems letting him know and he was completely cool with it."

Mia summarized the support she received from her son's father saying, "He was, obviously, like "whatever you do I'm going to support you." I knew in the end that he wanted me to keep him." Tiffany added, "He was very supportive, and he still is...he went with me to all of the appointments, which was a big deal . . . everything from him was really positive and supportive." Marilyn reported that while she had the help of her daughter's father and his family, it was hard for her to accept his support. She said, I felt like I was doing everything, but I think I put that on myself because he'd be like, "let me help you" and I'm like, "No." Marilyn went on to add that while she and her daughter's father are no longer dating, they work together to co-parent their daughter.

Five of the participants reported they did not receive any financial, emotional, or practical support from their children's fathers during their pregnancy or after giving birth. These particular participants reported that they had to rely on themselves and the assistance from their family and friends in the absence of their children's father. These women described their pregnancy and parenting experiences without the help of a committed partner or co-parent and oftentimes referred to themselves as single mothers. Jessica reported, "I was working two jobs because he (son's father) wasn't working. . . .

When I told you I was pregnant you were all for it. But here we are now and you're acting like just the rest of them." She added by saying,

I worked two jobs all the way up until my ninth month and worked one job until I gave birth. He didn't have no job . . . I just had to deal with the B.S. through this whole nine months . . . And I can't be sad, I can't cry 'cause . . . I'm not. I just can't do that. I got a whole child that I have to look after now. It is like, "I don't have time to cry if I wanted to.

Similar to Jessica, Elizabeth described her experience as a single mother stating,

He was also an athlete, and we were together at the time, but it definitely was different. He could still play sports, his life didn't stop. He still went partying, he still lived his college experience . . . it was hard to see him not lose a beat and continue to do what he wanted. It definitely put a strain in the relationship and it was very like, it was hard for me.

**Support from family.** Family members appeared to be the most often utilized support by the participants to assist in balancing the responsibilities of being a mother, student, and athlete. All of the participants except for two reported that they received emotional or practical support when caring for their child and themselves. A number of the participants in this study reported that they reached out to family members closest to them when faced with a pregnancy crisis and discussed the benefits of having the support of their loved ones as it relates to their overall pregnant and parenting experience. In addition, two of the participants reported the opposite and stated they did not received support from their family members, nor their child's father and as a result, had to rely on themselves, friends and/or community resources to help.

Marilyn explained how having the support of her aunt helped her during and after giving birth to her daughter. She said,

My aunt, especially, because that is who I'm close with as far as that goes. I really appreciate her advice on things . . . because she was 17 when she had my cousin, so she just would talk to me about things that she went through and overcame (with being a young mother) . . . she went right through school with her (participants cousin), she was like, "it's definitely possible" . . . she was the first person to know (about participants pregnancy).

Much like Marilyn, Laura described her mother as being both an example and pillar of support for her during her pregnancy experience by saying,

I talked to my mother. My mother had four of us in a row . . . she was a college athlete too. So once I told her she was on the roll and she was like, "Okay, let's do this, you're gonna play after this." She was my backbone during that time. That was pretty much it. If I didn't have my mom . . . they (coach and mother) battled around everything that was going on . . . they even said that if her (daughter) dad wasn't in the picture they was gonna try to make sure that everything was okay with me and the baby.

Mia said:

The first person I actually called was my mom. I text her and I was like, "There's something I need to tell you." She text me back and she said, "Are you pregnant?" I don't know. We ended up having a conversation later about it, but she was like "It's just motherly instinct that I had an idea." She kind of knew.

Mia continue to add,

I talked to my mom first and she was like, “You know, you’re not the first, you’re not the last, so everything in life is a learning experience.” . . . Her (mom) main concern was just making sure that I was okay and making sure that my scholarship and everything was still going to be set into place.

Jenean had a different experience when reaching out to her family for support and shared her family’s response to hearing the news of her pregnancy by sharing,

My grandmother was like, ‘You and the baby can’t stay here, you gotta go.’ So I was immediately looking for a place to stay.” . . . Her words to me, when she put me out of the house, were ‘You’re not gonna be able to learn again, you’ve ruined your life, you’re not gonna be able to finish school, with a baby.’ And when she said that to me, I was like, I’m not? Okay, I’m show you.

Jenean reported that her mother did offer her words of encouragement once throughout her pregnancy but she wasn’t present in Jenean’s life to offer any substantial support.

Like Jenean, Missy had a similar experience as her parents were not actively involved her life nor where they able to offer support of any kind to assist her in parenting her child.

She stated,

And my parents, I mean my dad didn’t speak to me for a really long time.

Probably longer than six months before he came around. When my son was born my mom kind of was around but she’s pretty aloof, so she was supportive when I wanted to talk and stuff, but no, you know she just kind of goes with the flow of everything. So, not really like an ear for advice and stuff like that.

Missy reported that although she did not have the support of her parents, she found support and encouragement from friends, teammates, and other mothers in her community. When reflecting on experience and being self-sufficient in parenting and caring for her son, Missy summarized it by saying “You know in hindsight I’m proud of myself.”

**Support from friends and the community.** Among the women who participated in the study, several of them reported that they did seek and receive support from resources within the community to aid in their preparation in becoming a mother. Although a number of the participants endorsed that their experience as a pregnant student-athlete was met with emotional highs and lows, having a supportive network was a contributor of their success as mothers, athletes, and students.

Both Missy and Marilyn sought the support of resources on campus and within their community to aid with the responsibilities of caring for their children. Marilyn summarized her experience seeking support in her community saying,

It could feel overwhelming and then filling it (Medicaid paperwork) out by yourself and going up because you have to go up to social service and do all the stuff . . . they had a daycare on campus also.

Missy reported:

I went through most of my pregnancy trying to figure out all of the different ways that things could work . . . you know, go in to be on welfare and stuff so that I could have money for food for the baby . . . standing in welfare lines.

She continued to add,

So there were a handful of moms at that time . . . that I would just sit in the daycare between my classes and talk to . . . but emotional support wise, I think that was probably, you know being able to talk to other people that, that just had a child too.

Tiffany said of the support she received connecting with other mothers, “Just going and being around other moms so I know okay, there are other moms out there in the world; I’m not the only one here with a crying one-year-old. I think that definitely helped.”

### **Perceived Organizational Support During and After Pregnancy**

While the majority of the participants reported positive support from their families, friend and community, the types and amounts of support each participant received within the athletic community varied. Some of the participants concluded that because they were each the first or only pregnant or parenting student-athlete on the team or within the university’s athletic department, their coaches, teammates, or professors were unfamiliar with the challenges and needs of student-athlete mothers. In addition, only two of the twelve participants reported that they received support through their student counseling center on campus to cope with the difficulties they faced during their pregnancy and parenting experiences as a student-athlete.

**Support from coaches.** When discussing organization support, the types and amount of support the participants received from their coaches varied. A number of the participants noted positive experiences they encountered with their coaching staff in response to their pregnancies compared to other participants who had less favorable

outcomes. Jenean reported that when she first shared the news of her pregnancy with her coach, her coach's initial response was

Oh my god. I can't believe it, you know, your life is about to change forever . . . you gotta focus on taking care of you and the baby now . . . I'm not gonna stop you from running, I'm just letting you know that this is a big, this is a big change . . . you know if you can, you can run again, I'll let you keep your scholarship.

Like Jenean, Mia recounted to moment she shared the news of her pregnancy with her coach by saying,

I remember texting my coach . . . she was like 'Wow, okay. I didn't expect that, but that's okay.' She was very, very supportive . . . She told me, 'whatever you decide, that's your decision, but at the end of the day I want you to have this baby. I want to be here for you and be able to support your through it.'

Laura shared that her coach's response to her pregnancy was not surprising, but her coach had a baby a year prior. She said, "well my coach, she was pretty good with that too because she had a baby the year before, they're (children) a year apart." All three women emphasized that the support they received from their coaches were advantageous to the maturation of their roles as mothers while competing in college athletes.

Opposite of Jenean, Mia, and Laura's experiences, Missy reported that her decision to have her child was met with unsolicited criticism by her coach. Missy shared, "my coach's first statement was 'You can't keep this. You think you're gonna keep this, it's such an immature decision.'" While Elizabeth reported, "my coach insisted on getting an abortion without saying it. He was like, "You know, I want you to run, but I'm not going to say it, but you do what is best and we'll support you." Like Elizabeth and Missy,

a few other participants shared that the unfavorable responses they received from their coaches about their decisions to continue with their pregnancies impacted their overall pregnancy experience and return to their sport.

