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How Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Changed the Well-Being and Athletic Identity of Collegiate Student-Athletes?

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How Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Changed the Well-Being and Athletic Identity of Collegiate
Student-Athletes?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty
of the Department of Leadership Education
College of Education
of Winona State University

by

Malissa J. LeClaire

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Science

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the changes that collegiate student-athletes have experienced in their well-being and athletic identity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was conducted through individual interviews. Participants indicated changes in their well-being that they experienced included: (1) uncertainty, (2) limited social interactions, and (3) maintenance of physical health. Participants also indicated that the changes they experienced in their athletic identities included: (1) a stronger athletic identity, and (2) the transition out of athletics. Recommendations for future research include expanding the study to a larger sample size and examining the psychological effects the student-athletes experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	6
PROBLEM STATEMENT	6
BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM.....	7
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	8
LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS.....	9
DEFINITION OF TERMS	9
SUMMARY	11
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	12
COVID-19	12
WELL-BEING OF COLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES.....	13
ATHLETIC IDENTITY.....	14
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	15
<i>Well-Being Theory</i>	16
<i>Social Identity Theory</i>	16
SUMMARY	17
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	18
RESEARCH DESIGN	18
SAMPLE AND SETTING	18
INSTRUMENT	19
DATA COLLECTION	20
DATA ANALYSIS.....	21
SUMMARY	21
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	22
REVIEW OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT	22
REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN	22
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS	23
FINDINGS.....	23
RQ1: WELL-BEING OF COLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES.....	23
RQ2: ATHLETIC IDENTITY OF COLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES.....	27
SUMMARY	28
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	29
DISCUSSION.....	29
THEORETICAL CONNECTION	30
RESEARCH QUESTION 1 DISCUSSION.....	31
<i>Theme 1: Uncertainty</i>	31
<i>Theme 2: Limited Social Interactions</i>	32
<i>Theme 3: Maintenance of Physical Health</i>	33
RESEARCH QUESTION TWO DISCUSSION.....	34
<i>Theme 4: Stronger Athletic Identity</i>	34
<i>Theme 5: Transition Out of Athletics</i>	35
CONCLUSIONS.....	35
LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS	36
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	37

SUMMARY	37
REFERENCES.....	39
APPENDIX A	46
PARTICIPANT 1 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	46
PARTICIPANT 2 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	48
PARTICIPANT 3 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	50
PARTICIPANT 4 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	52
PARTICIPANT 5 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	53
PARTICIPANT 6 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	54
PARTICIPANT 7 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	55
PARTICIPANT 8 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	56

Chapter One: Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many aspects of everyday life. Leaders around the world have attempted to slow the spread of the virus through various social distancing measures and mask mandates. There have been new regulations on limiting the size of gatherings and postponing and cancelling large events. This has included the postponement and cancellation of intercollegiate athletic competitions across all divisions in the United States. COVID-19 has wrought changes to most aspects of athletes' lives, including their very identities and livelihoods (Reardon et al, 2020). College student-athletes are confronted by distinct academic and performance demands, that in combination with other "normal" developmental tasks, often leaves them feeling conflicted, alienated, and overwhelmed (Tomalski, 2020). These distinct demands can make collegiate student-athletes' overall well-being more delicate than the general college student population. The social distancing measures put in place and cancellation of sports can be detrimental to the already fragile collegiate student-athlete population. This research study will examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity.

Problem Statement

On March 11, 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Global pandemics come with many negative impacts. In the United States, state leaders across the nation have attempted to keep their constituents as safe as possible during the difficult times. Various social and physical distancing measures have been introduced by the authorities including lockdowns of non-essential businesses, closings of schools, universities, and bans on travel, cultural and sporting events, and social gatherings (Parnell et al., 2020). These actions were taken to reduce

the rate of disease transmission in order to lessen the physical and psychological long-term distress from COVID-19. In addition to endangering human health and eventually leading to death, pandemic diseases can also cause irreversible psychological effects (Brooks et al., 2020). In the majority of the studies investigating the relationship between COVID-19 and mental health, COVID-19 was shown to cause negative psychological effects (Lai et al., 2020). The physical and psychological long-term effects of the COVID-19 are unknown as the pandemic is still ongoing.

The social and physical distancing measures to limit COVID-19 exposure has caused athletic events across all levels to be postponed and cancelled. The subsequent restrictions on group training due to social distancing measures, closure of training facilities, and loss of face-to-face access to coaches and support personnel has caused uncertainty and immense stress, anxiety and frustration among athletes (Liu, 2020). Adjustment to cancellation of sports may be very difficult for student-athletes who were highly committed to their identity and role as an athlete (Fuller, 2014). As a distinct population who are constantly facing unique social and academic challenges, student-athletes are at an increased risk for development of psychological problems that may later result in several stressors during their athletic careers (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). The COVID-19 pandemic is unique, and the well-being and athletic identity of student-athletes should be handled delicately during this time. The purpose of this study is to determine how the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity.

Background of the Problem

Nearly eight million students currently participate in high school athletics in the United States, and more than 480,000 compete as NCAA athletes, meaning that only roughly 6% of high

school athletes will go on to play sports in college (NCAA, 2020). Playing sports in college as student-athletes is never an easy task for young adults (Chyi et al., 2018). The academic and athletic demands increase from high school to college. The nature of the student-athlete population presents challenges and stressors related to athletic status that can lead to compromised well-being (Beauchemin, 2014). Collegiate student-athletes' well-being may have changed due to the increased stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collegiate student-athletes may be inclined to identify themselves based on their athletic role on campus (Hawley, Hosch, & Bovaird, 2014). This creates an athletic identity. Research shows that people's experience of social support and their well-being is heavily structured by shared social identification (Rees et al., 2015). Collegiate student-athletes' athletic identity may have changed due to the increased stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has wrought changes to most aspects of athletes' lives, including their very identities and livelihoods (Reardon et al., 2020). As campus activities ceased, student-athletes abruptly became isolated from teammates and were no longer able to participate in sport activities that are often central to their identity as an athlete (Graupensperger et al., 2020). Conducting research during a pandemic has provided unprecedented insights into qualitative research approaches and methodology (Dodds & Hess, 2020). The research conducted during this time will explore the changes collegiate student-athletes have gone through during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

There are two research questions this study will strive to answer. The research questions involve collegiate student-athletes and the impact COVID-19 has had on their well-being and athletic identity.

RQ1: What changes in well-being have collegiate student-athletes experienced since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: How has athletic identity changed in collegiate student-athletes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

By conducting research to answer these questions, collegiate coaches and athletic departments can improve resources and programming for student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity.

Limitations and Delimitations

Due to time constraints and the current ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, online interviews were used to gather data as it was the safest option. Online interviews allowed for student-athletes to provide more in-depth responses about how their well-being and athletic identity has changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, conducting an interview online always limits access to those who may not have internet. Qualitative interviews have inherent limitations, including (but not limited to) the dishonesty of participants and biased responses due to the researcher's presence (Creswell, 2014). The participants were volunteers and were assured that identities would be kept confidential, but participants may not have wanted to be completely truthful about the well-being and athletic identity changes experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The delimitation in this study is the demographic population will be collegiate student-athletes at Division II (DII) colleges and universities in the Midwest. This will include male and female collegiate student-athletes who participated in various intercollegiate sports throughout the 2019 and 2020 academic years.

