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# Warm-Ups to Business Suits: Identity Development of Female Student-Athletes

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## Interview Protocol

1. Are there people who have had a significant influence on your career interests- who are the people and how have they influenced?
2. Why are these people's opinions important to you?
3. If these people have different views about what you should do for a career, how would you handle their different viewpoints?
4. Can you tell me about a situation where you had to make a difficult decision? Would you tell me a story about what happened including how you handled the decision and how others helped you or hindered you in dealing with it?
5. How do you feel your college experience has affected your beliefs and values?
6. In what ways do you see yourself as the same from when you began college and ways you see the way yourself differently than when you began college?
7. College is often a time of exploring multiple perspectives- encountering people who grew up differently than you, people who hold different beliefs than you, encountering new ideas, in class etc.? Have you encountered new perspectives? Tell me about them. Finally how that experience affect the way you see things?
8. How do you think coming to college has affected who you are and the way you see yourself? Has it affected the way you see your academic goals?
9. What question does this raise for you to explore in the future? How might you go about doing that?

## Athlete Experiences

The student-athletes who participated in qualitative interviews for this project discussed a wide variety experiences, but some of themes of their talks mentioned that being a member of an athletic team exposes them to diverse groups that they may otherwise not have encountered. Professionals in the field of higher education who work with student-athletes should create experiences in which these athletes can reflect on these relationships and make meaning about them.

Additionally, since the athletic identity portion of being a student-athlete is central to a student's sense of self, it is important for advisors, coaches and all those who work closely with student-athletes to help prepare them for the transition from being in athletics to new roles they will fill upon graduation.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Office of Academic Services for Student Athletes for helping me obtain participants.

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if female student-athletes struggle with developing their internal voices because they have a wide range of external formulas that they must answer to in order to meet the demands of being a successful Division I student-athlete. Some of the restricting systems these student-athletes must follow include, but are not limited to coaches, trainers, professors, tutors, academic coordinators and others that are not mentioned here. It is important to determine what aspects of being a female student-athlete allow these student-athletes to listen to their internal voices. This study will inform student affairs professionals about how to facilitate better learning experiences for this unique student population.



## Results

- Female student-athletes feel as they are a distinct group separate their fellow students.
- Female student-athletes have a common identity with a group and a theme of the interviews shows that "they feel they have a family-like" bond with their teammates.
- Female student-athletes feel that they have shared experiences of expectations and hardships with balancing their lives as both students and athletes. They feel that they wish people understood that they must maintain strict schedules for sleeping and completing homework.
- Team participation and responsibility develops maturity in female student-athletes and seem to feel that their responsibilities help them reflect on their life choices.
- Each of the participants mentioned the importance of relationships with coaches in terms of their academic, athletic, or personal development and success.



## Participants

- Traditional age collegiate female student-athletes
- University of Dayton students
- Variety of sports: individual and team sports
- First-year, sophomores, juniors, and seniors
- Student-athletes with previous high school sport experiences



**"You know there is a piece of me that no one is going to touch and no one was going to take it away from me or that love of the game" -Sarah**

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## Recommendations

Student-athlete culture has several different cultures within itself. The first potential area of valuable research includes comparing how groups of female student-athletes on two different sports teams construct their identities differently. Information revealed by a participant in this study suggested that she has a specific mentality based on her participation in running. This is an area that calls for further examination to fully understand the mindsets female student-athletes have based on the specific sport in which they choose compete. This type of study would be benefit athletic advisors and learning specialist who work specifically with particular athletic teams.

The content of the qualitative research for this study also raised the question of female student-athletes who have critical roles within a team develop differently than other athletes within the same team context. The study could take shape by interviewing student-athletes who have key roles such as setter, point guard, pitcher, goalie, or other positions that are critical for a team's success. Student-athletes in similar positions could be interviewed at various institutions of higher education.

Investigating female student-athletes that belong to different racial groups is an area of interest because they may construct their reasons for participating in Division I athletics differently than those in the majority racial culture.

**"If I am no longer an athlete... will I be able to find other things, not to make myself stressed out, but other things that I can enjoy once I am no longer an athlete" – Karen**