Both Missy and Elizabeth reported feeling as if they were being isolated from practice and their team members as a result of their coach's attitudes about their pregnancy decisions. Missy shared:

And they (coaches) made it very difficult where we're going into winter time and we take the bus together (to travel for a track meet) . . . at the very last minute they told me that my son couldn't come on the bus with us because of you know, an insurance ordeal . . . and it was a snowstorm, so I had to get, my brother and another just like college student, like drove my car with my kid in it . . . I had to be on the bus and they followed us.

Elizabeth summarized her experience by saying,

I worked out the whole entire pregnancy, but they even banned me from the athletic training facility. They're (coaches and trainers) like, 'We're just too nervous for you to like . . . We can't tell you not to go to your own gym, but we don't want you here.'

She went on to say, that one of her assistant coach did his best to include her as much as possible with her teammates during her pregnancy, against her head coach's request.

**Support from teammates.** As with coaches, the participants reported that their teammates were important providers of social sport during their pregnancy experience as well. Of the participants who were still involved in their sport during the time of their pregnancy, all of them stated that their teammates were supportive of them. Grace

explained the support she received from her teammates after giving birth to her son. She said,

It was also really fun for him to have interactions with the other student-athletes, and my team just adores him, and I brought him to practice a couple of times and everybody was just so supportive.

Mia described the support she received from her teammates by saying,

They gathered and rallied around so quick and my pregnancy, they rallied around. I'm just thankful that I've been able to be around these group of people who really understand that there's more to life than sports. It's bigger than that.

Emily reported that one of her teammates served as her inspiration throughout her pregnancy experience. Having already had a child, this particular teammate set the example for Emily that she could balance being a mother, athlete, and student. Emily shared,

I had a teammate that had a son and I knew that she like successfully completed her schooling and competed so that kind of game me a little bit of hope and I know it was possible while I knew that for some period of time athletics would be over.

### **Guidance and Suggestions around Pregnancy**

Each participant was asked about what kind of advice they would offer to a student-athlete who discovered that she was pregnant. Their responses give a bit more insight into what they felt others might want to do differently. The advice the participants offered to other women revolved around three common concerns: reproductive autonomy when making pregnancy decisions, seeking out support, prioritizing for the future.

**Encouragement for pregnant and mothering student-athletes.** Overall, the participants were responsive and offered encouraging advice when discussing what information they felt would be helpful in assisting a pregnant student-athlete. While they described the challenges that they faced during their experience, they also shared the joys of having their children and that these joys were worth the sacrifices. In addition, the participants discussed the ideas that women should do what is best for them and to not get discouraged when faced with an unexpected pregnancy. For example, Missy shared, “you’ve gotta be able to find that place inside of you where you know exactly what you want, and then you figure out the rest.” Elizabeth agreed, saying,

Not to worry about what other people think. She needs to decide what’s best for her. What will make her happy? Not to destroy her soul for everyone else, because that’s a decision most girls have to make. They have to make, ‘Am I going to live my life the way I believe I should, or am I going to live my life the way other people believe I should?’ And you have to put yourself first no matter what.

Similarly, Tiffany explained.

I think mainly it’s just seeing that a baby is not the end of the world . . . just know that it’s not the end of your life but that it’s really just a new chapter in a story that is going to be your life, so just enjoy it.

Emily agreed by sharing:

It’s definitely not impossible to be a student-athlete and a mother. It just takes a lot of like thought and just have a plan, like having a plan is the biggest thing because without a plan you’re kind of lost, everything seems very overwhelming.

The women also offered advice on seeking support when accessing resources to aid with an unexpected pregnancy. Marilyn encouraged women to seek support by stating, “It could be a lot . . . it could feel overwhelming . . . so having someone to, I guess, give you and help you find those resources or take you to those resources helps in a major way.”

**Recommendations for athletic departments.** Throughout the interviews, several athletes discussed the changes they felt needed to be made within their athletic department and the NCAA at large to better support female student-athletes confronted with a pregnancy crisis. Four of the participants pointed out the potential for improvement in offering added support and resources to assist young women who may be transitioning into motherhood while competing at the collegiate level. For example, Emily said of her initial meeting with the decision-making team, which consisted of athletic staff personnel, medical staff, and mental health professionals:

It’s like having those meetings everybody in the room, they were all superior to me like doctors and coaches, head coaches and athletic trainer and there was no one really I felt like who was speaking for me or with me. It’s like you almost feel like you don’t really want to voice your opinion or voice how you feel in the situation because they’re above you.

Emily went on to share:

I didn’t feel comfortable enough to (speak up), I wouldn’t have known if there were resources or not, but I feel like with such a big adjustment and change it would have been nice to maybe have somebody I could have checked in with and

talked about my experience and just all those different things and set goals with to make sure that I was reaching this goals.

Elizabeth shared the same sentiments as Emily however she added:

They (NCAA) don't keep record of how many girls get pregnant . . . I think it's their responsibility to also keep in communication with the athletic program and be like, 'Hey, how's she doing? What's her status? What's y'all status?' Because at the end of the day, I still competed after I had my child. I still scored points for that college. I won medals for that college after I had a child and I did my part as an NCAA athlete . . . I feel like they (NCAA) need to know about it (pregnancy experiences), they need to hear these stories.

Tiffany made a similar statement, emphasizing that when assisting a student-athlete confronted with a pregnancy crisis the universities, athletic departments and the NCAA should make a conservative effort to assess the student-athletes needs and guide them to the appropriate resources. She explained:

Maybe just sitting me down every once and a while and just hey, we're here for you, this is what you've got going on, this is what we planned . . . it would've been nice if they had, I don't know, maybe done a little more, made sure that everything was fine with my professors or things like that. That probably would've been helpful.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed phenomenological themes that emerged from the semi-structured interview process, and interview of the interpretive researcher.

The goal of this research study was to describe the experiences of female athletes competing at the collegiate level and competing during pregnancy and after giving birth. Twelve participants described both positive and negative experiences as they transitioned to being mothers while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University. All of the participants made comments about the emotional and social aspects of pregnancy and motherhood, ways they coped with the social norms and stigma regarding pregnancy and practical aspects of caring for a child while participating in collegiate level training and competition. Five major themes were revealed, including: pregnancy decisions, on being a pregnant and parenting student-athlete, available social support during and after pregnancy, perceived organizational support, and guidance and suggestions around pregnancy. In Chapter V, a discussion of the results and implications for further research are provided, as well as suggestions for policy makers, counselors, and counselor educators with regards to female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II university.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Based upon an ecological perspective, this phenomenological study sought to explore the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University. In their own words, the participants described their experiences being a full-time student-athlete and mother. My study yielded five major themes with twelve sub-themes that provided insight into the thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and intentions of female student-athletes who have lived through such an experience and gave voice to pregnant and mother student-athletes competing in collegiate athletics.

#### Summary

A number of researchers (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2015; McGannon & Busanich, 2016; Palmer & Leberman, 2009) have conducted qualitative studies investigating the influence of pregnancy and motherhood on the athletic careers of elite athletes. For instance, Debois et. al. (2012) emphasized that motherhood enhanced her participant's athleticism through higher resilience and adaptability when confronted with challenges following her return to elite sports. In addition, Martinez-Pascual et al. (2014) observed that athletes who became mothers had a difficult time (re)negotiating and resisting societal and cultural expectations concerning motherhood. Additionally, researchers have explored the experiences of college students who have children (Albritton, Anglely, Grandelski, Hasen, and Kershaw, 2014; Attwell and Lavin, 2007; Eckerson, Talbourdet, Reichlin, Sykes, Noll & Gault, 2016; Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014; Gray, 2015; Miller, Gault, and Thorman,

2011). In However, few studies focused primarily on the experiences of pregnant and mothering student-athletes who compete at the collegiate level.