Definition of Terms

The operational definitions used for this study are listed below:

- Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment (WHO, 2019). Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (WHO, 2019). The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (WHO, 2019).
- Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means keeping a safe space between yourself and other people who are not from your household (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). To practice social distancing, stay at least 6 feet from other people who are not from your household in both indoor and outdoor spaces (CDC, 2020).
- Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others (CDC, 2020).
- Isolation keeps someone who is infected with the virus away from others, even in their home (CDC, 2020).

This study aims to gather information about the well-being of collegiate student-athletes. The components of well-being for this study will include emotional, social, and physical well-being.

In addition, the study will also include student-athlete identity.

- Well-being is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity (Davis, 2019).
- Emotional well-being is defined as the ability to practice stress-management techniques, be resilient, and generate the emotions that lead to good feelings (Davis, 2019).

- Social well-being is defined as the ability to communicate, develop meaningful relationships with others, and maintain a support network that helps you overcome loneliness (Davis, 2019).
- Physical well-being is defined as the ability to improve the functioning of your body through healthy living and good exercise habits (Davis, 2019).
- Athletic identity refers to the strength with which people identify with and embrace their role as an athlete (Fuller, 2014).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the well-being and athletic identity of collegiate student-athletes. Collegiate student-athletes are a unique population that may be more prone to distress and poor mental health even during non-pandemic times. This research will be beneficial in intercollegiate athletics in many years to come in order to better the overall student-athlete experience. Chapter two discusses the review of literature.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

New research on COVID-19 has been evolving daily as the number of cases continue to rise around the world. Recent research examines the impacts the virus has had across all populations, both physically and psychologically. The ongoing pandemic research along with previous research has provided essential information on the collegiate student-athlete populations' emotional, social, and physical states during this time as well as their athletic identities.

COVID-19

In the beginning of January of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a mysterious coronavirus-related pneumonia in Wuhan, China (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). This was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. At first it seemed like the virus would be contained and under control quickly. However, by the end of January, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) confirmed the first COVID-19 case in the United States (American Journal of Managed Care [AJMC], 2020). As the virus continued to spread, WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). As a result, schools were closed, events were cancelled, and people were ordered to stay at home unless essential.

Since COVID-19 was first discovered, the number of cases has risen, plateaued, fallen, and risen again. COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March of 2020. A week after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, California became the first state to issue a stay-at-home order, mandating all residents to stay at home except to go to essential jobs or shop for essential needs (AJMC, 2020). The rest of the United States followed with various stay-at-home orders and mask mandates. This seemed to help in slowing the spread of the virus as states began to loosen restrictions. However, COVID-19 began to rise rapidly again as the Fall and Winter months

approached. The US hit a grim milestone with 100,000 new cases reported in a single day for the first time in early November 2020 (AJMC, 2020). This has caused many states to issue new stay-at-home orders as 2020 ends and the pandemic was still ongoing into 2021. The social and physical distancing measures put in place have had a major impact on athletics across all levels. The closure of training facilities, and loss of face-to-face access to coaches and support personnel has caused uncertainty and immense stress, anxiety and frustration among athletes (Martens et al., 2006). The COVID-19 pandemic had created another stressor for the already fragile college student-athlete population.

Well-Being of Collegiate Student-Athletes

Mental health has become a growing topic in collegiate athletics. As the 21st century closes its second decade, more athletes are speaking out about dealing with mental health issues (Barnhouse, 2019). This has caused researchers to look at the student-athlete as a whole, and not just their physical sport abilities. Mental health and well-being are essential to being able to perform at one's best within career, academics, relationships, and sport (Egan, 2019). Collegiate student-athletes are a unique population. They face unique stressors that can contribute to compromised well-being (Beauchemin, 2014). This population faces different demands and expectations than the general college student population. College student-athletes are confronted by distinct academic and performance demands, that in combination with these other "normal" developmental tasks, often leaves them feeling conflicted, alienated, and overwhelmed (Tomalski et al., 2019). These distinct demands can make collegiate student-athletes more delicate than the general college student population. Student-athletes may be more susceptible to mental health issues (such as substance abuse, depression, and eating disorders) due to the demands of athletic participation (Ryan, Gayles, & Bell, 2018). Symptoms of mental health

distress can create a large disruption to well-being and functioning in relationships, academics and athletics (Egan, 2019). The collegiate student-athlete population's vulnerability to mental health issues have become extremely prevalent during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Bullard, 2020).

As more student-athletes have spoken up about their mental health struggles, there has been more research and actions taken place in order to promote physical and mental well-being of student-athletes (Barnhouse, 2019). COVID-19 has created new stressors on athletes, thus potentially increasing their vulnerability to mental health distress (Reardon et. al. 2020). The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) created the Student-Athletes Well-Being Study that was designed to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student-athletes' current physical and mental well-being. A majority of participants reported experiencing high rates of mental distress since the outset of the pandemic (NCAA, 2020). Although sports have begun to re-socialize since the study took place, concerns for the well-being of collegiate student-athletes, coaches, and staff of all divisions remain (Bullard, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unorthodox time for student-athletes in which their mental health and overall well-being should be handled delicately.

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity refers to the strength with which people identify with and embrace their role as an athlete (Fuller, 2014). Athletic identity may vary based on age, experience, sport, and many other factors. Athletic identity can be conceptualized as both a cognitive structure as a social role (Horton & Mack, 2000). As a cognitive structure, athletic identity provides a framework for interpreting information, determines how a person copes with situations, and inspires behavior consistent with the athlete role (Horton & Mack, 2000). As a social role,

athletic identity may be determined by the perception of those close to the person when then the person's friends, family members or coaches emphasize the athletic dimension (Horton & Mack, 2000).

Athletic talent is often recognized at a young age, and the time and psychological commitment required for success in athletics are such that by the time highly successful athletes reach high school-and most certainly college-they have internalized a strong sense of identification with the athlete role (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). Collegiate student-athletes spend a lot of time training and preparing for their sport that may create a strong athletic identity. Athletic identity is a good indicator that shows how one's athletic involvement and experience can affect the person psychologically and cognitively (Chen, Snyder, & Magner, 2010). Research has shown that disruptive circumstances in an athlete's career (temporary injury, permanent injury, retirement) can pose significant difficulties, especially if the athlete has developed a salient athletic identity (Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013). COVID-19 has caused major disruptions in athletics across all levels which may have created difficulties for collegiate student-athletes with strong athletic identities.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation of the research study is based off theoretical framework. A theoretical framework offers groundwork to understand research and interpret the results (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). This study will explore how COVID-19 has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity. Both the Well-Being Theory and the Social Identity Theory will be used as a base for analyzing the data.

Well-Being Theory

The Well-Being Theory, proposed by Seligman, includes five indicators of well-being. These indicators are supported predictors of achieving an optimal level of well-being (Coffey et al., 2016). The five indicators include positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Positive emotions are the good things that we feel, such as happiness, hope, and joy (Coffey et al., 2016). The positive emotions that collegiate student-athletes may get from sports may have lessened due to sporting events being cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Engagement” is the act of becoming highly absorbed, interested, or focused on life activities (Coffey et al. 2016). Collegiate student-athletes have suffered from less engagement with teammates, coaches, classmates, etc. during the COVID-19 pandemic. Feeling valued by others and having close, mutually satisfying relationships is another key indicator of well-being (Coffey et al., 2016). Collegiate student-athletes’ relationships may have taken a toll due to the social distancing measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Meaning” is having a sense of purpose derived from something viewed as larger than the self (Coffey et al., 2016). Striving for achievement, or accomplishment, is described as persistent or determined drive to master or accomplish something for one’s own sake (Coffey et al., 2016). Collegiate student-athletes may find meaning and accomplishment through sports, and when not competing, may not be the same. These five elements of well-being may have been changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result, changed the overall well-being of collegiate student-athletes.

Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity theory, proposed by Henri Tajfel, states that a person’s sense of who they are is based on their group memberships (McLeod, 2019). In some contexts, a person’s sense of self is defined in terms of personal identity, such that they see themselves, and behave

as a unique individual; but in many other contexts, self-definition and behavior is underpinned by social identity (Rees et al., 2015). Research supports the view that athletes may be inclined to identify themselves based on their athletic role on campus (Hawley, Hosch, & Bovaird, 2014). With sports being cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic, collegiate student-athletes may not be able to resonate with their social identity of being an athlete as strongly. Individual-level athletic identities are important considerations relative to the COVID-19 changes to sport (Graupensperger et al., 2020).

Summary

As more research is being done on student-athlete well-being, the pandemic offers a unique time in these student-athletes' lives that may provide insight to deeper rooted issues. Further research during this time would provide data and ways to better serve student-athletes during this pandemic and in the future. The research conducted on student-athletes' well-being during this time will provide valuable data. Chapter three provides the research methodology.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This qualitative study will explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the well-being and athletic identity of collegiate student-athletes. Chapter three presents the research methodology for the study including the research design and the rationale for the research design chosen. Furthermore, this chapter describes the sample, selection of participants, and the setting. The data collection and analysis process are described in-depth as well as an overview of the institutional review board (IRB) process.

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was used in this study to explore and develop an understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the well-being and athletic identity of collegiate student-athletes. Qualitative research focuses on human experience as it occurs in social life and looks to make sense of social practices (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Using a qualitative research design will allow the researcher to focus on the experiences the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon collegiate student-athletes. Qualitative research can help researchers access the thoughts of participants, which can give the researcher a better understanding of how people react to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The data collected from this research will aim to answer the specific research questions of how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study in order to gain an in-depth perception of the collegiate student-athletes.

Sample and Setting

The sample for this study was composed of male and female collegiate-student athletes at Division II universities and colleges in Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska. The researcher selected participants through purposeful sampling with the help of a previously

existing athletic network. Purposive sampling is common in qualitative research when particular individuals are chosen with characteristics relevant to the study who are thought to be most informative (Anderson, 2010). An email solicitation letter was sent to the student-athletes at the universities and colleges to ask for volunteers to participate in the research study. There were eight student-athletes that volunteered to participate. Out of the eight participants, two attended a university in Minnesota, two attended a university in Iowa, two attended a college in Nebraska, and two attended a university in South Dakota. There was one female and one male participant from each college and university. The participants varied in year in school and the sports they competed in, but they were all a part of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC). Qualitative research necessitates having a small sample because of the detailed and intensive work required for the study (Anderson, 2010). The small sample of eight participants provided in-depth results.

Instrument

The qualitative study was conducted through interviews that took place online via Zoom. With technology changes over the last few decades, the online interview has overcome time and financial constraints, geographical dispersion, and physical mobility boundaries, which have adversely affected onsite interviews (Janghorban, Roudsair, & Taghipour, 2014). The researcher chose to utilize interviews in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a small sample to study how the well-being and athletic identity of collegiate student-athletes has changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews are most appropriate where little is known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants (Gill et al., 2008). In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic was still ongoing as the research was being conducted, therefore, little was known about how it has shifted well-being and athletic identity in

collegiate student-athletes. The interview was designed as a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Gill et al., 2008). The semi-structured interview approach allowed the researcher to elaborate on questions if needed. This approach also allowed the participants to answer as they wished. Proper interview protocol was developed and followed by the researcher throughout the course of the interviews.

Data Collection

The researcher scheduled online interviews via Zoom with each participant at their convenience. Each interview lasted between twenty and forty minutes. A coding system was used to keep the participants' identity confidential. The first participant was coded as participant one, the second participant was coded as participant two, and the pattern followed throughout the remaining interviews. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions to give the participants the opportunity to express their experiences in great detail if they wished to do so. The interview questions are can be found under Appendix 1. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed at a later date.

The collection of data in a qualitative research study can create concern for ethical and confidentiality challenges. These arise primarily from the emergent and unpredictable nature of the methodology involved (Houghton et al., 2010). Before any data was collected by the researcher, each participant signed an informed consent form. The participants were notified that their participation was voluntary, and they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Maintaining confidentiality can be challenging in qualitative research due to the detailed descriptions used to illustrate and report the findings (Houghton et al., 2010). The participants

were informed that identities would be strictly confidential as well as responses. This study followed the informed consent requirements outlined by the Winona State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in qualitative research seeks to combine all data collected and identify coherent themes or patterns that address the area of inquiry (Green et al., 2007). After all data were collected for this study, data analysis was completed by the researcher. The data analysis was the same for both research questions. The researcher conducted thematic analysis. The process included transcribing interviews, coding the interview data, organizing data into categories, and identifying common themes and patterns (Green et al., 2007). Themes are generally aligned with the analytic goals of the study and therefore are designed in response to the study's primary research questions (Lester & Lochmiller, 2020). The researcher is responsible for the data analysis to be as accurate as possible to represent how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the well-being and athletic identity of collegiate student-athletes.

Summary

Chapter three presented the research methodology for the present study. The research methodology included the research design and the rationale for the research design chosen. The sample, selection of participants, and setting were also presented along with the data collection, data analysis and IRB process. This qualitative study will provide information on how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity. Chapter four will examine the results of the research.

Chapter Four: Results

This qualitative study explored how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity. Chapter three described the research methodology. Chapter four will review the problem statement, research design, interview questions, and demographics of the participants. Chapter four will also present the results and findings from the individual interviews with collegiate student-athletes. This will include the identified emergent themes along with interview data.

Review of the Problem Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many disruptions to everyday lives. This included the cancellation of athletic events across all levels. The closure of facilities, training restrictions, loss of face-to-face access to coaches and teammates has caused immense stress, anxiety, and frustration among athletes (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). COVID-19 has wrought changes to most aspects of athletes' lives, including their very identities and livelihoods (Reardon et al., 2020). Little research has been done on how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identities, as the pandemic has still been ongoing.