Based upon this gap in the literature, the primary research question for my study was: what are the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University? In order to answer this question, I interviewed twelve individuals using a semi-structured interview protocol to gather information about the shared experiences of being pregnant while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II university. I utilized a transcendental phenomenological qualitative research design that Moustakas (1994) adapted from Van Kaam (1959, 1966) to identify the themes detailed in Chapter IV. Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological systems model provided the framework by which I understood the essence of the pregnant female student-athletes personal experiences, as well as the experiences that helped these women to mature as student-athlete mothers in relation to their social surroundings. Through an analysis of the data, five major themes, (a) pregnancy decisions (b) on being a pregnant and parenting student-athlete (c) available social support during and after pregnancy (d) perceived organizational support (e) guidance and suggestions around pregnancy, and twelve sub-themes emerged. I anticipate that counselors and counselor educators will gain insight into the experiences within intercollegiate athletics that might impact developmental trajectories for student-athletes who become pregnant and opt for motherhood. Moreover, these themes might be used to help better understand the experiences of other pregnant and mothering student-athletes competing at NCAA Division I or Division II universities.

This study used a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of a select group of student-athlete mothers who experiences a pregnancy while competing at a Division I or Division II university. To explore the student-athlete mothers' experience of pregnancy and to better understand to which the experiences of pregnancy help these women to mature as mothers while competing in collegiate sports, the research examined the participant's responses during individual semi-structured interview sessions and analyzes the content of the twelve interviews.

The aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II university. All of the participants shared their thoughts and experiences on whether to terminate the pregnancy, to parent or place the child in an adoptive home, how to continue with academic and professional goals, how to pay for pregnancy-related/child expenses, and how to tell significant others such as their coaches, peers, partner, and family members about their pregnancy. The findings that resulted from this study are consistent with past literature, which concluded that prioritization of their time as mothering student-athletes to care for and support the needs of their children can place added constraints on their athletic training, participation, and identity.

The results revealed that the participants categorized their experiences among five different themes: pregnancy decisions, being a pregnant and mothering student-athlete, available support during and after pregnancy, perceived organizational support, and guidance and suggestions around pregnancy. More specifically, the results revealed that the experiences described by the student-athlete mothers in this study extend the

knowledge of the maternal experiences of female athletes competing in collegiate athletics.

In my study, each participant reported their initial reactions, thoughts, and feelings at the moment they discovered they were pregnant, which they reported were connected to their decision to continue their pregnancy, resulting in the theme *pregnancy decisions*. All but one of the participants reported entering motherhood unexpectedly and made comments about their initial discoveries of their pregnancies and decisions to parent their children. The theme of *pregnancy decisions* is consistent with the findings of Gray (2015), who concluded that stressors and access to social support could influence a young woman's reproductive decisions when faced with an unintended or unplanned pregnancy.

Eleven of the participants also discussed struggling with their decisions to continue with their pregnancies and wondering if they were making the best decision for themselves and their child. The struggle experienced by my participants might be explained by the findings of Rice et al. (2017), who found that conditional acceptability, anticipated reactions, stereotypes and attitudes influence pregnancy decisions following an unintended pregnancy. Therefore, it is possible that my participants felt pressured to terminate their pregnancy, to choose adoption over abortion, or felt pressure to continue with their pregnancy and leave their sport, concerns which they confirmed, by sharing their fears of being judged or stigmatized by those closet to them based on the decision they made. Taken together, societal expectations and attitudes regarding pregnancy decisions (i.e., parenting, adoptions, or abortion) appeared to have an impact on the participants experience and response to their unintended pregnancy (Smith et al., 2016) in

the following ways: fearing the loss of their athletic scholarship, concealing their pregnancy, feeling isolated from participating in athletic activities, and fear of receiving negative judgment from individuals who viewed the unintended pregnancy as being their fault.

Unintended pregnancy has reportedly been linked to increased psychological stress related to postpartum depression and anxiety, lower degree completion rates, societal pressures associated with the decision to keep or terminate a pregnancy, financial difficulties, and future unplanned pregnancies (Holub, Kenshaw, Ethier, Lewis, Milan & Ickovics, 2007; Meiksin, Chang, Bhargava, Arnold, Dado, Rankel & Zickmund, 2010; Gray, 2015). Despite reporting feelings of guilt, secrecy, fear, depression and anxiety as a result of their unintended pregnancy, the participants in this study earned or were in the process of earning their undergraduate degree. This finding contradicts data supporting the association between unintended pregnancy and college dropout rates among college women with dependent children (Gault et al., 2014; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008.). These differences may be explained in part by the emphasis of academic standards and eligibility requirements placed on student-athletes receiving scholastic grant-in-aid by their university to compete in a NCAA sanctioned sport compared to their non-athletic peers. Student-athletes may receive comprehensive academic support services (i.e., tutoring, studying assistance, academic and individual skills development programs) in addition to academic resources offered on campus to assist with balancing their academic and athletic demands within the athletic department to further support their academic needs. Thus, increasing the student-athletes likelihood to graduate from college.

Although the interviews started with the participants discussing what motivated them to pursue athletics at the collegiate level, it later led to discussion on their experiences while *being a pregnant and mothering student-athlete*, which was the second theme. As the participants in this study discussed the integration of their roles and responsibilities being an athlete, student, and mother, they still acknowledged the impact that becoming a mother had on their overall personal growth. The effects of being a student-athlete on motherhood was consistent with the findings of Sorensen et al. (2009) who believed that most student-athletes who make the decision to become mothers begin to evaluate their personal, athletic, and academic goals. The participants reported that once they became mothers, their perceptions about who they were and their goals in life, began to shift, causing them to feel to need prioritize their personal lives more than before now that they did prior to becoming responsible for caring for a child care.

All of the participants commented on the primary importance of their children. While many of the participants spoke highly of the expectations they set for themselves at the start of their collegiate athletic career, the majority of them reported prioritizing their roles as mothers with their responsibilities as student-athletes. Several of the participants reflected on their pregnancy and mothering experiences and emphasized that becoming a mother helped them to prioritize their future to better provide for their child, appreciate life outside of their sports, and put their athletic careers in new perspective. The experience also seemed to improve their sense of reliance. The pride they displayed when discussing their roles as mothering student-athletes are consistent with the findings of Appleby and Fisher (2009) and Palmer and Leberman (2009) which indicated that becoming a mother enhances an elite athletes experiences by fostering resilience and

adaptability, which helps them to better deal with challenges associated with balancing struggles they endure managing their responsibilities as mother and athlete.

The participants in this study also discussed the effect being a student-athlete had on mothering their child(ren). They acknowledged the sacrifices that they made in order to pursue their athletic goals. However, several of the participants mentioned that they felt they missed out on important moments of their children's lives due to the commitments they had as student-athletes. The participants identified lack of discretionary time, organizational resistance and inflexibility (e.g. perceived lack of or no support from their coaches), lack of suitable child-care, as well as societal expectations and assumptions regarding motherhood while competing in college athletics impacted their roles as mothers which corroborate with the findings of Palmer & Leberman, 2009. Similarly, this finding is consistent with Albritton et al. (2014) who suggested that juggling academic and parenting responsibilities can present a great deal of stress and conflict for students raising children in college especially if they do not have adequate support. This result may be explained by the fact that, in addition to raising their children, the student-athlete mothers in this study reported difficulty balancing athletic and academic responsibilities, balancing athletic success and failures with emotional stability, balancing physical health and injury with the need to continue competing, and addressing the pause or termination in their college athletic career to have a child (Miller & Kissinger, 2009).

Every participant in my study spoke on the significance of having *available social support during and after pregnancy*, which is the third theme. Having a supportive network has been documented in the literature (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; McGannon et

al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2015; McGannon & Busanich, 2016; Palmer & Leberman, 2009) as a key variable in achieving healthy outcomes in pregnancy. Many of the women spoke highly of the individuals in their lives who offered them support at one point or another during their pregnancies and how that support affected their transition as parenting student-athletes. Social support has been found to have a positive effect on women's health during pregnancy (e.g. favors, advice, information gathering, esteem support, emotional support) and as a result is a buffer to stress in many health situations, including pregnancy and postpartum (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003; Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Syme; 1985; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986; Hall, Williams, & Greenberg, 1985). This finding is in agreement with those of Erk (2013) and Houston (2013) who explored protective factors that promote degree completing among mothers with dependent children in college. A possible explanation for this might be that the emotional and social support offered by loved ones combined with the participants motivation, self-discipline and time management as athletes helped them to better cope with obstacles and challenges associated with pregnancy and mothering (Freeman, 2008).