Review of the Research Design

This qualitative study explored how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity. Qualitative research was chosen for this study in order to help the researcher access the thoughts of participants to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Eight participants volunteered to participate in individual interviews via Zoom. The interviews were designed as semi-structured which consisted of several key questions that helped define the areas to be explored (Gill et al.,

2008). The data collected from the interviews answered the two specific research questions of how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity.

Participant Demographics

Eight collegiate student-athletes volunteered to participate in individual interviews. The collegiate student-athletes were from Division II universities and colleges. Two participants attended a university in Minnesota, two participants attended a university in Iowa, two participants attended a university in South Dakota, and two participants attended a college in Nebraska. There was one male and one female participant from a university or college in each state. The participants varied in academic year and sport.

Findings

The findings of this research study were derived from individual interviews via Zoom. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each participant. Each interview lasted between ten minutes and twenty minutes. Following the completion of all the interviews and transcriptions, the participants' responses were grouped together based on similarity of responses for each question. Throughout this process, the researcher identified emergent themes for each research question. The following section will provide the identified themes for each research question.

RQ1: Well-Being of Collegiate Student-Athletes

The first research question that this study answered involved the changes collegiate student-athletes' have experienced in their well-being since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Well-being is defined as the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity (Davis, 2019). To

explore how collegiate student-athletes well-being changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following research question was proposed:

RQ1: What changes in well-being have collegiate student-athletes experienced since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the collegiate student-athletes' well-being, the researcher specifically asked about the emotional, social, and physical well-beings of the participants. The interview questions that were asked in order to answer this research question included:

Interview question 1A: How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interview question 1B: How has your social well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Interview question 1C: How has your physical well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The multiple components of well-being had unique themes that emerged from the interview responses.

Interview question 1A asked, "How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?" Emotional well-being is defined as the ability to process stress-management techniques, be resilient, and generate the emotions that lead to good feelings (Davis, 2019). When asked about emotional well-being, 25% of the participants responses included stress while 100% of the participants mentioned the uncertainty and ups and downs the pandemic has caused for them. Discussions relevant to this interview question include:

Participant 2: It was really just getting your hopes up and then all of sudden the next week it was back down because I have nothing to look forward to

anymore. It was hard to stay motivated because when we have to run fitness tests I was like “do I even need this if I am not even going to have a season?” It was depressing, sad, and hard to stay motivated when there was nothing to work for. Then it was just really all over the place because I was excited when a schedule came out and then the next week I was back down in the dumps because it got cancelled. So, I would say my emotions have been all over the place. One week I am happy, one week I am sad, and just overall I am very stressed. It has also been hard because as athletes obviously we are sad about our stuff being cancelled, but with so much else going on it is hard. I feel like we cannot be sad because people are dying and instead our seasons get cancelled. I feel like it is a little hard to deal with that and express our emotions as athletes.

Participant 6: I would say it has been a roller coaster with the constant changing and never knowing what is going to happen next. It is hard to mentally prepare yourself when you do not really know what you are preparing for because you do not know if you are having a season, or when you are having a season. So, I would say it has been a lot of ups and downs throughout COVID-19 with just so many unknowns.

Interview question 1B asked, “How has your social well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?” Social well-being is defined as the ability to communicate, develop meaningful relationships with others, and maintain a support network that helps you overcome loneliness (Davis, 2019). Throughout the interviews, the participants identified the ways their limited social interactions that they were able to have, have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the eight participants, 75% of them identified the time spent with teammates had become the highlight of their social lives while gaining stronger relationships with smaller groups of people. Discussions relevant to this interview question include:

Participant 5: It definitely sucked early on being away from everybody on the team. But if anything, I have gotten closer with some of my teammates because it has been a hard thing for all of us to go through. Now that we are all kind of back together for the most part it has been okay.

Participant 6: It is definitely a lot different now. A lot less contact with people but more contact with just my smaller group of friends. Volleyball has been awesome because that is now my social life and the volleyball team is my small friend group. But it is a lot different now that you do not see as many people on campus or have as many interactions anymore.

Interview question 1C asked, “How has your physical well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?” Physical well-being is defined as the ability to improve the functioning of your body through healthy living and good exercise habits (Davis, 2019). Out of the eight participants, 50% of them reported some difficulties to maintain physical health in the beginning but 100% of participants felt they have still been able to stay in shape and feel more motivated now being back on campus and working out with teammates again. Discussions relevant to this interview question include:

- Participant 2: I would say when I was by myself it was harder to stay motivated so I think I took a few more days off this summer than I would have in a regular summer. Then once I was back with my teammates it was easier. We had more of a complete schedule when we were lifting and practicing.
- Participant 5: I would say physically I have done okay. I am probably better than usual because I did not have to play football this year. As sad as that sounds, I know lifting and running are definitely healthier for you long term versus the short term of playing a season. I probably extended my athletic career by a year not just eligibility wise but physically also.
- Participant 6: I would say when COVID first started it definitely went down just because we were trying to do the home workout phase and did not have access to gyms or lifting. So, it definitely was hard in the spring and summer, when COVID first started with limited access to resources. But now that we are able to get in the gym more, it is exciting and I think I am more thankful for the opportunities to just practice, lift and be able to interact with teammates. I am a lot more focused and excited about it than I have been in the past.
- Participant 7: I would say it is probably about the same. I think part of being an athlete during COVID is that it is kind of nice that you are still forced to be active and given ways to be active. So, I would say my physical well-being has stayed about the same since we have been given workouts to follow.

The emergent themes of research question 1 include (1) uncertainty, (2) limited social interactions, and (3) maintenance of physical health. Further discussion on these themes will be expanded in Chapter five.

RQ2: Athletic Identity of Collegiate Student-Athletes

The second research question that this study answered included collegiate student-athletes' athletic identity. Athletic identity refers to the strength with which people identify with and embrace their role as an athlete (Fuller, 2014). To explore how collegiate student-athletes athletic identity changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following research question was proposed:

RQ2: How has athletic identity changed in collegiate student-athletes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The interview question asked in order to answer this research question included:

Interview question 2: How has your athletic identity changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Out of the eight participants, 100% of them reported their athletic identity changed in some way after their sport was taken away for a while during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussions relevant to this question include:

- Participant 1: I never lost the core identity of being a runner. I love to run, and it has been a part of my life for so long now that it is a part of who I am. There were sometimes at the end of summer when our season got cancelled when I questioned if I wanted to keep trying to run competitively and dealing with the disappointment of everything being cancelled. But every time I went down that path of thinking, I always answered it with a “yes, I want to do this” and I think it was always the right answer. I knew the disappointment was temporary and that I wanted to keep being a collegiate athlete because it is a unique experience that not everyone gets to have.
- Participant 2: Yes, I definitely think my athletic identity changed more from the women's soccer player to the women's soccer player and what else does she do. I felt like I went from a soccer player into a question mark almost. So, I guess that is kind of good in the sense that people are not just classifying me as just a women's soccer player.
- Participant 3: I think I clung more to football, personally. I have different goals and aspirations after playing in college, but also, I am not a freshman that

doesn't really care. I am a 6th year now and I feel like I have put my heart and soul into being where I am at and what I have accomplished. I think my identity as an athlete got stronger, personally and I think it is the strongest it has been. It has been the longest year and a half of my life because I did not see myself being here in the first place and then obviously COVID happened and I have not been able to play.

Participant 8: It has kind of forced me to figure out who I am more outside of volleyball. I think it is really easy when you are an athlete to get caught up in that being your whole identity. But now I am a senior so I am done after this year and I will not be an athlete anymore. I think COVID kind of threw us seniors off the deep end and made us learn how to swim with figuring out who we are outside of our sport since it got taken away so abruptly.

The emergent themes of the second research question are (1) stronger athletic identity and (2) transition out of athletics. Further discussion on these emergent themes will be expanded in Chapter five.

Summary

Chapter four has presented the research questions that were answered through the individual interviews. Four total emergent themes were discovered through the data analysis. The emergent themes that were discovered for RQ1 included: (1) uncertainty, (2) limited social interactions, and (3) maintenance of physical health. The emergent themes that were discovered for RQ2 included: (1) stronger athletic identity and (2) transition out of athletics. Chapter five contains interpretation of results, literature comparisons, leadership implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

This qualitative study explored the changes collegiate student-athletes have experienced in their well-being and athletic identity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous chapters discussed background information on collegiate student-athletes' well-being and athletic identity. The previous chapters also included the research questions, methodology, and the results of the study. This study demonstrated the difficulties collegiate student-athletes have faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has changed their emotional, physical, and social well-being. This study also shows collegiate student-athletes' athletic identity has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter five will present the discussion, theoretical connection and conclusions of this study. This chapter also includes leadership implications and provide recommendations for future research.

Discussion

A qualitative research design was utilized to explore the changes collegiate student-athletes' have faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The research design consisted of semi-structured interviews which provided the best approach to examine the experiences of collegiate student-athletes. The research questions guiding this study were the following:

RQ1: What changes in well-being have collegiate student-athletes experienced since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: How has athletic identity changed in collegiate student-athletes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Data collection was performed through individual online interviews via Zoom and the researcher utilized thematic coding to analyze the data. The emergent themes for RQ1 included

(1) uncertainty, (2) limited social interactions, and (3) maintenance of physical health. Two themes emerged for RQ2: (1) stronger athletic identity and (2) transition out of athletics.

Theoretical Connection

Well-being and social identity served as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study. The well-being theory includes positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement as indicators of well-being (Coffey et al., 2016). The social identity theory states that a person's sense of who they are is based on their group memberships (McLeod, 2019).

The participants were asked about the changes they have experienced in their emotional, social, and physical well-beings throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In comparison to the five indicators of well-being included in the well-being theory, the participants' well-being got worse throughout the pandemic. None of the participants identified having positive emotions when discussing emotional well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Various participants felt their social well-being suffered by having less engagement with other people. However, participants did feel that they were able to have more significant relationships with fewer people. Without competition, the student-athletes did not have the feelings of achievement that come with winning games or matches. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused mostly negative changes to these five elements of well-being, and therefore overall caused negative changes to collegiate student-athletes well-being.

Research supports the view that athletes may be inclined to identify themselves based on their athletic roles on campus (Hawley et al., 2014). With the cancellation and postponement of athletic competitions, student-athletes experienced changes in the strength to which they viewed themselves as athletes. Various participants identified the different feelings they experienced in

regard to their athletic identity. When away from teammates and their sport, they did not think of themselves as athletes as much. Those that are continuing to play their sport have started to compete again have felt a stronger athletic identity now than they have in the past. Two of the participants were seniors that did not get to have their final season and are now no longer athletes. These participants experienced a struggle in the abrupt transition that COVID-19 caused.

Research Question 1 Discussion

There are three emergent themes for RQ1, “What changes in well-being have collegiate student-athletes experienced since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?”: (1) uncertainty, (2) limited social interactions, and (3) maintenance of physical health.

Theme 1: Uncertainty

The everyday challenges and stressors that student-athletes face can lead to compromised well-being (Beauchemin, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a lot of uncertainties that created additional stressors that have further compromised collegiate student-athletes’ well-being. The interview question associated with this emergent theme includes:

Interview question 1A: How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Select discussion relevant to this theme include:

Participant 7: I would definitely say there is more stress. There is just a lot more uncertainty about what is going to happen, and a lot more thought goes into every decision you make because there is an additional aspect with COVID. Every decision feels like it has to be a conscious decision. So, I would say just the additional stress is the biggest thing that has changed for my emotional well-being.

As this participant stated, there was a lot of uncertainty that occurred in the world of athletics. Student-athletes were given a competition schedule one week, and then told it was

cancelled the next week. The life of a student-athlete is often very busy and over-scheduled. Extensive time demands can play a significant role in the stress that student-athletes experience (Beauchemin, 2014). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the student-athletes did not have a typical training schedule which created a new type of stressor that compromised their emotional well-beings.

Theme 2: Limited Social Interactions

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused various social and physical distancing measures to be put in place to help slow the spread of the virus. As campus activities ceased, student-athletes abruptly became isolated from their teammates (Graupensperger et al., 2020). This has had a major impact on athletics across all levels. The social and physical distancing measures that have been put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 have affected the social well-being of collegiate student-athletes. The interview question associated with this emergent theme includes:

Interview question 1B: How has your social well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Select discussion relevant to this theme include:

Participant 2: I think it is definitely different. I am more of an introvert than an extrovert anyways, but not being able to have that contact really showed me that I missed that. Whether it be my grandparents, my roommates, my teammates, or some kids in class it is just different not being able to interact, talk, joke about whatever, and having to do meetings like this over Zoom. It was tough not being able to get together for holidays. It is hard because even though you might not realize how important that is, when you do not have it anymore you realize how much you are missing that. It affects you and makes you sad and lonely sometimes. I would say that I did not really realize how important it was to me until it got taken away.

As classes shifted online and sports were cancelled, collegiate student-athletes were isolated from almost every social interaction they typically have on a college campus. Even

when they returned to campus in the Fall, the most social interactions they had were with teammates. This created a decline in the student-athletes' social well-beings.

Theme 3: Maintenance of Physical Health

An important part of being a collegiate student-athlete is physical health and well-being. Physical well-being is defined by the ability to improve the functioning of your body through healthy living and good exercise habits (Davis, 2019). The interview question associated with this emergent theme includes:

Interview question 1C: How has your physical well-being changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Select discussion relevant to this theme include:

Participant 3: Honestly, a lot better. We were able to build our own weight room in our backyard. We squatted on garbage cans for a couple months outside in our backyard. We bought stuff off of Facebook, Amazon, and people brought stuff from home, so we literally had the same stuff in weight room here minus a treadmill. We made it work and if not, I had another buddy that built their own gym in their basement in town. So, I mean working out wasn't an issue for me even without having a gym. We were able to do football drills and stuff like that. From a physical standpoint, my I kept up with lifting and because I knew with everything going on, I also needed to watch my nutrition too.