In comparison, participants who identified with being a single mother mentioned relying on themselves as a method of seeking support to cope with struggles experiences during their pregnancy and after giving birth. In general, the participants framed their experiences being self-reliant in predominantly positive terms sharing statements emphasizing how proud they were of themselves as mothers. Based on the findings of Debois et al. (2012), who discovered that mothering a child has the potential to foster higher resilience and adaptability when confronted with challenges following pregnancy,

it can be argued that becoming a mother helped the participants to transition into adult life effectively. For example, although the women in my study perceived balancing the challenges related to their pregnancy and mothering their child as difficult, they did not view these challenges as constraints in fulfilling their roles as mothers (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Instead, they perceived the challenges they faced as life lessons, helping them to become better women and mothers.

*Perceived organizational support* was the fourth theme that captured the participants viewpoints on the support they from their coaches, teammates, professors, and athletic academic advisors. This finding match those observed by Fox and Quinn (2015) and Palmer and Leberman (2009) who found that organizational support offered to pregnant and mothering athletes influenced the retention and continued development of women and mothers in their professional sport. The participants reported varying levels of *perceived organizational support* they received within their athletic departments during and after their pregnancy they believed to be helpful to their experience. Several of the participants recalled instances during their pregnancy and mothering experience where they received encouragement from their coaches in support of their pregnancy decision.

Subsequently, a number of participants noted that because they were the first or only pregnant or parenting student-athlete on the team or within the university's athletic department, their coaches, teammates, or professors were unfamiliar with the challenges and needs of student-athlete mothers. This finding further supports Sorensen et al. (2009) and Sterling (2010) argument that student-athletes with pregnancy-related conditions, and the choices they make as a result of their pregnancy are heavily influenced by the

treatment or lack of support they receive from the university's athletic department following the disclosure of their pregnancy. The participants' perceptions on the support they received from their coaches and teammates within their athletic communities match those observed by Freeman (2008) and Palmer and Lebermen (2009).

Finally, the participants share *guidance and suggestions around pregnancy* to other pregnant and mothering student-athletes, which is the fifth theme. Each participant was asked to share what advice they would offer to a student-athlete who just found out she was pregnant. All of the participants were very open about their struggles and triumphs during their experience as well as what they wish they had known prior to becoming student-athlete mothers. Participants offered advice related to pregnancy decision outcomes (e.g. abortion, adoption, or parenting), seeking support and resources, to recommendations for athletic departments and universities to better accommodate pregnant and mothering athletes on campus. Also, many of the participants acknowledged the lack of attention and interest exploring their experiences integrating motherhood, college athletics and academics. Therefore, obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experience of a pregnancy from the point of view of the participants may offer encouragement to female student-athletes confronted with a pregnancy crisis. The shared advice given by the participants included child-care resources, emphasis on social support, along with negotiating their roles as mothers, students, and athletes. The guidance and suggestions offered by the participant around pregnancy reinforce the ideas of Gray (2015), who pointed out "narratives of unplanned pregnancy may help to shed light on the experiences of these women" (p.1). The results of this study indicate that the support the participants received from their personal networks such as partners, parents,

friends along with support from their coaches and teammates enabled them to prioritize motherhood with the pursuit of their athletic career goals amid the challenges they faced during and after their pregnancy.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations were associated with the interpretation of the results of this research study. First, this study was based on self-reported data that are retrospective in nature. Therefore, it was dependent on the willingness of the participants to be open and honest about their pregnancy and mothering experiences, as well as the accuracy of the participants' memory of their experiences. Of the twelve participants, I was familiar with at least five of them from reading articles and press releases detailing their experiences as student-athlete mothers. Several steps were taken to limit biases that were in favor of this population (see Chapter III); however, these biases still remained. Given that there was prior knowledge of the participants experiences, my preconceived thoughts about the pregnant and mothering student-athlete experience may have influenced my ability be present with the participants in the interview, as I might have assumed I already knew everything about their experience. As a result, sharing with the participants that I had previous knowledge of their experiences based on what I had read about them prior to conducting the interview might have caused the participants to minimize their experiences, thereby excluding important information related to the phenomenon being explored.

Second, in an attempt to include as many participants as possible from a small sample, participants represented a variety of sports across two NCAA Divisions (I, II).

The geographic locations of the participants as well as the university where they attended/competed were not limited to a specific region in the United States, rather the participants were recruited based on the level of intercollegiate competition they participated in, Division I or Division II, and not by sport or type of sport (i.e. team sport or individual sport). It worth noting that although the participants represented different sports, the results were consistent across sports and division level. Therefore, the participant's responses are representative of their experiences being pregnant while being a student-athlete without the acknowledgment of type of sport and division level as a direct influence of their experience.

Third, the ethnic and cultural diversity of the sample was dependent upon who agreed to participate in my research study. The target sample group consisted of participants who were biologically female, experienced a pregnancy while competing in collegiate athletes, and were no longer enrolled at a NCAA Division I or Division II university as a student-athlete or competing at the collegiate level. It is important to note that although the participants represented a diverse sample group the results were consistent across diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, their responses are representative of their experiences of being pregnant while being a student-athlete without the acknowledgment of race or ethnicity as a determining factor of their experience. I also did not consider the number of past pregnancies or children they had prior to participating in my study. However, this information could have provided additional context to the phenomenon being explored because it could have helped to gain a deeper understanding of the pregnancy and mothering among college athletes. Having prior knowledge of each participant's relationship status during their pregnancy

was helpful, but it was only utilized to gather demographic information about the participants to inform the researcher of what follow-up questions to ask when discussing their experiences with the men who the participant's pregnancy was produced.

Lastly, due to the geographic locations of the participants, interviews were conducted via Skype or Google Hangout. Although Skype and Google Hangout allowed the convenience of conducting the interviewing the participants, conducting the interviews via a telecommunications application was not consistent method in collecting data in the following ways because the interviews would freeze or disconnect due poor internet connection, which would interrupt the flow of the interview. In addition, and it made it difficult to hear the participants as response times would be delayed leaving the possibility of the misinterpretation of meaning for a participants response or set of responses for a particular question. Therefore, the participants in my study were likely not as comfortable to discuss intimate details about their experiences with me. Also, I was not able to be as attentive to non-verbal cues as I would have liked, given that the interviews were not conducted in person. As a result, I was not able to capture the participants reactions regarding the questions asked. Hence, I was not able to include any bodily expression, such as eye or facial movements, posture, vocal cues or signals exhibited by the participants when reporting my data.

### **Implications**

As the athletic participation rates among women competing at the NCAA level continue to rise (more than 200,000 in 2014-2015) the probability of a female student-athlete dealing with a pregnancy is likely. Pregnancy has specific stressors requiring specific support for soon to be mothers (Gray, 2015). In addition, the social stigma tied to

being pregnant and unmarried may further influence a student-athlete's decision to seek help. The emotional, social, and financial responsibilities associated with being both a parent and student might significantly impact an athlete's overall wellbeing, especially if there is no readily apparent support to help mediate the transition into motherhood.

### **Implications for Professional Counselors**

The results of my transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) revealed implications for professional counselors working with pregnant or parenting student-athletes. Professional counselors, particularly those working in college and university counseling centers can apply their clinical skills to matters concerning emotional challenges specific to female athletes faced with a pregnancy crisis. In addition, professional counselors must also be aware of the culturally specific nuances, relative to the collegiate athletic population which include: balancing academic and athletic requirements (Pinkney, 1991), coping with physical injury (Parham, 1993), dealing with role conflict predicated by athletic participation (Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989), developing outside social and leisure interests (Austin, 1978; Lanning, 1982), forming interpersonal relationships, managing sports-related career transitions (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), and maintaining optimal physical conditions (Danish, Petipas, & Hale, 1993).

The acuity and complexity of student-athletes presenting mental health issues are of serious concern in professional counseling. According to the literature, college student-athletes endorsed concerns with life-related problems, substance abuse, academic skills difficulties, emotional adjustment, interpersonal relationships, and athletic retirement or career searching (Etzel, 2009; Galambos, Terry, Moyle, & Locke, 2005;

Johnson & Ivarsson, 2011; Nicholls, Backhouse, Polma, & McKenna, 2009). Combined with the clinical experience and an understanding of the student-athlete culture, licensed professional counselors could be beneficial in assisting athletic departments in supporting student-athletes' overall mental and emotional health. In addition, licensed professional counselors present as a resource for support it is ever needed outside of the athletic system. Although the women in my study had a sense of support and thus continued their pregnancies, their experiences might have been different if they did not have access to a supportive network and resource.