All of the student-athletes that were interviewed stated that they felt they were able to maintain their physical health throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The student-athletes were given at-home workout programs to follow and often found ways to be creative without being able to access a gym as Participant 3 stated. Fall sports that did not get to have a regular season reported that they actually felt that they were in better physical shape by giving their bodies a break from their sports. Overall, the student-athletes found ways to keep up with their physical well-being.

Research Question Two Discussion

Two themes emerged for RQ2, “How has athletic identity changed in collegiate student-athletes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?”: (1) stronger athletic identity and (2) transition out of athletics.

Theme 4: Stronger Athletic Identity

With campuses being closed and sports being cancelled, collegiate student-athletes’ athletic identity may have changed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As campus activities ceased, student-athletes abruptly were no longer able to participate in sport activities that are often central to their identity as an athlete (Graupensperger et al., 2020). Adjustment to cancellation of sports may be very difficult for student-athletes’ that were highly committed to their identity and role as an athlete (Fuller, 2014). Six participants in this research study indicated that their athletic identity strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview question associated with this emergent theme includes:

Interview question 2: How has your athletic identity changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Select discussions relevant to this theme include:

Participant 6: Now that it is confirmed that I get that last opportunity to get some closure and have a final season I am really just embracing that and trying to be grateful and thankful for the opportunity to play again with all my teammates and have a final senior season. I would say that is a big part of my life right now and a lot of focus I want to place on the final season of being a college athlete.

Participants identified the change they experienced in the strength to which they identify themselves as an athlete throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the eight participants, six are continuing to play their sports for at least one more season at the collegiate level. These six participants had moments of questioning their athletic identity when they were not able to be

with teammates and compete. However, after returning back to campus in the Fall and getting back into a routine, five out of the six participants now feel a stronger sense of athletic identity, while the other participant feels the same as before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 5: Transition Out of Athletics

Research has shown that disruptive circumstances in an athlete's career (temporary injury, permanent injury, retirement) can pose significant difficulties, especially if the athlete has developed a salient athletic identity (Heird & Steinfelt, 2013). Two participants indicated that they were forced to transition out of athletics and their identity as an athlete during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview question associated with this emergent theme includes:

Interview question 2: How has your athletic identity changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Select discussions relevant to this theme include:

Participant 4: For me, I am leaving in May now, so I am not even an athlete anymore. I did not get my senior season. So, for me it completely changed because now I transition immediately to being basically a non-athlete. That waiting period of not knowing if we were going to play or not was really hard and I feel like for athlete's competition is such a big part of your identity so not getting to compete made it really difficult too.

The two participants forced out of their identities as athletes were seniors and did not get to have their final collegiate athletic season of competition. This resulted in them abruptly no longer being an athlete and therefore losing that part of their identity. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused collegiate student-athletes athletic identity to change in many different aspects.

Conclusions

After conducting individual interviews with eight participants, reviewing the literature, and incorporating the findings in chapter four, the researcher draws the following conclusions from the study:

1. Collegiate student-athletes have faced more stress and uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Collegiate student-athletes have gone through a lot of ups and downs in their well-being and athletic identity during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Collegiate student-athletes' athletic identities have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leadership Implications

Conclusion 1: Collegiate student-athletes have gone through a lot of stress and uncertainty throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The student-athletes did not know if or when they would be able to compete and have a season many times throughout the pandemic. The uncertainty of what was to come created a lot of stress for student-athletes which led to lower overall well-being.

Implication: Leaders have a responsibility to keep everyone engaged. Regardless of the current situation of the pandemic, leaders should remain hopeful of the future and keep teammates thinking positively and thinking ahead to when they would get to compete again. Leaders providing a positive outlook on the situation can decrease the stress and uncertainty that student-athletes may have been feeling during this time.

Conclusion 2: Collegiate student-athletes have gone through a roller coaster of feelings about their emotional well-being, social well-being, physical well-being and athletic identity. The constant schedule changes, mask mandates, physical and social distancing measures, quarantines, and lockdowns caused student-athletes' emotions and identities to vary a lot.

Implication: Leaders may have experienced these feelings too but should do their best to be consistent in the world of unknowns. Throughout the ups and downs, student-athletes looked to

control the controllable and any sort of consistency they could find. Leaders can provide consistency through communication.

Conclusion 3: Collegiate student-athletes faced difficulties in regard to their identity as athlete during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of campuses and cancellation of athletic events created an unorthodox time for student-athletes and the life knew as an athlete completely changed causing their athletic identity to change.

Implication: It is important to take into consideration the different phases each person is at in their athletic career and how that may factor into their athletic identity. Each team members situation is unique and may experience changes differently. Leaders should be considerate of differences each team member may experience.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined the changes that collegiate student-athletes experienced in well-being and athletic identity during the COVID-19 pandemic as many sports seasons were postponed and cancelled. Additional research is necessary with a larger sample size to validate and add to the findings of this study. Additionally, further research could include a more in-depth look at the well-being of collegiate student-athletes and the how the changes they experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their mental health. This research has also shown the importance of having programs to assist student-athletes as they transition out of their athletic identities when their playing career ends.

Summary

Chapter five presented the discussion, theoretical connection and conclusions of this study. This chapter also included leadership implications and provided recommendations for

future research. This study demonstrated the changes collegiate student-athletes experienced in their well-being and athletic identity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Appendix A

Participant 1 Interview Transcript

Interview #1 on 2/3/21

Participant 1

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 1: As of recently it has gotten a lot better because we are actually competing. When we went online with everything in the Spring last year, we missed out on outdoor season for track. Over the Summer we were really hoping to be able to compete for cross country in the Fall since we are not a contact sport. Then we got three-fourths of the way through Summer training and out of nowhere coach said we were not having a cross country season. That was awful and really hit hard for me as a low point in the Summer. It sucked doing all that work and then not getting the payoff of getting to compete. After that news, there was about two weeks where I had no motivation to run and convinced myself that I would have plenty of time to make it up if we even got to have an indoor track season in the Spring. That was not the best mindset to have but everything was very topsy turvy and just a really awful time. Then everything was different when we got back to campus this Fall with the mask wearing and regulations. But we knew it was what we had to do so it was not that awful. It was good to be around teammates again and just training together again gave me a huge confidence boost. Then a couple of us actually ended up getting COVID which took a toll on my emotional well-being. The overall experience of getting it was not that bad since I am a healthy 22-year-old in good shape but being quarantined and stuck in my room for two weeks was awful. It really put me in a slump to be away from people and basically not do anything besides sit in my room and using Zoom for classes. It also really messed up my training schedule with having to sit out for those two weeks. Then people went home for break and training got really disrupted again up until about two weeks before this Spring semester started. Right now, we are in indoor track season and our coaches and everyone are doing everything they can to make sure we get to compete and have the meets we have scheduled. I love being able to train with my teammates and to just be there and doing it together, so my emotional well-being has definitely improved lately.

Researcher: How has your social well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 1: In the spring there was not really a whole lot of social interactions because everything was shut down and nothing was going on. I was at home working and doing online classes. I was able to work full time to get hours and make money which was nice to be social going to work. I was busy with work and school, so I did not have a lot of time for a social life anyway in the Spring and Summer. Getting back on campus this Fall was really good for my social well-being. I love my teammates and getting to train with them again. But during the Fall it was difficult because we were around each other all the time but not getting to compete so we got kind of sick of each other. But we are in this really good groove right now as a team. We are hitting workouts and we are all getting along really well. Overall, the social aspect has definitely gotten better since we have gotten back to campus and have been able to compete again.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 1: Over the summer my physical well-being was great up until those last two weeks when we found out we were not having a season and I lost a lot of motivation in that time. But otherwise, I typically ate healthy, kept up with my training, and my summer job is manual labor so that also kept me active. So even when I stopped running for those two weeks, I was still pretty active with working. Then I felt really good through the Fall with cross country training even though we did not have a season up until I actually got COVID. Physically, I was okay when I was sick but taking those two weeks off and being stuck in my room really sucked. That set me back a little bit, so I was running less for a little while to let my body ease back into it. That was probably the low point of my physical well-being but after that I have been in a really good spot with consistent training with teammates. Overall, like everything else, I would say physical well-being also had its ups and downs.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity has shifted or changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 1: I never lost the core identity of being a runner. I love to run, and it has been a part of my life for so long now that it is a part of who I am. There were sometimes at the end of Summer when our season got cancelled when I questioned if I wanted to keep trying to run competitively and dealing with the disappointment of everything being cancelled. I am also not on scholarship, so I was really questioning putting in all the work that I do not get any scholarship money or extra incentive for. But every time I went down that path of thinking, I always answered it with a “yes, I want to do this” and I think it was always the right answer. I knew the disappointment was temporary and that I wanted to keep being a collegiate athlete because it is a unique experience that not everyone gets to have. I am glad I made the right decision for myself and for my teammates, and now with the extra year of eligibility from the NCAA I’ll be able to compete in cross country next Fall and track next Spring. Overall, I would say I may have lost or questioned my identity as a college athlete at times, but I never lost my core identity as a runner.

Participant 2 Interview Transcript

Interview #2 on 2/4/21

Participant 2

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 2: I think it has been super stressful for a lot of people because of all the changes. I do not really like change as a person, but it is the unknown that really gets me too. I think this summer it changed five different times whether we were having a season or not. Our schedule changed 10 times already and then finally it was just cancelled. So, it was really just getting your hopes get up and then all of sudden the next week it was back down because I had nothing to look forward to anymore. It was kind of hard to stay motivated because when we have to run fitness tests I was like “do I even need this I am not even going to have a season”. It was just kind of depressing, sad, hard to stay motivated when there was nothing to work for. Then just all over the place because you are excited about when a schedule does come out and then the next week you are back down in the dumps. It has also been hard because, as athletes obviously we are sad about our stuff being cancelled, but with so much else going on it is almost hard, and I feel like we cannot be sad because people are dying and instead our seasons get cancelled. I feel like it has been a little hard to deal with that and express our emotions as athletes. So, I would say my emotions are all over the place. One week I am happy, one week I am sad, and overall, I am stressed.

Researcher: How has your social well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 2: I think it is definitely different. I think I am more of an introvert than an extrovert anyways, but not being able to have that contact really showed me that I missed that. Whether it be my grandparents, my roommates, my teammates, or some kids in class it is just different not being able to interact, talk, joke about whatever, and having to do meetings like this over zoom. It was tough not being able to get together for holidays It is hard because even though you might not realize how important that is, when you do not have it anymore you realize how much you are missing that. It affects you and makes you sad and makes you feel lonely sometimes. I would say that I did not really realize how important it was to me until it got taken away.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 2: I would say when I was by myself it was harder to stay motivated so I think I took a few more days off this summer than I would have in a regular summer. Then once I was back with my teammates it was easier. We had more of a complete schedule when we were lifting, and when we were practicing. But then by myself, some of the gyms were not open, so I had to come up with new ways, but then doing HIIT workouts all the time got boring. I definitely think it is easier with people. I definitely was more in shape in previous years, but I think that I gave myself a little bit more rest which was also helpful too.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity changed or shifted since COVID-19 has started?

Participant 2: As a college athlete on campus, I am not known as the business or math major or someone who is in charge of best buddies. I am known as the defender on the women's soccer team. So, not having any season it has kind of changed. People still know me as that, but I feel like it is harder to define me as just the defender on the women's soccer team. People cannot put awards or names to you so, then they kind of wonder like "well what else does she do". I felt like I went from a soccer player into a question mark almost. But yes, I definitely think my athletic identity changed more from the women's soccer player to the women's soccer player and what else does she do. So, I guess that is kind of good in the sense that people are not just classifying me as a women's soccer player.

Participant 3 Interview Transcript

Interview #3 on 2/8/21

Participant 3

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 3: I would say it has had its ups and downs. I would definitely say I would be more on the negative side because just with how everything has had to change from a student-athlete standpoint with classes going remote and then not being able to lift in the weight room or relying on your teammates and stuff like that. So, I would say I definitely took a toll just because of literally our world being flipped upside down. It was a lot of talking to your parents and your friends and making sure that you are staying positive and doing what you can.

Researcher: How has your social well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 3: I was very blessed since I stayed here and so I was around the same five to ten people for every day for about eight months. I did not go home at all, so I guess in the social aspect I was still fine. I was able to facetime my parents every day or call them if needed. But just because we were in that select group for so long, I was still positive because I always had people in my corner. Nothing really changed socially, for me.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 3: Honestly, a lot better. We were able to build our own weight room in our backyard. We squatted on garbage cans for a couple months outside in our backyard. We bought stuff off of Facebook, Amazon, and people brought stuff from home, so we literally had the same stuff in weight room here minus a treadmill. We made it work and if not, I had another buddy that built their own gym in their basement in town. So, I mean working out was not an issue for me even without having a gym. We were still able to do football drills and stuff like that. From a physical standpoint, I kept up with lifting and because I knew with everything going on, I also needed to watch my nutrition too.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity changed or shifted since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 3: I think I cling more to football now, personally. I know I am in a unique situation compared to everybody else, just because where I stand academically. I guess in a way I see it differently than some people. I have different goals and aspirations after playing in college, but also, I am not a freshman that does not really care. Compared to myself being a 6th year, I feel like I have put my heart and soul into being where I am at and what I have accomplished. I think my identity as an athlete got stronger, personally. Like I said I was squatting on garbage cans and wearing hoodies and a winter hat in March. I biked four miles every day to my coach's house to do yoga in the front yard with his wife for months just for something to do. I think just being able to find a way to stay in shape even though the resources were not there, we made the most of it. I think honestly my athletic identity has gotten to be the strongest it has been, and it has

been the longest year and a half of my life because I did not see myself being here in the first place and then obviously COVID happened and I have not been able to compete in so long.