Because an athlete is expected to produce in many aspects of their lives, a relationship with a primary purpose to serve as an additional source of support is valued and contributes to balance and overall wellness of the athlete. Licensed professional counselors can play an influential role in advocating for the expansion of resources for pregnant and mothering student-athletes. The concerns and challenges of assisting female student-athlete during pregnancy is not a new campus issue; however, understanding the meaning of maternity for college student-athletes may help licensed professional counselors in enhancing resources for female student-athletes who experience a pregnancy while competing in intercollegiate sports.

First, incorporating psychoeducational materials specific to the emotional and physical symptoms of a pregnancy crisis and the benefits of counseling to student-athletes within college and university athletic departments could be beneficial in educating student-athletes, coaches, athletic administrators and support staff on understanding the importance of seeking help. Helping student-athletes, their coaches, athletic advisors, and parents to understand the when and where on campus to reach out

for help could be beneficial in establishing a relationship between the athletic departments and college counseling centers. Sorensen et al. (2009) suggested that, “college health professionals would be well served to recognize the need for an organized, pre-planned, legal, ethical, gender-equitable response to this health risk” (p.12). It is important to note that male student-athletes could potentially experience a pregnancy crisis, so it is equally as important to consider developing psychoeducational materials that speak to gender equitable and foster inclusion of all pregnancy experiences male or female.

Similarly, being able to provide training to athletic staff members on the specific topic related pregnancy and parenting student-athletes would not only benefit the student-athlete, but the coaches and the university at large. Professional counselors could work with athletic departments to provide trainings on how to recognize signs and symptoms, best practices when assisting student-athletes who are in crisis (e.g. pregnancy crisis, mental health crisis) and who to refer the student-athlete to in the counseling center to assess that student-athletes needs and refer them to additional resources in the community if necessary.

Student athletes are unaware of the variety of student resources available to them on university and college campuses because of their strong association to the athletic department and challenging time constraints associated with participating in intercollegiate sports. By creating a pipeline from pregnancy to motherhood, counselors will be able to help pregnant student-athletes foster a safe environment process their feelings and thoughts around their pregnancy decision, help them to identify supportive individuals in their social networker, access to resources on and off campus and how to

cope the with challenges with pregnancy and becoming a mother. In addition, professional counselors could establish various support groups on campus for college students who are pregnant or have dependent children. Creating a safe space for young women on campus to share their pregnant and parenting experiences would not only foster a network of social support but it would provide student-athletes an opportunity to access resources outside of the athletic department.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study closes a glaring gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of student-athlete mothers as they manage pregnancy, motherhood, and athletics, and identified shared experiences within intercollegiate athletics that impact developmental trajectories for student-athletes who become pregnant and opt for motherhood. The following recommendations for future research can further inform counselors working with student-athletes faced with a pregnancy crisis. However, data detailing the number of student-athletes who experience a pregnancy is absent in the literature.

Although similar studies have investigated the shared experiences of elite athletes as mothers, the literature does not reflect upon the experiences of pregnant student-athletes who compete at the collegiate level. Therefore, more research on the pregnancy and mothering experiences of student-athletes will give a voice to a population that has been absent from the literature. It is further recommended that the participant pool be expanded in order to more of the essence of what it means a pregnant and parenting student-athlete. Exploring the experiences of fathers who impregnated a female partner, along with athletic coaches with a past experience of coaching a pregnant student-athlete on his/her team, will help to document a richer and in-depth understanding of female

student-athlete pregnancy. Palmer and Leberman (2009) suggested the need for and potential value of comparing and contrasting the perspectives of fathers in sport with the experiences of mother. While the physical burden of pregnancy is predominantly placed on female student-athletes, male student-athletes are also affected by pregnancy (Hogshead-Makar & Harmon, 2008). Palmer and Leberman (2009) suggested the need for and potential value of comparing and contrasting the perspectives of fathers in sport with the experiences of mothers. Like female student-athletes, male student-athletes have to consider the personal obligations and responsibilities associated with caring for and raising a child (Hogshead-Makar & Harmon, 2008; Sorensen et al., 2009). Thus, exploring the experiences and attitudes of male student-athletes towards pregnancy may provide insight into the cultural context of dealing with pregnancy while competing in intercollegiate athletics.

It is important to note that due to the small sample size, findings from this research study may not be generalized to all pregnant and mothering student-athletes competing in intercollegiate athletics. Although the majority of the participants in this study reported shared experiences when discussing the challenges they faced, how they coped with those challenges, and the support they received, there were also a few differences and should be replicated with a larger sample size. In addition, the sample of participants included athletes in four different sports across two different NCAA Divisions (I, II) competition levels. Moreover, the organizational and team culture was found to have an influence on the participant's experiences. Therefore, further research investigating the pregnant and mothering experiences of student-athletes in a variety of sports across college sports associations (i.e. NAIA, CIAA, NJCAA).

## Conclusion

This qualitative study sought to give voice to student-athletes who are also mothers. In doing so, their personal experiences were described, which may provide institutions of higher learning, athletic departments, university health and counseling professionals with a better understanding of the challenges and difficulties many young women encounter while playing for two (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). The framework grounding this study, ecological systems model, was utilized to offer understanding of pregnant and mothering student-athletes and provide them with a voice.

The review of literature includes literature salient to motherhood, student-athlete, pregnancy, and female college athletics within the counseling profession. A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized to capture the personal experiences of the participants as they described the nature of their experiences as pregnant student-athletes from their points of view. Data were analyzed by utilizing Moustakas's (1994) adaption of Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) interview analysis in order to account for an overall understanding of each phenomenon. Five major themes and twelve sub-themes emerged from the present study, which included: (a) pregnancy decisions (b) on being a pregnant and parenting student-athlete (c) available support during and after pregnancy (d) perceived organizational support (e) guidance and suggestions around pregnancy. The findings observed in this study offer information regarding various dimensions of dealing with pregnancy while competing in intercollegiate athletics, which may be used to educate mental health practitioners in the areas of advocacy and clinical efforts supporting pregnant student-athletes. In addition, the shared experiences of the participants will offer insight related to the experiences and events that were instrumental

in helping these women to mature as student-athlete mothers in relation to their social surroundings. By giving a voice to the experiences of pregnant and mothering student-athletes, counselors and counselor educators will gain insight into the variables within intercollegiate athletics that may impact developmental trajectories for student-athletes who become pregnant and opt for motherhood.

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## APPENDIX A



Institutional Review Board  
 Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
 903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448  
 Phone: 936.294.4875  
 Fax: 936.294.3622  
[irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu)  
[www.shsu.edu/~rgs\\_www/irb/](http://www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/)

DATE: November 29, 2016

TO: Candice Williams [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Jeff Sullivan]

FROM: Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: *A Qualitative Exploration of a Select Group of Female Student-Athletes Who Experienced a Pregnancy While Competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University [T/D]*

PROTOCOL #: 2016-10-32324

SUBMISSION TYPE: INITIAL REVIEW—RESPONSE TO MODIFICATIONS

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: November 29, 2016  
**EXPIRATION DATE: November 29, 2017**

REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED

REVIEW CATEGORIES: 7

Thank you for your submission of your **Response to Modifications** for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Expedited** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records



Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448  
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appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. **Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of November 29, 2017. When you have completed the project, a Final Report must be submitted to ORSP in order to close the project file.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforges  
IRB Chair, PHSC  
PHSC-IRB

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

## APPENDIX B

Candice D. Williams, M.A., LPC  
Sam Houston State University  
Department of Counselor Education  
Doctoral Candidate

You have been asked to take part in a research project described below. Please feel free to ask questions. If you have more questions, Candice D. Williams, the person responsible for this study, will discuss them with you.

### **Description of the project:**

You have been asked to take part in a study that will explore the experiences of a select group of student-athlete mothers who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II university. Potential subjects are being asked to participate as a volunteer in this study because of your life experiences and the insight you have on this particular experience. The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions and experiences of female student-athletes during the course of their pregnancy. These perceptions will offer insight related to the experiences and events that were instrumental in helping these women to mature as student-athlete mothers in relation to their social surroundings. By giving a voice to the experiences of pregnant and mothering student-athletes, counselors and counselor educators will gain insight into the variables within intercollegiate athletics that may impact developmental trajectories for student-athletes who become pregnant and opt for motherhood.