Participant 4 Interview Transcript

Interview #4 on 2/9/21

Participant 4

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 4: It has definitely gotten worse probably just because not being in the gym as much when it is healthy to be working out all the time. I think for most athletes, competition is just a big part of who we are and not getting to compete or know what is going on has been hard. I think the uncertainty of it has not helped. I think there has been support from administration, coaches, teammates and whatnot, so I think it has hard but there has been support too.

Researcher: How has your social well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 4: It has definitely been harder. We cannot get together in bigger groups, so it is hard for your whole team to hang out on the weekend or hang out with more than a couple of people. So, I think it is difficult to just even hang out with people sometimes.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 4: I think early on, it was harder when we were not in the gym. It was hard to work out by yourself, or not have a schedule, but I think now it has been pretty much back to normal.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 4: For me, I am leaving in May now, so I am not even an athlete anymore. I did not get my senior season, so I think especially for a lot of athletes, but for me like it completely changed because now I transition immediately to being basically a non-athlete. That waiting period of not knowing if we were going to play or not was really hard and especially, I feel like for athlete's competition is such a big part of your identity.

Participant 5 Interview Transcript

Interview #5 on 2/10/21

Participant 5

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 5: I would say overall I have been okay. But there have definitely times dealing with the uncertainty of where season was going to go and just the general uncertainty with everything that it definitely took a toll on me emotionally. Especially close to the end of the summer we were not sure if we were going to play or not.

Researcher: How has your social well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 5: It definitely sucked early on kind of being away from everybody on the team. But if anything, I have gotten closer with some of my teammates because it has just kind of a hard thing for all of us to go through. Now that we are all kind of back together for the most part it has been okay.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 5: I would say physically I have done okay. I am probably better than usual because I did not have to play football this year. As sad as that sounds, I know lifting and running are definitely healthier for you long term versus probably the short term of playing a season. I probably extended my athletic career by a year not just eligibility wise but physically also.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity changed or shifted since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 5: I do not know if it has changed that much. I guess it kind of did since we had a lot of guys graduate at the end of last season. If anything, it has kind of accelerated the process now that all of a sudden, I am an upperclassman. The pandemic accelerated the fact that I am one of the older guys. For me it did not happen gradually over time, it was a couple months and then all of a sudden, I went from one of the younger to middle guys in my position group to being one of the oldest.

Participant 6 Interview Transcript

Interview #6 on 2/11/21

Participant 6

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 6: I would say it has kind of been a roller coaster with the constant changing and never knowing what is going to happen next. It has been kind of hard to mentally prepare yourself when you do not really know what you are preparing for because you do not know if you are having a season, or when you are having a season. So, I would say it has been up and down a lot throughout COVID-19 with just so many unknowns.

Researcher: How has your social well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 6: It is definitely a lot different now. A lot less contact with people but more contact just with my smaller group of friends. Then volleyball has been awesome because that is now my social life and the volleyball team is in my small friend group. But it is a lot different now that you do not see as many people or have as many interactions anymore.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 6: I would say when COVID first started it definitely went down just because we were trying to do the home workout phase and did not have access to gyms or lifting. So, it definitely was hard in the spring and the summer, when COVID first started with limited access and resources. But now that we are able to get in the gym more it is exciting and I think I am more thankful for the opportunities to just practice, lift, and be able to be interact with teammates. I think I am a lot more focused and excited about it than I have been in the past.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity changed or shifted since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 6: I would say, with COVID it had kind of gotten lost for a little bit just because in the spring we did not know what the season would look like and I was not sure if I was done being an athlete or if I still had another chance of one final season. So, for a while I was kind of lost and I was not really sure if I had to come to terms of being okay with it or if I was going to get that final opportunity. That was wavering a lot in the beginning, but now that it is confirmed that I get that last opportunity to get some closure and have a final season I am really just embracing that and trying to be grateful and thankful for the opportunity to play again with all my teammates and have a final senior season. I would say that is a big part of my life right now and a lot of focus I want to place on the final season of being a college athlete.

Participant 7 Interview Transcript

Interview #7 on 2/11/21

Participant 7

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 7: I would definitely say there is more stress. There is just a lot more uncertainty about what is going to happen and a lot more thought goes into every decision you make because there is an additional aspect with COVID. I would say every decision feels like it has to be a conscious decision. So, I would say just the stress is the biggest thing.

Researcher: How has your social well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 7: I definitely think one of the biggest ways it has changed, even when you are around people in a class and stuff, it almost feels like there is a little bit of a wall because everybody is in a mask and there is always that thought of how close you can get to them and stuff like that. It is difficult because you do not want to offend anybody, so I think it definitely makes you feel more distant from people, even if you are with them, it still feels more distant.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 7: I would say it is not any different now that we have been back in school. But when it first when it first happened, it was definitely different trying to figure out how nutrition needed to change since I was not being as active and how to make sure that I still got activity in. It was not as easy as when you are at school with a schedule of practice and all that stuff you have to do. Whereas, at home you had to be much more intentional about making sure that you get things done and figuring out kind of what works during that time. It was not just maybe thinking about one or two things that you do extra outside of practice, it was planning out your whole day for how you can stay in shape and stuff like that.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity has changed or shifted since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 7: I would say it did not change too much for me. I was still pretty focused throughout the break as far as I did not ever drift away from thinking of myself as an athlete or as a baseball player. I mean it definitely makes you more grateful for it, but I do not think it necessarily changed my identity as far as thinking of myself in a certain way athletically.

Participant 8 Interview Transcript

Interview #8 on 2/11/21

Participant 8

Researcher: How has your emotional well-being changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 8: It has kind of been up and down like I think it has been for a lot of people. Initially it almost was better because everything was shut down and it just felt like I had all the time in the world to myself and I had plenty of time for my schoolwork and everything with volleyball being done. Then I think after a while I got to the point where I missed it and then it was almost too much down time and I had a lot of time to think. So, I think it has been kind of up and down with working hard and we were here all summer and then having our season taken away was obviously kind of low point, but then we got to still be here in the Fall and work with the team and that was kind of a high. So, I think it has been kind of up and down for sure.

Researcher: How has your social well-being has changed since the start of COVID-19?

Participant 8: I think since it started, I have definitely been a lot less social with a greater number of people, but I have gotten a lot closer to a smaller number of people. I kind of really got closer with a smaller group of people rather than having like less significant relationships with a bigger number of people.

Researcher: How has your physical well-being has changed since the startup COVID-19?

Participant 8: I would say it is probably about the same. I think part of being an athlete with COVID is that it is kind of nice that you are still forced to be active and given ways to be active. So, I would say about the same since we have been given workouts to follow.

Researcher: How has your athletic identity changed or shifted since COVID-19 started?

Participant 8: It has kind of forced me to figure out who I am more outside of volleyball. I think it is really easy when you are an athlete to get caught up in that being your whole identity. But now I am a senior so I am done after this year and I will not be an athlete anymore. I think COVID kind of threw us seniors off the deep end and made us learn how to swim with figuring out who we are outside of volleyball since it got taken away so abruptly.