### **Procedure:**

If you decide to take part in this study: you will be asked to sign this document (informed consent), complete a demographics questionnaire, and participate in a (one time) face to face interview with the principal investigator of the study (Candice D. Williams). The face to face interview will last approximately an hour and a half and will be recorded by audio. The audio recording will be destroyed upon a successful dissertation defense of the principal investigator. All responses will be confidential.

### **Risk or discomfort:**

No more than minimal discomfort or risk is expected during the duration of the research project. Since the information discussed during the interview is personal and relates to private experiences it is possible for emotional discomfort to occur. Should emotional discomfort occur and psychological help is needed it is asked that you contact your personal counselor. If your personal counselor is not available to you please contact one of the following community resources:

**Benefits of this study:**

Mental health professionals, social workers, and educators will become more knowledgeable regarding this particular subgroup of women which may result in better accommodating the needs of this growing population. In addition, I anticipate that my findings will be useful in offering policy makers and practitioners innovative strategies that could improve the development of intervention strategies in athletic departments, colleges and universities. Those participating in this study may also feel a sense of accomplishment in helping eradicate issues with intercollegiate athletics. Participants will not be offered or receive any special considerations for participating in this research study.

**Confidentiality:**

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name, you will be asked to provide an alternative pseudonym so that no records will reflect your name in order to provide anonymity. All records (informed consent, demographic questionnaire, and audio tapes) will be placed in a place where only the principal investigator can access in locked storage. The informed consent, demographic questionnaire, and audio tapes will be destroyed upon the principal investigators successful dissertation defense.

**Voluntary participation and withdrawal:**

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. You may also skip questions. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Questions, rights and complaints:**

If you have any questions about this research project, please call Candice D. Williams at [REDACTED] or email at [candiced@shsu.edu](mailto:candiced@shsu.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, please direct them to Candice D. Williams or the faculty member associated with this study Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan at (936) 294-4657 or email at [jms107@shsu.edu](mailto:jms107@shsu.edu).

### CONSENT STATEMENT

By signing this document you consent to participate in: A Qualitative Exploration of a Select Group of Student-Athlete Mothers Who Experienced a Pregnancy While Competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University. This study will be conducted by: Candice D. Williams, Doctoral Candidate in the College of Education (Counseling Department) at Sam Houston State University.

This statement certifies the following: that you are 18 years of age or older and you have read the consent and all your questions have been answered. You understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

All the answers you provide to Candice D. Williams will be kept confidential in that your personal information will not be linked to your responses. You have been informed that your name will not be used, and that no other identifying characteristics will be revealed. You have been informed that the audiotapes are for the purposes of compiling research results, and then, all the tapes will be destroyed. You should know that you have the right to see the results prior to their being published.

A copy of the informed consent will be given to you.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Typed/printed Name

---

Date

**APPENDIX C****Demographic Questionnaire****Participant Pseudonym** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date :** \_\_\_\_\_**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_**1. What is your current marital status?**

Single  
Married  
Divorced  
Legally Separated  
Widowed

**2. Are you currently employed?**

Yes  
No

**3. What is your current profession?****4. Which of these best describes your race?**

American Indian or Native American  
Asian American or Pacific Islander  
Black or African American  
White or Caucasian  
Multiple Heritage  
Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Are you of Hispanic or Latino descent?**

Yes  
No

**6. Which NCAA Division did you compete in as a student-athlete?**

Division I  
Division II

**7. How many years has it been since you last participated in a collegiate sporting activity?**

- 0-2 years
- 2-4 years
- 4-6 years
- 6-10 years

**8. What sport did you participate in during your career as a student-athlete?**

**9. How many years did you compete in college athletics?**

- 0-1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-5 years
- competed during all 5 years of eligibility (if redshirted or transferred)

**10. Did you receive any related grant in aid (an athletic scholarship) during your career as a student-athlete?**

- Yes
- No

**11. If yes, please identify the level of financial support**

- Less than 25% of total cost of attendance
- 25-49% of total cost of attendance
- 50-74% of total cost of attendance
- 75-99% of total cost of attendance
- 100% full athletic scholarship

**12. Was the grant in aid you received provided for all years of your athletic eligibility?**

- Yes
- No

**10c. How did you cover any of the additional cost of attending school? (for those who did not receive a full athletic scholarship, can select more than one response)**

- Financial Aid
- Parents
- Outside academic Scholarship(s)
- Employment

**11a. Were you ever pregnant during your collegiate athletic career?**

- Yes
- No

**11b. If yes, how many times were you pregnant as a college athlete?**

12. **How many live births have you had during your collegiate athletic career?**

13. **How old were you when you discovered you were pregnant?**

14. **Was your pregnancy planned?**

Yes

No

15. **Were you taking/using any form of birth control?**

Yes

No

16. **Describe your relationship status during the time of your pregnancy.**

Single

Married

Divorced

Separated

Widowed

17. **What was the length of your relationship with your child's father prior to becoming pregnant?**

0 to 6 months

6 to 12 months

12 to 24 months

24 months or more

18. **Which of these best describes your year in college when you found out you were pregnant?**

Freshman (First Year)

Sophomore (Second Year)

Junior (Third Year)

Senior (Fourth Year)

Grad school (Fifth Year)

Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

19. **Did you compete in any collegiate athletic activities during your pregnancy (i.e. practice and /or a game)?**

Yes

No

20. **If yes, in what trimester were you last physically active as an athlete before giving birth**

- 1st (0 to 13 weeks)
- 2nd (14 to 26 weeks)
- 3rd (27 to 40 weeks)

**21. To the best of your knowledge, were you made aware of your legal rights as a pregnant student athlete by any one on identified on the athletic department staff (i.e. compliance office, athletic trainers, athletic administrators, athletic academic advisor)?**

- Yes
- No

**22. Following the birth of your child did you return back to your sport and compete in the following year?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

**22b. If no, what was the reason for not returning?**

- Graduated College
- Exhausted eligibility (red shirt)
- Financial reasons
- Academically not eligible
- Other

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Questions

1. What motivated you to pursue athletics at the collegiate level?
2. Tell me about what it means for you to be an athlete.
3. When you entered college what did you envision doing?
4. Think back to when you were a student-athlete and discovered you were pregnant.  
Please describe your reactions, thoughts, and feelings in the moment of this discovery. (Follow-up: Tell me about your experience with the man with whom the pregnancy was produced.)
5. Detail for me what being a pregnant student-athlete looked like. (Describe a typical day).
6. Describe an experience you had while pregnant that was particularly challenging for you.
7. How did you cope with that challenge?
8. Describe your first three months of your life following the end of your pregnancy.
9. How did your life change following your pregnancy?
10. What challenges did you face?
11. How did you cope with those challenges?
12. Describe a time when someone offered you emotional support during this experience.
13. How did that affect your transition as a parenting student-athlete?
14. (If the participant choose to become a mother) How did your experience as a student-athlete affect your role as a mother?

15. What advice would you offer to a student-athlete who just found out she was pregnant?
16. Take a moment to reflect on your story. Think about all of the feelings, thoughts, and experiences you had during your time as a pregnant athlete. As you think about that time in your life, tell me what that experience meant to you.
17. What did you discover about yourself?
18. How has your opinion of the system in which you participated as an athlete changed, if at all?
19. Is there anything else you would like to add that you think is important for me to know about this time in your life and how it has affected you? If so, I invite you to share that with me.

## APPENDIX E

## Interviewing the Interpretive Researcher Questions

Topic	Debriefing Question	Answers
Researcher's interview background/experience	What experiences have you had that you believe impacted your decision to conduct the interviews?	My clinical training and experience helped me to conduct the interviews. My clinical skills helped me to create a safe and comfortable to share their experiences.
Researcher's perceptions of the participants	How comfortable were you interacting with all of the participants?	I was very comfortable conducting the interviews. I had some anxieties about conducting the interviews via Skype, however, I was still comfortable in that setting.
	What participant responses did you feel were the most helpful? In what ways did you think they were the most helpful?	Yes. The participant's responses were helpful. All of the participant's responses were helpful. Particularly, the women who shared the positive experiences they had during their pregnancy. Prior to conducting the interviews I anticipated that the participants would share more challenging experiences than positive ones during their pregnancies.
Perceptions of nonverbal communication	To what degree do you think the setting impacted the dynamics of the interviews?	Although Skype allowed the convenience of conducting the interviewing the participants, conducting the interviews via Skype presented some challenges. I was able to work through the technical difficulties, however, those difficulties impacted the flow of the interviews.

continued

Topic	Debriefing Question	Answers
	To what degree do you think the pacing of the conversation (e.g. length of time between questions asked and answered) impacted the dynamics of the interview(s)?	I think the pacing of the conversation was appropriate for the interviews. I utilized my clinical skills as well as interviewing skills to help with the pace of the interviews. I allowed the participants to lead the interviews and I followed up with the next question when necessary.
Interpretations of interview findings/interpretations	What findings surprised you?	The overall commonalities of the participant's pregnancy experiences is what surprised me the most. Although each participant's pregnancy experience were unique to their personal journey, it surprised me when some of the women report that they did not experience any challenges during their pregnancy experience while participating in college athletics.
	To what degree were the findings similar or dissimilar to your thoughts prior to conducting the interview?	The participant's responses were similar to what I had hoped. There were dissimilar to the articles that I read prior to conducting the interviews.
Impacts on researcher	What part of the interviews if any impacted you?	Hearing the pregnancy experiences of the women who participated in my study impacted me in a positive way. The resilience they displayed during their pregnancy experiences was inspiring.

continued

Topic	Debriefing Question	Answers
	In the future, how will you conduct interviews based on what you learned during the interview?	In the future, I would utilize choose a more reliable telecommunication application software to conduct the interviews.
	In what ways, if any, do you feel you are a different person now that you have conducted the interviews?	Yes. It allowed me to confront my own attitudes and perceptions around pregnancy. In addition, it reaffirmed my theoretical and philosophical views on student-athlete pregnancy.
Impacts on the participant(s)	In what ways, if any, do you feel your gender/race/culture/class/hierarchy/status/age influenced the participant's responses/comments during the interview(s)?	I think being an African American Woman conducting the interviews influenced the participant's interview experiences to some degree. The majority of my participants were women of color and I think my race and gender impacted there interviews in a positive way. In addition, my professional affiliation working with college and professional athletes also helped me to create a safe space for the women to share their experiences.
Ethical or political issues	During the interview, did you feel at any time that the interviewee was providing socially acceptable or politically acceptable answers that did not reflect the true state of affairs? If yes, how did you respond?	No, I think each of the participants were open and honest to sharing their pregnancy experiences. I attempted to build a trusting rapport with each of the the participants which I believed caused them to share openly and honestly.

continued

Topic	Debriefing Question	Answers
Unexpected issues or dilemmas	At any point did an issue or situation arise in the study that you were not expecting? How did you respond?	One issues that arose in preparation for my study that I did not expect was the lack of support that I received from the athletic departments of the universities that I reached out to in an effort to help me recruit my participants. The lack of responsiveness to my recruitment efforts helped me to develop a better strategy for recruiting participants.
	What dilemmas did you encounter during the study? How did you handle this?	Recruiting subjects for my study and scheduling interviews presented some challenges for me during the data collection process. I utilized my professional networks to assist in recruiting participants which included posting my recruitment materials on academic list-serves, professional LinkedIn Groups, and professional organizations that cater to a female audience.

## APPENDIX F

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

- ❖ Are you a female student-athlete who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a Division I or Division II University?
- ❖ Are you no longer competing at the collegiate level?
- ❖ Are you 18 years of age or older?
- ❖ Are you fluent in the English Language?

If you have answered yes to the above questions, you are invited to participate in my dissertation study **exploring the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University.**

Your participation is voluntary and your responses are confidential. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online demographic questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete followed by a 45-90 minute interview conducted via in person, Skype or Google Hangout with the principal investigator of the study (Candice D. Williams). Access to the online demographic questionnaire will be provided following your consent to participate in this research study. Your responses as well as your personal information will be kept confidential.

If you think you are eligible and would like to participate in my study, please contact me via e-mail at [candiced@shsu.edu](mailto:candiced@shsu.edu) or phone at [REDACTED]

Thank you and I look forward to your participation!

**APPENDIX G**

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in *A Qualitative Exploration of a Select Group of Female Student-Athletes Who Experienced a Pregnancy While Competing at a Division I or Division II University*. I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to pass along the enclosed information (i.e. the recruitment flyer) to friends and/or family members who may also be interested in learning about this research study. You are under no obligation to share this information and whether or not you share this information will not affect your participation in this research study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Candice D. Williams

## APPENDIX H

### The Moustakas (1994) Steps to Data Analysis

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping
  - a. List every expression relevant to the experiences (Horizontalization)
2. Reduction and Elimination: To determine the Invariant Constituents: Test each expression for two requirements:
  - a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
  - b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated or presented in a more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.
3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents: Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.
4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: Validation.
  - a. Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying themes against the complete record of the research participant.
    - i. Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
    - ii. Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?
    - iii. If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the principal investigator's experience and should be deleted.

5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each principal investigator's an Individual Textual Description of the experience.  
Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.
6. Construct for each principal investigator's an Individual Structural Description of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.
7. Construct for each participant a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes. From the Individual Textural-Structural Description, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experiences, representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, pp.120-121)

## VITA

### CANDICE D. WILLIAMS

#### *Education*

Doctorate of Philosophy (In Process)

**Major:** Counselor Education

Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX (CACREP accredited program)

Scholarly Associations: Chi Sigma Iota-Beta Kappa Tau Chapter

**Dissertation:** *A qualitative exploration of a select group of student-athlete mothers who experience a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University* (Qualitative).

Master of Arts

**Major:** Counseling-Marriage and Family Counseling Track

Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX (CACREP accredited program)

Scholarly Associations: Chi Sigma Iota-Beta Kappa Tau Chapter

Bachelor of Science

**Major:** Psychology

Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas

Scholarly Associations: Psychology Club

#### *Professional Licenses and Certifications*

Licensed Professional Counselor #PRC14810 (Expires: 12/31/2018)

Department of Health, Washington, DC

Licensed Professional Counselor #68372 (Expires: 3/31/2018)

Department of State Health Services, Austin, TX

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Trainer (ASIST), Provisional Certification (2015).

LivingWorks Education

National Certified Counselor #285495

National Board of Certified Counselors

Trauma Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Certified Therapist (2014)

TF-CBT National Therapist Certification Program

#### *Work History*

Program Manager of Clinical Services, *The Trust (Powered by The NFLPA)*,

Washington, DC

Provide clinical case management to retired NFL players which include planning, documentation, and follow-up services in the areas of crisis intervention, mental health, alcohol and substance abuse. Also evaluate all behavioral, mental health and social support partnerships to ensure compliance and effectiveness.

Supervisor: Kelly Mehrrens  
July 2014 – Present

Athletic Compliance Assistance, *Department of Athletics*, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX

Assisted Athletic Compliance Coordinator to ensure coaches, student-athletes, staff, and boosters abide by NCAA and Southland Conference rules and regulations.

Supervisor: Curtis Collier  
January 2014 – June 2014

Counselor, *Children's Safe Harbor*, Conroe, TX

Provided counseling services to victims of child abuse and their non-offending caregivers.

Supervisor: Clare Lucas, MA, LPC-S  
October 2011 – November 2013

Family Advocate, *Children's Safe Harbor*, Conroe, TX

Provided case management for designated families which included planning, documentation and follow-up services in the areas of transition, mental health, and community support services.

Supervisor: Kris Kerlin, MA, LCP-S  
January 2011 – October 2011

Undergraduate Advising Coordinator, *College of Criminal Justice*, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX

Assisted the Associate Dean of Academic Programs as well as managed the day-to-day operation of the Undergraduate Advisement Center. Also assisted with organizing the CJ Summer Camps for high school and other undergraduate programs throughout the academic year such as the Criminal Justice Career Fair, High School Criminal Justice Instructor Training (HSCJIT), and Real Talk with CJ.

Supervisor: Holly A. Miller, PhD  
January 2008 – December 2010

### ***Teaching Experience***

Invited Guest Lecture, Sam Houston State University

#### **Graduate Level Courses:**

COUN 5393: Community Counseling, Fall 2012 Semester

COUN 5387: Intro to the Counseling Profession and Ethical Practice, Summer 2014 Semester

Invited Guest Lecture, Stephen F. Austin University

**Graduate Level Course:**

COU 593: Practicum in Counseling, Fall 2015 Semester

Invited Guest Lecture, The University of Tampa

**Undergraduate Level Course:**

SPM 290: Introduction to Sports Management, Fall 2015 Semester

Invited Guest Lecture, Lone Star College-Montgomery

**Undergraduate Level Course:**

PSYCH 2301: Theories of Psychology and You, Spring 2014 Semester

Teaching Internships, Sam Houston State University, The Woodlands, TX

**Graduate Level Courses:**

COUN 5393: Community Counseling, Summer 2014 Semester

COUN 6376: Supervised Practicum, Spring 2014 Semester

COUN 5392: Cross Cultural Issues in Counseling, Summer 2013 Semester

***Clinical Internship Experience***

Advanced Supervised Practicum, Sam Houston State University, Community Counseling

Clinic-The Woodlands Center, The Woodlands, TX

Conducted counseling sessions with adults and child clients

Faculty Supervisor: Rick Bruhn, PhD, LMFT-S

Summer 2012 Semester and Summer 2014 Semester

Field Practicum, Children's Safe Harbor, Conroe, TX

Counseled children and conducted intakes

On-site Supervisor: Kris Kerlin, MA, LPC-S

Faculty Supervisor: Chi-Sing Li, PhD, LMFT-S

Spring 2011-Summer 2011

Field Practicum, Sex Offender Treatment Program-Rehabilitative Program Division,

Texas Department of Criminal Justice Goree Unit, Huntsville, TX

Co-facilitated CBT group

On-site Supervisor: Enobong Inyang, PhD, MA, LPC-S

Faculty Supervisor: Carol Parker, PhD, LPC-S

Spring 2011-Summer 2011

Supervised Practicum, Sam Houston State University, Jack Staggs Counseling Clinic,  
Huntsville, TX

Conducted counseling sessions with adults and child clients

Faculty Supervisor: Enobong Inyang, PhD, MA, LPC-S and Chi-Sing Li, PhD, MA,  
LMFT-S

Summer 2010 Semester and Fall 2010 Semester

### ***Clinical Supervisor Experience***

Counselor Supervision Practicum, Jack Staggs Counseling Clinic, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX

Provided direct clinical supervision to master's counseling students completing their supervised practicum in the Jacks Staggs Counseling Clinic.

Faculty Supervisor: Chi-Sing Li, PhD, LMFT-S

Fall 2013 Semester

Counselor Supervision Practicum, Community Counseling Clinic, Sam Houston State University, The Woodlands, TX

Provided direct clinical supervision to master's counseling students completing their supervised practicum in the Jacks Staggs Counseling Clinic.

Faculty Supervisor: Mary Nichter, PhD, LMFT, LPC-S

Spring 2013 Semester

### ***Professional Presentations***

Panelist, *The Power of Storytelling: Living with Mental Illness On and Off the Field* panel discussion, with Robert Royal, Marques Ogden and Gerald McRath (2017). Mental Health America Annual Conference, Alexandria, VA.

Panelist, *Behind the Jersey: Uncovering Mental Health in Sports* panel discussion, with Dr. Emmett Gill, Greg Harden, Erick Hipple and Katie Lyons (2015). 1in4 Project, Chicago, IL.

**Williams, C. D.** (2013). *Balancing Act: Maintaining Two Roles as Student and Athlete*. Presented at the Fourth International Conference on Sport and Society in Chicago, IL.

**Williams, C. D.** & Haynes Georgia (2012). *Lifestyles and Careers in the Field Of Criminal Justice*. Podium Presentation for The National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice Spring Conference "Students to Professionals: Where We Are To Where We Want To Be". Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.

Alvarado, M., & **Williams, C. D.** (2012). Presentations, Posters, Oh My! Presented at the 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Professional Growth Conference in Galveston, TX.

**Williams, C. D.** (2012). Sports Counseling: An Emerging Specialty Area in Counselor Education. Presented at the 56th Annual Professional Growth Conference in Galveston, TX.

Alvarado, M., Jones-Trebatoski, K., Bohner, G., & **Williams, C. D.** (2011). Calling All Graduate Students! Are You Taking Good Care of Yourself? Presented at the 55th Texas Counseling Association Professional Growth Conference in Fort Worth, TX.

**Williams, C. D., & Smith, M. L. (2011).** *Team Building & Self Exploration*. Podium Presentation to the McNair Scholars Program at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, TX.

**Williams, C. D., & Smith, M. L. (2010).** *Team Building & Self Exploration*. Podium Presentation to the McNair Scholars Program at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, TX.

Miller, H. A., van Reeuyk, C. L., **Williams, C. D., & Clark, A. (2008).** *A Survival Analysis Evaluation of a Prison-Based Sex Offender Treatment Program*. Poster presented at the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) Annual Conference in Atlanta, GA.

### ***Trainings Attended/Completed***

- 2015 *Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) for Trainers*. Presented by LivingWorks Education. Denver, CO.
- 2014 *Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)*. Presented by LivingWorks Education. Washington, DC.
- 2014 *Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Therapist Certification Program*, Presented by West Penn Allegheny Health System and the CARES Institute. Sponsored by Center for Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents, Austin, TX.
- 2013 *Heads Up To Clinicians Online: Addressing Concussions in Sports among Kids and Teens*. Presented by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention.
- 2013 Summer Leadership Training Institute. Sponsored by Texas Counseling Association, Arlington, TX.
- 2012 Summer Leadership Training Institute. Sponsored by Texas Counseling Association, Fort Worth, TX.
- 2011 *Psychological First Aid Online*. Presented by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
- 2011 *TF-CBT Web: An On-line Training Course for Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy* Presented by the Medical University of South Carolina, National Crime Victims Research & Treatment Center.

### ***Appraisals and Assessments***

Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2)  
 Minnesota Multiphase Personality Inventory-2-RF (MMPI-2-RF)  
 Trauma Symptoms Checklist for Young Children (TSCYC)  
 Trauma Symptoms Checklist for Children (TSCC)  
 UCLA Post-traumatic Stress Index

### **Grants**

Williams, C.D. (2016, November). *A qualitative exploration of a select group of student-athlete mothers who experience a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University*. NCAA Graduate Student Research Grant. (\$1000.00)

### **Scholarships and Awards**

- 2014 Spring Creek Counseling Association Scholarship
- 2013 SHSU International Education Scholarship
- 2013 Sport & Society Graduate Student Scholar Award
- 2012 Texas Counseling Association Educational Endowment Award
- 2011 Outstanding Counseling Student Scholarship. Department of Counseling, Sam Houston State University.
- 2011 Outstanding Service Award. Chi Sigma Iota-Beta Kappa Tau Chapter, Sam Houston State University.
- 2010 Spring Creek Counseling Association Scholarship
- 2007 Jon L. Hagler Scholarship, Texas A&M Foundation, Texas A&M University

### **Service and Affiliations**

#### **Professional**

Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP)  
 American Counseling Association (ACA)  
 American Psychological Association (APA)  
     Division 47- Society for Sport, Exercise & Performance Psychology  
 Chi Sigma Iota (CSI)  
 National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)  
 Texas Counseling Association (TCA)  
 Women Leaders in Collegiate Sports  
 Women in Sports and Events (WISE)

#### **Previous Offices/Committee Assignments**

- 2016-Present NFLPA Cognitive Concerns/Wellness Committee
- 2013-2014 AASP Student Development Committee Member
- 2013-2014 TCA Wellness Committee Board Liaison
- 2012-2014 TCA Board Member
- 2012-2014 Texas Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development  
     Director
- 2012 Blind Reviewer, 56th Annual Texas Counseling Association Professional  
     Growth Conference.
- 2011-2012 Door Prize and Gifts Chair, TCA Professional Growth Conference  
     Planning Committee
- 2011-2012 Secretary, Texas Association for Multicultural Counseling and  
     Development

- 2011-2012 Texas Counseling Association Graduate Student Involvement Committee  
 2010-2011 Chair, Future Fest Career Fair, Chi Sigma Iota-Beta Kappa Tau Chapter,  
 Sam Houston State University.  
 2010-2011 Texas Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development  
 Emerging Leader

### **University, School, and Department Service**

- 2013-2014 Faculty Moderator, Undergraduate Research Symposium, Sam Houston  
 State University, Huntsville, TX  
 2012-2013 Texas A&M University Young Alumni Advisory Board Professional and  
 Career Development Committee Member  
 2010-2011 Career Services Advisory Board Member, Sam Houston State University.

### **Community Service**

- 2016-Present Tutor, Tutorial Ministry, Alfred Street Baptist Church, Alexandria, VA  
 2007-2008 Advisor, Proud African American Youth, Huntsville, TX  
 2005-Present Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc.