Embodiment, Scholarship Pressures, and Eating Disordered Behaviors in Division II Collegiate Athletes

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Embodyment, Scholarship Pressures, and Eating Disordered Behaviors in Division II Collegiate Athletes

A Dissertation Project

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Kelsey Blum, M.S.

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Abstract

The present study sought to explore embodiment, eating and exercise behaviors, and the pressures that Division II team-sport athletes face. Six female collegiate team-sport athletes with scholarships participated in a focus group and reflected on their relationships with their bodies, eating and exercise patterns, and pressures they experience as student athletes. Participants also completed questionnaires regarding their experiences with eating and embodiment. A reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) resulted in an overarching theme of “pressure to perform impacts athletes’ lives”, reflecting the dominant message participants shared regarding intense pressures experienced by student athletes. This overarching theme expanded into three main themes. The first theme, “athletes’ exhaustion from pressures”, reflects the fatigue experienced due to the multiple responsibilities athletes have and the pressure to succeed in all of their responsibilities. This was further explained by the subtheme “little time for self-care”. A second theme was “pressure causes disruptions in embodiment”, which reflects student athletes’ disrupted relationships with their bodies due to sport demands. This was further explained by the subtheme of “negative body image perceptions”. The final theme, “scholarship is an added pressure”, reflects the additional pressures of a scholarship. This led to the subtheme of “competition for position on team”. Results show that there is pressure to always perform well for student athletes at the Division II level, and this pressure has consequences on all aspects of their lives, including their relationships with their bodies.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Every 62 minutes, at least one person dies as a direct result of an eating disorder, making this the deadliest mental illness (National Eating Disorders Association, 2019). Athletes are particularly vulnerable to developing eating disorders with as many as 13.6% developing eating disorders, as compared to a prevalence rate of around 4.6% for non-athletes (Fewell et al., 2018). For this reason, more research would be helpful to better understand what aspects put athletes at risk for developing eating disorder behaviors, in addition to understanding the protective factors of being an athlete. The purpose of this research is to identify risk and protective factors for eating disorder symptoms in collegiate athletes who participate in team sports. While there are some conflicting findings in the existing research, it is clear that being an individual-sport athlete versus a team-sport athlete puts an athlete more at risk for developing eating disorder symptoms (Pamuk et al., 2020). However, that does not mean that team-sport athletes do not face their own unique pressures that put them at risk for disordered eating behaviors. Therefore, it is important to understand the specific pressures that team-sport athletes face, and what risk and protective factors are present. This study specifically aimed to examine team-sport student athletes’ experiences of embodiment, the pressures of maintaining athletic scholarships, and how these are related to eating and exercise habits. First, the current research on disordered eating behaviors among athletes will be reviewed. This includes an explanation of the different types of eating disorders, and the pressures that athletes experience that may contribute to the development of eating disorders. Potential factors that may protect student athletes from eating disorders will also be discussed. Next, the pressure of maintaining an athletic scholarship at the collegiate level will be discussed. Then, the concept of embodiment will be examined, including its relationship
to eating disorders and its importance in understanding eating disorders in athletes. Finally, the proposed study will be presented.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Eating Disorder Behaviors Among Athletes

Around 28.8 million people in the United States will suffer from an eating disorder at some point in their lifetime (Arcelus et al., 2011). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), eating disorders are categorized as a disturbance of eating or eating-related behavior that results in an individual having an abnormal consumption/absorption of food, leading to impairment in both physical and psychosocial functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Anorexia nervosa is a type of eating disorder that includes restricting one’s energy intake to less than required, which leads to a significantly low body weight. Anorexia nervosa consists of two types: restricting or binge-eating and/or purging. Restricting type involves an individual using dieting, fasting, and/or excessive exercise to accomplish weight loss. Binge-eating/purging type involves the individual engaging in episodes of binge eating or purging behaviors through self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas, in addition to the restriction of food and excessive exercise. Bulimia nervosa is characterized by cycles of binge eating episodes followed by compensatory behaviors (e.g., self-induced vomiting, excessive exercise) to compensate for binge eating. According to the DSM-5, binge eating disorder involves an individual eating large quantities of food, quickly to the point of discomfort, experiencing a loss of control while eating, and experiencing feelings of shame and guilt after binge episodes (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Another type of eating disorder listed in the DSM-5 is Other Specified Feeding and Eating Disorder (OSFED). This diagnosis is given when an individual experiences disordered eating (e.g., food restriction, binge episodes, purging) to the level where it impairs their
functioning and/or causes significant distress, but their symptoms do not meet the criteria for one of the previously mentioned eating disorder diagnoses. It is important to note that many people do not meet strict diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge eating disorder, but still suffer from a significant eating disorder. OSFED is a serious and life-threatening disorder (National Eating Disorders Association, 2019. One study looking at 2,000 eating disorder patients at the University of Minnesota’s outpatient clinic found a mortality rate of 5.2% for clients with OSFED, which is a higher mortality rate than anorexia nervosa (4%) or bulimia nervosa (3.9%) (Renzoni, 2020).

One type of eating disorder that is not formally recognized in the DSM-5, thus falling into the OSFED category, is orthorexia nervosa. Orthorexia nervosa is an eating disorder in which the individual engages in an obsession to eat healthful food to the point of fixation that leads to damaging their own well-being. This individual may engage in checking ingredients and calories excessively, cutting out many food groups, and feeling stress when “healthy” foods are not available (Donini et al., 2005).

An athlete is an individual who is trained to perform exercises, sports, or games that require them to use physical strength, agility, and stamina (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020). For the purposes of this literature review, an athlete will be defined as an individual who participates in an organized sport that follows specific governing league rules. When looking in the literature, it is clear that eating disorders are prevalent among collegiate athletes. One study examining 522 female athletes and 448 non-athletes found that 18% of athletes were diagnosed with an eating disorder compared to only 5% of non-athletes (Joy et al., 2016). This suggests that being an athlete puts an individual at risk for developing an eating disorder. Another study of 1,445 Division I athletes found that 10% of the females and 13% of the males reported binge
eating behaviors (Williams, 2016). In addition to binge eating prevalence, orthorexia is also prevalent among collegiate athletes. One study looked at orthorexia nervosa in 116 male and female collegiate athletes compared to 99 non-athletes using the Orthorexia Nervosa Scale-15 (ORTO-15). The researchers found that around 28% more of the student athletes were engaging in orthorexic behaviors. This was particularly noted in athletes who were undertaking high volumes of exercise when compared to their non-athlete counterparts.

Athletes are prone to making drastic changes to their health and bodies to maintain peak performance such as implementing a more rigorous workout routine or restricting their diet (Heller et al., 2005). One study by Anderson and colleagues (2012) examined 25 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I female athletes from different universities who compete in gymnastics, swimming, and diving to examine how the environmental pressures of their sport affect their body satisfaction. The study was a longitudinal study, and measured the participants twice, first in September (at the start of their athletic season) and then again in February (at the end of their athletic season), five months later. The study used a modified version of the Weight Pressures Scale by Reel and Gill (1996) to gather information about how the pressures that the female athletes face affect their diet, and their desire to change their body to improve their performance in their sport. This study found that some of the pressures that athletes face that lead them to more body conscious behaviors include the environment that they are surrounded with that focuses on what the athletes are eating, how much the athletes weigh, and the leanness of their body. The study further explained that this pressure to be thin may be caused by the message the athletes receive from the coaches that a thin/small body will perform better, the requirement to wear tight/revealing uniforms that all look the same, and comparisons of body weight between teammates (Anderson et al., 2012). Other researchers have found similar
results, including that the athletic pressures experienced also often lead athletes to adapt their eating and exercise habits, such as reducing their calorie intake and limiting the types of foods that they will eat. Athletes also may implement more demanding exercises into their routine in an attempt to fit the “ideal” that is expected of them to keep their spot on their team (Goltz et al., 2013).

When looking at the research on which populations are most susceptible to eating disorders, it is apparent that athletes are at an increased risk. This can be seen through the construct of what is known as the Female Athlete Triad. The American College of Sports Medicine found that there is an association between disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis in female athletes, meaning that each of these coexist relative to an athletes’ restrictive eating patterns. These components were more likely in female athletes who were more skilled at their sport and are indicative of the pressure that the athlete may put on themselves in order to succeed in their sport, and therefore are inclined to jeopardize their health due to the pressure they are under to perform (Thein-Nissenbaum, 2013). Over time, the Female Athlete Triad has been further investigated and refined to reflect what females face as athletes. Currently, the female athlete triad consists of the following three components: energy availability, menstrual dysfunction, and bone mineral density. For an athlete to be considered affected by the Female Athlete Triad, the athlete must have one of the three components present, with or without an eating disorder (Gibbs et al., 2013). This triad was described for females, but researchers are starting to look more closely at how these components may affect males as well. The Male Athlete Triad is said to consist of similar components as the Female Athlete Triad: energy availability, low testosterone levels (which would replace menstrual dysfunction), and bone mineral density. Due to the dangers of low energy availability, it would be crucial for athletic
departments to consider the triads for both females and males and provide support for athletes who may experience one or more of the components (Siobhan, 2020). This can help reverse the energy deficit experienced in the athletes, and help them maintain peak performance in an appropriate and healthy way.

Current research looks at the pressures that are most likely to lead to the development of disordered eating behaviors in athletes. Pressures that have been posited include type of sport, type of uniform, team pressures, internal standards for performance, pressure from coaches, and academic financial pressures. Much of the literature focuses on individualized sports as opposed to team sports, given there have been more risks found among individualized sports over team sports. In a study done by Haase (2009), 137 female athletes who participate in both individual sports and team sports completed the Social Physique Anxiety Scale (Hart et al., 1989), The Eating Attitudes Test (Garner & Garfinkel, 1979), and reported their body mass index to determine the relationship between disordered eating, perception of their physique, and the type of sport that they participate in (individual or team). The study found that individual-sport athletes are more likely to be in an environment where there is a greater emphasis on the athlete’s physique, putting them more at risk for engaging in disordered eating behaviors. Because individual or judged-sport athletes are at risk of competing with themselves, they often experience more eating disorder symptoms than team-sport athletes. An individualized sport is when an athlete competes alone, leaving the result to be up to the single athlete. Alternately, a team sport is one that depends on the entire team working together to earn the most points (Hamilton, 2013). Although most research supports individual sports as placing athletes more at risk for disordered eating, this does not mean those involved in team sports are free from body-related concerns. Stoyel and colleagues (2020) studied 1,017 male and female athletes through
online questionnaires. Questionnaires were used to measure sport pressures, body satisfaction, eating behaviors, affect, and modeled behaviors. The researchers found that 47.6% of team-sport athletes and 52.4% of individual-sport athletes had body dissatisfaction, a risk factor for eating disorders. Body dissatisfaction for both types of athletes was due, in part, to comparing themselves to their teammates and feeling obligated to be better than them.

Another added pressure that may be present in athletes is the requirement to wear a specific uniform. Many uniforms, particularly for females, are tight or revealing for both individual and team sports. Female athletes often feel the need to lose weight to maintain the aesthetic beauty of their sport and to look good in tight or revealing uniforms (Soubliere & Gitimu, 2016). This may lead to the athletes comparing themselves to others more frequently due to differences in how the uniform fits teammates or competitors. Tight and/or revealing uniforms also highlight body shape, and draw attention to any flaws the athlete perceives.

Athletes often participate in their sport full-time, making them face expectations from coaches and teammates year-round, which may cause the disordered eating behaviors to become part of their everyday lives (Wells et al., 2015). Division I, for example, is very competitive and requires athletes to train year-round to perform their best when in their peak season. Year-round demands contribute to the pressures that the athletes are always facing and the expectations they hold for their bodies, appearance, and their weight (Anderson et al., 2012). In a qualitative study conducted by Arthur-Cameselle and colleagues (2017), psychological, physical, relational, and environmental factors that led to eating disorder behaviors were examined. The group consisted of 29 female athletes recruited from universities. The most common psychological factor associated with the onset of their eating disorder behaviors was a feeling of low self-worth from comparing themselves to others. The athletes reported feeling that their teammates were more
skilled and fit athletes. This evidence supports the immense pressure that athletes put on themselves as a result of social comparison with teammates.

In addition, there are internal pressures athletes put on themselves in relation to their sports (e.g., pressure to earn a starting spot on their team, have the fastest time, score the most points). These pressures may lead athletes to feel that they are competing with their teammates to stand out to meet the expectations of the coaches and to be the best at their chosen sport. When comparing themselves to teammates, they may look at their bodies as what is holding them back or making them weaker than their teammates. This comparison often causes athletes to change their eating and exercise patterns to control their bodies to be the ideal (Goltz et al., 2013). When looking at 242 female athletes between the ages of 13 and 30 who participated in both aesthetic and non-aesthetic sports, Kantanista and colleagues (2018) found that female athletes compete with their teammates to achieve the ideal body shape for their chosen sport.

Further research on Division I athletes found that coaches have encouraged unhealthy attitudes and behaviors related to athletes’ eating and weight. Based on the messages that the athletes receive from their coaches, athletes may change their diet and engage in over-exercising in order to meet the expectations of their coaches, teaching athletes that these attitudes and behaviors are acceptable, normative, and expected (Kantanista et al., 2018). One study found that more than 60% of female athletes reported feeling pressure from coaches to maintain a lean body physique and low body weight. This same sample reported parental influences contributing to the pressure to maintain the “thin ideal” and increasing the athletes’ body dissatisfaction (Kong & Harris, 2015). This research supports the idea that the coaches and parental figures place an emphasis on the weight and appearance of their athletes in an attempt to have athletes perform better at their chosen sport.
Given previous research, it is useful to research disordered eating behaviors in general, and behaviors related to orthorexia specifically when studying collegiate athletes (Clifford & Blythe, 2018). The distinguishing factor between disordered eating and diagnosable eating disorders is the degree to which the individual is experiencing the behaviors (Gottlieb, 2014). Disordered eating behaviors are often seen as precursors to diagnosable eating disorders, and can be dangerous to the individual regardless of whether or not a diagnosis of an eating disorder develops. Due to the dangers of disordered eating behaviors, and the frequency of these behaviors among collegiate athletes, the proposed study will look at disordered eating behaviors.

**Risk and Protective Factors for Athletes**

Although there is evidence that pressures on athletes can lead to disordered eating behaviors in both team sports and individual sports, much of the research looking at the mental health of team-sport athletes has found team sports may serve a protective role for student-athletes (Egan, 2019). When examining the literature, team-sport athletes have been found to have less emphasis on a lean physique (Wells et al., 2015). Fransen and colleagues (2020) found when looking at 289 handball players that there is a “social cure” when participating in a team-sport as opposed to an individual-sport setting due to these athletes being more open to making themselves comfortable disclosing who they are and receiving support from teammates. The study also talked about how the messages coaches, team captains, and informal athlete leaders send to their team play a role in how supported the team members will feel, and in the overall well-being of the team (Fransen et al., 2020). This information provides insight in how a team-sport athlete may feel more supported by their team, reducing their risk for an eating disorder and other mental health conditions.
One study looking at prevalence of negative body image and disordered eating patterns in 58 Division II college athletes (participating on both team and individual sports) and 196 college non-athletes found that while student athletes had more negative body image endorsement than their non-athlete counterparts, non-athletes endorsed more disordered eating behaviors (Gaines & Burnett, 2014). This could be explained by the desire to want to hold a lean physique in order to play better at their sport, but not wanting to alter their nutrition intake due to the need to fuel their bodies.

Within the literature, researchers have examined “lean sports” and “non-lean sports”. Lean sports are defined as being focused on endurance, aesthetic, and are weight dependent. Non-lean sports are defined as being focused on an external object (e.g., basketball, softball), power, and technique (Mancine et al., 2020). Additionally, non-lean sports are representative of sports that are typically played with multiple teammates on the field at one time. Therefore, the literature on non-lean sports can be applied to the team-sports that are discussed in this study.

A systematic review examining body image concerns in student athletes of all types (i.e., lean and non-lean sports) as compared to non-athletes found that athletes endorsed higher levels of body esteem as well as endorsed valuing their body and its functions when compared to their non-athletic counterparts (Varnes et al., 2013). This provides support that there are more positive connections between both lean and non-lean sport athletes and their bodies. However, the literature consistently shows that lean sports are more problematic than non-lean sports when considering disordered eating behaviors. This was supported by Mancine and colleagues, who found through a systematic review that athletes participating in lean sports endorsed higher ratings of disordered eating when compared to athletes participating in non-lean sports (2020).
However, some research has found that there are also risks to being on a team sport for an athlete’s mental health. One study looked at 756 athletes between the ages of 6 and 18 years old who were on either a team sport or an individual sport and compared their motivations for choosing their type of sport over the other. This study found that 11.3% of children and adolescent athletes suffer from anxiety or depression. This statistic supports the idea that the anxiety and depression rates in athletes are increasing, as compared to the prevalence rate of 8.7% reported in 2005 for anxiety and depression within this population. The researchers also explain that the pressure of team sports can be comparable to individual sports in that team-sport athletes face competition, coaching concerns or the dynamics among teammates, as well as an increase in accountability to do well in their own position (Pluhar et al., 2019). Additionally, Sheehan and colleagues (2018) found that team-sport athletes were likely to have extrinsic motivations when playing their sport (e.g., reward or punishment from coaches or keeping up with teammates when playing), which was found to increase the athletes’ anxiety. These findings support the idea that although a team-sport atmosphere may provide protective factors to an athlete when compared to individual-sport athletes, there is still pressure to perform and comparison between teammates, which may lead to mental health concerns.

The existing literature supports the idea that collegiate athletes are at risk of developing disordered eating behaviors. However, there are limitations to the existing body of research on athletes’ disordered eating behaviors. First, most research has examined female athletes. Females in general are susceptible to the anxiety from comparing themselves to others, and from societal influences that result in weight concerns (Wells et al., 2015). Because females are more susceptible to comparison, and have significantly higher rates of eating disorders, researchers pay limited attention to males and the strain that they face. Male athletes are also at risk,
especially those who perform in sports that require being weighed on a scale in front of the coach and team, a specific size of their body, a specific look to their body, and those that emphasize diet (e.g., wrestlers, gymnasts, swimmers). Within these types of sports, 33% of males and 62% of females develop disordered eating behaviors (Fielder-Jenks, 2014). In addition to limited research on males, existing research mainly focuses on Division I collegiate athletes, with very few studies looking at the other Divisions.

**Academic and Scholarship Pressures**

Athletes experience multiple expectations that must be met in order to be eligible for their sport. Maintaining academic eligibility amongst an athlete’s busy schedule is one common stressor among collegiate athletes (Goltz et al., 2013). Academically, there is a demand for all students to maintain appropriate grades while in college, but to keep their spot on a sports team, athletes have an enhanced obligation to maintain their grades in order to participate (Huml et al., 2019). One study found that athletes face multiple pressures academically. One pressure that the researchers discuss is athletic identity in the classroom, meaning that an individual thinks and feels like an athlete and uses competition for self-expression through making themselves known as an athlete to their classmates and professors, and portraying their desire to perform well academically, similar to their desire to perform well at their sport. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2021) found that student athletes also feel a sense of social isolation in the classroom, due to spending most of their time at facilities designated for athletic purposes due to the limited time within their schedule. Similarly, another pressure athletes face is academic clustering, meaning that there are 25% or more of a particular team in one major or class. Athletes also have time constraints when it comes to getting work done due to the busy schedules that the athletes experience between school, practices, extra trainings, and games. This may lead to comparison
of performance in the classroom and on the field between teammates. Finally, the researchers found that the pressure to keep going is another stressor of being a student-athlete, which may lead to burn-out. This is due to the expectation for athletes to perform well in multiple domains of their life (e.g., athletic performance, academic performance, social life, and self-care), with limited time availability. This becomes a pressure for an athlete, because although the student athlete is experiencing burnout, the expectation to keep going in order to stay eligible is still present (Huml et al., 2019).

Another common stressor for athletes who obtain an athletic scholarship is the competitive nature of maintaining the scholarship. This competitive nature is often dependent on the funding accessible, based on the NCAA. NCAA university athletic programs are categorized by Division level. There are three Division levels: Division I, Division II, and Division III. Whether a school is categorized by Division I, II, or III depends on the number of teams that the school has, the size of each of their athletic teams, the difficulty of their game calendars, and the financial support that the athletic department has (Burrell, 2019). Differing Division levels offer different scholarship opportunities for student athletes (Berkman, 2015). Much of the research on athletes focuses on Division I, where acquiring a scholarship is more competitive; but once accepted to the school, the athletes are given the scholarship throughout their time on the selected sports team. Division I is known for having the best athletes in the NCAA (Burrell, 2019). Because college is an expensive investment, students are often looking for scholarship opportunities to pay for school. Division I athletic programs often have more financial opportunities, a larger student body, and put more emphasis on their athletic programs, making it an appealing option for a skilled athlete. For this reason, athletes must maintain excellent athletic performance while maintaining an appropriate GPA to keep their athletic scholarship; thus, they
may feel extreme pressure to keep their bodies in peak shape. In a qualitative interview, six Division I female hockey players reported that transitioning from high school to the Division I level included changes in their weight, eating, and exercise requirements before and upon starting their Division I program (Heller et al., 2005).

The Division II level is less sought after by serious high-level athletes than Division I, although many of these athletes often have the same skill and competitive level as those participating in Division I sports (Burrell, 2019). At the Division II level, there are fewer opportunities for receiving a scholarship, which makes the nature of scholarships at the Division II level more competitive (Berkman, 2015). The stress of the limited scholarship opportunities, paired with the competitive nature, may lead to athletes creating maladaptive behaviors (e.g., restriction, binging, purging, and over-exercising) in order to be considered the most fit athlete. However, very little research has been conducted on Division II athletes.

The Concept of Embodiment

Embodiment is a relatively new construct within the eating disorder literature; thus, there is little research looking at embodiment and athletes. In general, literature has found that disruptions in embodiment can lead to eating disorders (Piran, 2016). As defined by Piran (2016), embodiment is how an individual feels and experiences their body and its functions. This construct can help researchers understand and address the maladaptive behaviors that occur with eating disorders (Piran & Teall, 2012). Embodiment focuses on the way that our body functions and separating the physical/objectified body (what others notice) from the lived body (what the individual feels) (Musolino et al., 2016). Piran’s definition of embodiment encompasses five components: a) body comfort and connection, b) agency and functionality, c) experience and expression of desire, d) attuned self-care, and e) inhabiting the body as a subjective site.
Body comfort and connection is how in tune, aware, and connected the individual feels with their own body and engaging in positive self-talk to counter adverse social influences. An example of positively experiencing body comfort and connection would be an athlete who takes the time to appreciate what their body does for them before, during, and after their sport. An example of negatively experiencing body comfort and connection would be engaging in negative self-talk in line with social influences, such as telling oneself “I am not skinny enough” or “I am not as fast as my teammates”. Agency and functionality focuses on the individual taking action through their voice and behavior to share their beliefs. An example of experiencing this in a positive way would be someone who is educated about the negative impact of dieting choosing to speak against diet culture. An example of experiencing this in a negative way would be a female athlete not doing karate because she feels like it is a “male’s activity”. Experience and expression of desire includes being aware of one’s needs and desires (i.e., sexual desires and appetite) and expressing them. An example of positively experiencing this component would be an athlete noticing when their body is hungry after practice, and honoring that desire by eating what their body needs/wants. An example of negatively experiencing this component would be the opposite, either where the athlete does not recognize their hunger cues, or notices their hunger, but suppresses that hunger. Attuned self-care is when the individual is interested in particular activities and allows themselves to engage in those activities. A positive example of this would be an athlete noticing their body needing rest and using their off days from their sport to take time off to let their body rest. A negative example of this would be if an athlete wakes up sick, instead of taking the day off to recover, the athlete goes to their practice/game not feeling well. Finally, inhabiting the body as a subjective site involves resisting objectification. An example of positively experiencing this component would be an athlete caring about how their
body feels during their chosen sport, rather than focusing on their physical attractiveness when they play the sport. A negative example of this would be an athlete showing their body off in a way that conforms with the cultural standards of beauty, such as through how they use their uniform or how they present themselves outside of their sport (Piran, 2019). Haase’s (2009) study focused on female athletes and found that they are more likely to be in an environment that emphasizes physique. This supports the idea that female athletes are inclined to focus on their physical features, which affects the way that they portray their body to others in the world. When looking at the literature on embodiment, Musolino and colleagues (2016) found that defining oneself through the evaluation of others (i.e., being judged, competing against another) in a negative way can lead to a disruption in embodiment.

Research focusing on the embodiment of females leads to possible explanations of why females feel they are less competent and therefore reduce their involvement in physical activities. Because sports come with the connotation of being masculine, females experience a comparison to males that causes them to stray away from sports, especially those deemed more “masculine” (e.g., football, wrestling) in order to be more “feminine” (Piran, 2019). Young (1990) explained that females are not given an opportunity to use their body in a free and open way with the world, as well as not encouraged to develop specific bodily skills the way males are. This leads females to engage in more individualized sports that are more attractive to men and more accepted by societal ideals (e.g., ice skating, cheerleading, and gymnastics). However, participating in non-contact sports that judge bodies, may lead to females feeling that they need to change their body to fit the standard expected (e.g., seeking a smaller body size). Individuals who partake in these types of competitions can experience their bodies as objects instead of from
a first-person perspective (Monteleone et al., 2017). This aspect, common among female athletes, directly disrupts embodiment.

Piran (2016) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study of 69 women and girls about their experiences living in their bodies. The study used interview questions that focused on body experiences throughout one’s life history (e.g., “What would your body say?” “How did you feel in your body?”). The interview questions also asked about times that the women and girls felt both good and bad in their bodies. Based on the information gathered from this study, the five components of embodiment noted above emerged. Research has found that when individuals experience a disruption in embodiment (i.e., negatively experiences at least one of these components), this disruption can lead to disordered eating behaviors (Piran, 2016).

When looking at the literature, there is little research on how athletes experience their body and how their experiences as athletes may impact how they experience their body. Most of the research focuses on the experience of exercise alongside embodiment. Ackard and colleagues (2002) explained dysfunctional exercise as exercising without proper hydration or nourishment, in unsafe environmental conditions, while injured, and as a way to punish or harm oneself. When an individual experiences attunement with exercise, they are experiencing physical activity that reflects being mindful of the body, and caring for the body’s needs (Tylka et al., 2019). Ackard and colleagues’ (2002) research explained that to maintain a positive experience with one’s body, one must be attuned with exercise. Daubenmier (2005) looked at 43 females who practiced yoga and 51 females who did not. The researchers had each group of participants complete a self-report of their participation in exercise, as well as questionnaires that assess body satisfaction, body awareness, and disordered eating attitudes and behaviors. The study found that participants who practice mindfulness yoga and focused on healing and attunement regularly
experienced more body awareness, body responsiveness, and body satisfaction when compared to participants who do not practice yoga. When an athlete partakes in exercise, it is crucial for the athlete to experience a sense of attunement to avoid dysfunctional exercise (Ackard et al., 2002). Athletes who experience attunement while exercising can perform better at their chosen sport than those who do not. However, it is hard for athletes to develop this attunement with their bodies due to living in a culture that encourages dysfunctional exercise (Mond & Calogero, 2009).

When looking at the literature, the research on the embodiment construct has been done with females, with little research on male participants. One study using the Experience of Embodiment scale on men and women found that women were more likely to experience a disruption in embodiment when compared to men (Holmqvist et al., 2018). As noted previously, more research is also needed on the construct of embodiment in athletes.

The Present Study

The pressures collegiate athletes experience are not limited to Division I athletes. More research is needed to examine these factors in Division II athletes, and how the added pressure of limited scholarship opportunities, paired with the competitive nature of Division II sports, may lead to athletes taking extreme measures (i.e., disordered eating behaviors) to maintain peak performance (Berkman, 2015). Most of the research has been done on Division I, individual sports, and female athletes. The literature is also limited when examining embodiment with males, as well as embodiment with athletes. More research is needed in order to understand embodiment in team-sport athletes (including embodiment in male athletes), and disordered eating behaviors in Division II athletes. Examining these pressures for team-sport athletes is
important due to the comparative nature present amongst teammates, as well as the pressure of not wanting to “let the team down” when on a team sport.

The present study examined Division II athletes through qualitative methods to assess embodiment, eating, and exercise behaviors in team-sport athletes. The study further explored the perceived pressure of maintaining a Division II athletic scholarship. In addition to a qualitative focus group, the study also utilized quantitative questionnaires; however, based on the small sample size, more emphasis was placed on the qualitative findings (i.e., data from the focus group). Quantitative findings (i.e., data from the questionnaires) were used solely as auxiliary information to get a general understanding of eating behaviors and ratings of embodiment for the sample, and develop a better understanding of the qualitative findings.

The study used a qualitative approach in order to give voice to Division II student-athletes and provide rich and diverse information regarding embodiment, eating and exercise behaviors, and the pressures that the team-sport athletes face. Through a reflexive qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), the present study attempted to explore the experiences and pressures that Division II athletes face, and to what extent athletes feel they need to change their bodies. A reflexive thematic analysis was used in order to get the researcher’s interpretation of the information gathered in the focus group. Additionally, the use of qualitative thematic analysis through a focus group allowed the student athletes to respond freely, and offered the opportunity for the researcher to probe in order to acquire more than an initial response, and allowed for a thorough understanding of the athletes’ experiences. This approach also aided in answering “why” and “how”, rather than the “what”, often found in quantitative research. This allowed for the athletes’ experiences to be a collection of descriptive information that leads to a clearer understanding of the pressures that student athletes experience (Crust & Nesti, 2006).
Additionally, qualitative research allows for a focus on human subjectivity (Horton et al., 2019), which allows for sensitivity to the complex experiences of eating and exercise behaviors, scholarship pressures, and embodiment among the student athletes.

Because this study aimed to elicit a wide range of perspectives and views of disordered eating, embodiment, and scholarship pressures, Braun and Clarke (2013) support the use of focus groups to allow participants to feel comfortable speaking to peers, rather than placing participants in an atmosphere that they may find intimidating (i.e., one on one with a researcher). Focus groups provide an atmosphere that allows for “everyday talk” around disordered eating, embodiment, and scholarship pressure.
Chapter 3: Methods

Participant Recruitment

Participants targeted for the study were collegiate athletes who receive some sort of athletic scholarship. At West Chester University, each athletic team is allotted a particular amount of scholarship funding to be distributed to chosen players at the coach’s discretion. Typically, there are not many full scholarships, if any. In 2018-2019, 61% of WCU’s scholarship funding dollars were spent on female athletes, with 66% of the 304 WCU female athletes being awarded some amount of scholarship funding. (This is the most current information available for WCU student athletes’ funding.) The following men’s sports are active on WCU’s campus: baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, and track and field. The following women’s sports are active on WCU’s campus: basketball, cheerleading, cross country, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, rugby, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball.

For the purposes of this research, a team sport is defined as one that depends on the entire team working together, with multiple athletes participating at once, to accumulate the most points together. Sports eligible for this study were basketball, baseball, football, soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, rugby, softball, and volleyball. Club sports teams were excluded from this study due to the inability to obtain a scholarship at the club sport level.

The study initially planned to recruit a sample of 20 collegiate athletes, consisting of 10 females and 10 males between the ages of 18 and 25 who receive some form of athletic scholarship. This study was advertised as a study about the experiences of team-sport student athletes at the Division II level, and their eating and exercise behaviors. Participants needed to be on the roster for a NCAA Division II university team sport at West Chester University, must
have participated for one full year in their sport at the Division II level, and must receive some form of athletic scholarship funding from West Chester University. Funding amount was not specified. Participants were initially recruited through an email explaining the study purpose and procedures. The researcher sent an email to the coaches and asked them to forward it to their athletes (see Appendix A). This attempt to recruit through coaches was made at three time points. However, with only two responses from student athletes from this method, the researcher emailed the coaches and requested that the researcher attend a practice to recruit participants in person (see Appendix B). The researcher was permitted to attend the women’s volleyball, rugby, and basketball practices. At these practices, the researcher read the initial email to the student athletes (see Appendix A) and asked interested athletes to provide their name, email address, and general availability on the provided sign-up sheet. After collecting names from the three teams, as well as contacting the two previously interested student athletes, a list of 15 female athletes was generated. The researcher then picked the focus group time that worked for the greatest number of athletes, and at that point six female athletes were chosen to participate in the study. A follow up email was sent to those who did not indicate availability for the focus group time selected. This email offered those participants the opportunity to still attend if they could make the chosen time (see Appendix C). No responses were received to that email. Due to no response from male team student athletes and coaches, only female student athletes were examined in this study.

Participants

Participants in the study were six female collegiate athletes, between the ages of 19 and 22 ($M = 20.5, SD = 1.17$). The participants consisted of two second year students, two fourth year students, one third year student, and one fifth year student. Two participants reported living
on campus, three participants reported living in off-campus housing, and one participant reported living at home with their parent/guardian. Five identified a socioeconomic status of upper middle class, while one identified as being from a lower socioeconomic status. A majority of the sample identified as Caucasian, with one participant identifying as Latina/Hispanic, and one participant identifying as Black/African American. In this study, women’s basketball (n=1), lacrosse (n=1), and volleyball (n=4) were represented.

**Procedures**

The study was approved by West Chester University’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix D). The researcher emailed the chosen athletes to inform them they had been selected for the study, the date and time of the planned focus group, and the instructions for completing the informed consent form (see Appendix E). The researcher asked the athletes to sign and return the consent form prior to the focus group (see Appendix F). The day before the study, the researcher sent the participants an email to confirm the receipt of their informed consent form and included the Zoom link for the focus group (see Appendix G). The researcher also sent a reminder email with the same information the day of the focus group (see Appendix H). The athletes then participated in one remote focus group (via Zoom) lasting 90 minutes, where the researcher asked questions to gather information about the athletes’ experiences of embodiment, eating and exercise behaviors, and perceived pressures, including pressures from holding a scholarship (see the complete script for the focus groups in Appendix I). The athletes were asked to keep their cameras on throughout the entirety of the focus group. The script used for the focus group was developed in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

**Objective A: Experiences of embodiment among female team-sport athletes**

1. How do team-sport athletes feel in their body?
a. Do athletes feel in tune with their body?

2. How does being a team sport athlete affect an athlete’s relationship with their body?
   a. How does being on a team sport positively affect an athlete’s relationship with their body?
   b. How does being on a team sport negatively affect an athlete’s relationship with their body?

3. How well do athletes assert their needs in order to maintain physical and mental well-being?
   a. How comfortable are athletes asserting their needs with coaches?
   b. How comfortable are athletes asserting their needs with teammates?
   c. How comfortable are athletes asserting their needs themselves? (e.g., taking a rest day if needed, being aware of what your body needs and taking it)?

**Objective B:** Perceptions of pressures related to athletic scholarships among female team-sport athletes

1. What are the pressures of being a student athlete?

2. What pressure comes with having an athletic scholarship that is separate from the pressures of being a student athlete?
   a. What is expected of an athlete in order to achieve an athletic scholarship?
   b. What is expected in order to maintain a scholarship?
   c. How do these pressures affect you?
Objective C: Perceptions of the team-sport culture around eating and exercising for female team-sport athletes

1. What is the team culture surrounding nutritional behaviors?
2. What is the team culture surrounding exercising/training?
3. What messages do athletes receive about their bodies as a result of being on their team-sport and who most often delivers these messages? (e.g., need to gain/lose weight, need to be a specific height, etc.)

The focus groups were video-recorded through the Zoom application which was stored on the researcher’s password protected laptop, and audio-recorded on the researcher’s password protected phone. The audio-recording served as a back-up in the event of a Zoom recording malfunction. At the conclusion of the focus group, the athletes were sent a link through the Zoom chat feature to complete questionnaires on their computers anonymously through Qualtrics. The participants completed scales regarding demographics, embodiment, and disordered eating behaviors. The participants were also given the option to provide any additional information regarding any of the topics discussed during the focus group that they did not feel comfortable sharing with the larger group. Due to a small sample size, internal consistency was not computed for any of the measures, and results from the questionnaires should be interpreted with this in mind.

Following completion of the focus group and questionnaires, participants were emailed to be debriefed, thanked, and provided with resources if they felt that they needed support after participation. Resources included information for the University’s counseling center and the National Eating Disorders Association Helpline. The email also included a $25 Amazon
electronic gift card as compensation for participation. (See Appendix J for a copy of the debriefing statement).

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire included age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, year in school, living situation while attending school, and chosen sport. Participants were asked whether they currently hold an athletic scholarship. (See Appendix K for a copy of the demographic questionnaire.)

Disordered Eating Behaviors

The Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q; Fairburn & Belgin, 2008) was used as a measure of disordered eating behaviors. This scale targets disordered eating behaviors present in the previous 28 days from time of administration. The EDE-Q consists of four subscales, and a total of 28 items. The first subscale is Restraint, which consists of questions regarding restriction of food intake (e.g., “Have you tried to exclude from your diet any foods that you like in order to influence your shape or weight?”). The next subscale, Eating Concern, consists of questions regarding concerns around eating behaviors (e.g., “Have you had a definite fear of losing control over eating?”). The third subscale, Shape Concern, consists of questions regarding concerns about body shape (e.g., “Have you had a definite desire to have a flat stomach?”). The last subscale is Weight Concern, which consists of questions regarding feelings about current body weight (e.g., “Have you had a strong desire to lose weight?”). Items are answered on a scale from 0-6. This scale is a measure of frequency with the following anchors: 0 (“never”), 1 (“1-5 days”), 2 (“6-12 days”), 3 (“13-15 days”), 4 (“16-22 days”), 5 (“23-27 days”), and 6 (“every day”). Additional items ask that the participant respond to a set of questions regarding their
weight, shape, and comfort in their body within the past 28 days. These responses were answered on a scale of 0-3. This section included the following anchors: 0 (“not at all”), 1 (“slightly”), 2 ("moderately”), 3 (“markedly”). The higher the score, the more severe disordered eating behaviors the participant experiences. The questionnaire also provides spaces for participants to provide additional information regarding their choices to the 28-items. This information is not required. This information is strictly used as a way to clarify answer choices of the participants (Berg et al., 2012). The EDE-Q is reported to be a reliable and valid measure, with acceptable internal consistency. The alphas for each subscale range from 0.70 to 0.93 (Berg et al., 2012). (See Appendix L for a copy of the EDE-Q.)

The Orthorexia Nervosa Inventory (ONI; Oberle et al., 2020) was used to assess athlete’s eating behaviors when it comes to making decisions about their food choices. Orthorexia is defined as an eating disorder that involves an obsession to eat only healthy food (Donini, et al, 2005). The ONI consists of 24 multiple-choice items for participants to rate how frequently they engage in the behaviors. Items are scored on a scale of 1-4: 1 (not at all), 2 (slightly), 3 (mainly), 4 (very). The higher the participant scores, the more orthorexia nervosa symptoms the participant is experiencing. The scale includes three subscales, including items measuring orthorexia nervosa behaviors, impairments, and emotions. The first subscale, Behaviors, consists of questions regarding the individual’s food behaviors (e.g., “I follow a healthy diet with many rules”). The next subscale, Impairments, consists of questions regarding the level of impairment the individual experiences regarding their food (e.g., “My healthy eating is a significant source of stress in my relationships”). The third subscale, Emotions, consists of questions regarding the individual’s feelings regarding food and food choices (e.g., “I feel much guilt or self-loathing when I stray from my healthy diet”). The ONI is recognized as a valid scale and has good
internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.94 across all subscales and ranging from 0.88 to 0.90 for the individual subscales. The scale also has good reliability, as evidenced by a 2-week test-retest with a coefficient of 0.91 (Oberle et al., 2020). (See Appendix M for a copy of the ONI.)

**Embodiment**

The Experience of Embodiment Scale (EES; Piran & Teall, 2012) is a 34-item questionnaire that was used to assess athletes’ levels of embodiment. Piran’s (2016 qualitative work with girls and women helped develop the dimensions of embodiment. The EES consists of six subscales: Positive Connection with Body (e.g., “I feel at one with my body”), Body-Unencumbered Adjustment (e.g., “My body reduces my sense of self-worth in the world”), Agency and Expression (e.g., “I find it difficult to express my emotions”), Experience and Expression of Sexual Desire (e.g., “I am comfortable with my sexual feelings/desires”), Self-Care and Attunement (e.g., “I take good care of, and am respectful of, my body”), and Countering Self-Objectification (e.g., “I care more about how my body feels than about how it looks”).

Participants respond to items on a Likert scale anchored as follows: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (somewhat disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (somewhat agree) and 5 (strongly agree). The higher the EES total score, the more positively the individual is experiencing embodiment. The EES total score will be used as a measure of embodiment in the athletes. The EES has been validated for all subtests through an exploratory factor analysis. The EES contains good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha=0.81), and high test-retest reliability ($r=0.77$) (Piran, 2019). (See Appendix N for a copy of the EES.)
Chapter 4: Results

Reflexive Statement

As part of the reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013), it is important to consider how the researcher’s own experiences could affect the findings and the conceptual underpinnings of the research. To aid in remaining objective while conducting a reflexive thematic analysis, the primary researcher reflected on their own subjective experiences and how that may affect the results of the study through journaling as well as self-reflection with the faculty advisor, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013). The faculty advisor and primary researcher engaged in cross referencing of the information frequently to ensure that the reflections of the primary researcher were not overshadowing any of the findings. This allowed for an in-depth engagement with the focus group transcription and allowed for the primary researcher to reflect on the analysis in a meaningful way when developing codes and themes, while also leaving space for objective interpretation of the findings. In addition, the coding and candidate theme development process was done by the primary researcher independently as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013) who believe that reflexive thematic analysis is meant to capture the primary researcher’s independent thoughts and engagement with the data and analytic process.

Although the primary researcher was never a collegiate athlete, nor suffered from symptoms of an eating disorder, the primary researcher has been studying eating disorders and has been part of a campus eating disorders prevention program for nearly seven years, and has worked with eating disorders in a clinical settings for the past two years. This experience was recognized when conducting the study and evaluating the findings to ensure that the interest in
eating disorders did not bias the prompts given during the focus group, nor did it bias the codes and themes developed during the analysis.

** Reflexive Thematic Analysis **

To perform a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), a research assistant first transcribed the information collected during the focus group from the Zoom recording. The research assistant followed along with the video-recorded focus group to capture the discussion, as well as the non-verbal behaviors that the student athletes displayed during the focus group. While transcribing, the research assistant deidentified the participants, assigning each participant a number (i.e., Participant #1, Participant #2). The research assistant also deidentified the sport that each of the student athletes participated in to maintain confidentiality. When this process was completed, the research assistant was compensated for their work and the transcript was sent to the primary researcher.

The primary researcher then reviewed the research assistant’s work. This involved re-watching the focus group recording and following along with the transcript to ensure accuracy of the transcript. Minor edits were made to the transcript by the primary researcher. The primary researcher then went through the transcript two more times to develop codes. During this process, the primary researcher highlighted passages from the transcript that related to the research questions. Then, the primary researcher went through the highlighted passages and assigned initial codes to each passage. After generating a lengthy list of initial codes, the primary researcher went through the list to look for similar codes that could be condensed into one. At this point, the primary researcher listed the codes in order of importance, based on how often the code appeared as well as the emphasis or agreement among the focus group participants. The primary researcher and the faculty advisor discussed the codes to ensure there were no overlaps
in codes. Then, the primary researcher went back through the transcript and assigned the final codes to each highlighted passage. The final list of codes can be found in Appendix O.

After generating a final list of codes, the primary researcher developed candidate themes that reflected the main ideas that emerged from the codes. Initially, the primary researcher developed one overarching themes, three themes, and six subthemes to tell the story of the focus group discussion. See Figure 1 for the initial thematic map.

**Figure 1.**

*Initial overarching themes, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the focus group.*

As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013), it is important to review and condense the overarching themes, themes, and subthemes to the simplest form. For this reason, the primary researcher and faculty advisor together refined the themes on the thematic map so that the most important content from the focus group would be depicted in the simplest way. After thorough review of the candidate themes, a final overarching theme, three themes, and three subthemes
were identified to address the main content from the focus groups. See Figure 2 for the final thematic map.

**Figure 2.**

*Final Overarching Themes, Themes, and Subthemes Developed from the Focus Group*

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**Pressure to Perform Impacts Athlete’s Life**

An overarching theme of **pressure to perform impacts athlete’s life** reflects the pressures that student athletes face in all aspects of their lives as a result of being a part of their team sport and representing the university. Throughout the focus group, participants consistently mentioned feeling pressure to perform well whether they are engaged in their sport, working on their academics, or participating in social activities.

“I feel like it’s expected of athletes to have to have it all together. Like practice, games, sports, and then academics... you kind of have to map it all out and have time for everything...
There is just like a standard with student athletes to be on top of everything and do well and be happy [there is] this like high bar that you’re expected of” - Participant 4

“It’s just a different standard that we’re always held to because we’re expected to be the perfect person, perfect grades, you play on a sports team, perfect social life and it’s just the pressure...” - Participant 6

“My coach stresses to us that if there’s some type of holiday or event at school, just know that you represent [your team], know that they know who you are. So you have that on you so if you don’t represent us right then that’s a whole thing. That could be a pressure like knowing that you represent a whole university. So you have to stay in line somewhat.” - Participant 5

Three main themes around this overall pressure emerged during the focus group: athletes’ exhaustion from pressures, pressure causing disruptions in embodiment, and scholarship as an added pressure.

Athletes’ Exhaustion from Pressures

The theme of athletes’ exhaustion from pressures was developed in order to capture the high level of fatigue expressed due to the many different responsibilities present for a student athlete, and the idea that the student athlete needs to perform well in all of these responsibilities. The student athletes reported needing to succeed academically, behaviorally (i.e., staying out of trouble), and in their sport, performing well both at practices and games. These numerous expectations lead to the athletes feeling overall exhaustion, wanting to take a break but feeling unable to.

“Rest on your body is really important and I feel like athletes sometimes take that for granted and you don’t expect how it will affect your performance... I expect my body [to keep up] like okay now I have practice, now I have homework, now I have class. Stretching it to have
time for me, like hanging out with my team or hanging out outside of sports, you expect your body to do all this and then play a game? So you have to prioritize” -Participant 5

“After traveling hours on the bus and not getting enough sleep, all these things, [like] constantly having practice, it hits a point where you’re like okay I need a change in my schedule… my body still does it but even getting out of bed to go to practice, it’s like ugh! Until you’re actually in the flow of playing, it like takes a lot for me to actually have the energy to want to do it all”-Participant 3

A subtheme, little time for self-care, arose from student athletes reporting having little time for self-care when they are in season. They expressed feeling that they do not have time to fuel their bodies properly with nutritious meals, nor are they able to move/rest their bodies in ways that feel replenishing.

“I was just going to say my answer to your question ‘what do you do for your body’ was ‘not enough’… especially during season I feel like I forget to do the extra things, I’m just getting by on the required things. Like okay I showered after practice, that’s good I’ll lay in bed now. I just can’t do the extra things, like drinking water.” -Participant 4

“I wish there was a better way. I feel like we just hit a point where it’s like oh this is our whole life it’s just a constant loop of the same things, I wish I had more of a social life. I wish during the week I could do normal things without having to rush back. Like I’ve been trying to schedule a hair appointment for weeks now and I literally can’t find time” -Participant 3

“We get [a] fueling station at our practices. So our practices are 2pm to 4pm and sometimes I come right after class at 1pm and [I will have] an uncrustable and a bag of like sun chips or popcornts [and that’s] my lunch. And like that’s pretty like awful. Then after practice I
go home and try to make myself a good meal [and] sometimes that doesn’t always happen. So then my meal [is] an uncrustable for the day.” -Participant 1

This subtheme is also connected to the student athletes experiencing a disruption in embodiment (as reflected by a dashed line), due to not taking care of themselves and ignoring the cues that their bodies are sending them. This is discussed more below.

**Pressure Causes Disruptions in Embodiment**

The theme of pressure causes disruptions in embodiment captures how the pressures the athletes experience can result in them ignoring the cues their body is sending them. This theme suggests that while athletes have an awareness of the choices they are free to make when it comes to food, exercise, and self-care, the pressure to perform supersedes their ability to assert their needs and can cause athletes to make decisions that are not in line with positive embodiment. This theme is also connected to the push through mentality reported from the athletes to continue to play despite body cues. As noted above, this is also influenced by the little time for self-care that the student athletes report and how that leads to difficulty in listening to what the body needs and honoring those needs.

“I kind of force myself to [play] and if the coaches really need you they’re like ‘does your ankle really hurt that bad?’ , ‘can you just go back in the game for a little bit? ’… I feel like partially I can be like you know I really do need to sit out, but then there’s also a little bit like a pressure [from coach], like go back out there and go play” -Participant 6

“I feel like you have to have a higher pain tolerance, like if it hurts you learn to play through it. I also broke my foot and I [played on it] for a whole week and I was like there is no way this thing is broken and then a week later I got an x-ray and they were like oh it’s broken and I was like oh...” -Participant 2
“Even if you’re having an off day or you’re not feeling well you get to practice and it’s like okay well you’re supposed to forget about everything else in your life at the moment and now you have to perform cause you’re a student athlete and that’s what’s expected of you” – Participant 4

“I need to go to the gym [is due to] fear [of] gaining weight or when I would return to school in the fall when our season [starts] I would be out of breath or out of shape completely compared to my other teammates who I know would love going to gym all the time or something like that. I would push myself to do it [go to the gym] out of fear of either gaining weight or just not being caught up with everybody when we return to practices” – Participant 1

A subtheme that falls under this theme is negative body image perceptions. This is meant to explain how the athletes view their own bodies, as well as how they perceive others viewing their bodies. Included in this is the idea that the athletes’ uniforms affect how the athletes feel when they are playing, and make them more self-conscious of their body.

“A lot of non-athletes, they’re normally a lot skinnier. And we’re more muscle. So, weight wise it’s kind of weird to discuss with other people. But I find myself comparing myself more to people who aren’t athletes” – Participant 6

“Yes you lift, like for us we lift a decent amount, so you need to be strong, you need to have muscle but then it’s like how am I going to look as a girl? How am I going to look in a dress or in a crop top or something like that?” – Participant 5

“Our uniforms are so tight, like we wear spandex and even our jerseys are skin tight. I feel like, I even have more pressure, [and] I get self-conscious in [my uniform] sometimes.” – Participant 2
“I feel like if our uniforms weren’t the way that they are - short and tight, [your thoughts] would be less based on how you look. Sometimes in spandex it’s ridiculous like things hang out that you don’t want to. You always have to be worried about that, so I often catch myself worrying about that then actually playing the sport. In games, I’m always like ‘oh my gosh like, what am I looking like’ instead of focusing on playing.” – Participant 3

Scholarship As an Extra Pressure

The theme of scholarship as an extra pressure captures the athletes’ experiences of obtaining an athletic scholarship and how that adds another layer of pressure to their performance. This appears to have stemmed from the messages received from the coaches, family, and peers regarding the performance of athletes, and the pressure to not lose their spot on the team or else they will no longer receive the same level of funding. This pressure that the athletes face includes the need to stay on top of their schoolwork and perform well in the classroom, as well as not letting themselves get in trouble.

“I don’t know I just think external pressures you always have [your scholarship] on your back like oh you won’t get recruited, oh you won’t be able to play… In college it’s the home stretch almost, cause getting recruited was the big goal and now that you’re here you have to maintain it and not mess up when everyone else is kind of a free-for-all at college so [there is] pressure to not get in trouble. Which obviously I don’t want to get in trouble but if I did it would be way worse for athletes than it would be for normal students” – Participant 3

“I know I always feel the need to play well to keep my scholarship. Gosh, my worst fear is that I play bad and then I get the letter in the mail like “hi your scholarship has been reduced” that’s my worst fear. Cause I know people who that’s happened to. So, I always feel the need to go out every day and play for [my scholarship].” – Participant 6
“Say you have a bad year but then [there’s] the stress at the end of the year when you get your scholarship things...it’s like wait so did it go down because I didn’t have a good year, did they notice?” -Participant 5

“I think not performing academically is a really big one. You’re a student athlete, so student is the first word. So, you kind of have to keep your grades up and it’s not just failing one class but if you’re failing all your classes and really not doing well [losing your scholarship is] your punishment.” -Participant 6

This pressure is further exacerbated by the idea that the athletes must compete for their spot on their chosen team and led to the development of the subtheme competition for position on team. Athletes discussed the pressure to always be the best at their position, so they do not lose their scholarship amount for the following year. The athletes also expressed the idea that due to this competition for particular positions, it is challenging for student athletes to maintain friendships with teammates, although they are encouraged to do so.

“Our coach kind of practices replacing people often so if you’re not performing well or say you’re having an off day, it’s the constant pressure that someone else can fill your spot. You’re not the only girl that could do that job so you kind of always have to be on your A game”- Participant 3

“It unfortunately makes you think different of the person but you’re kind of mad at them. Like, oh, well, I was doing well at practice and now they’re doing well you know what I mean? And you’re actually really good friends so it obviously [is] very difficult to maintain a friendship, or a really good friendship and also compete with them at the exact same time.” -Participant 4
Quantitative Measures

The results from the quantitative questionnaires that the student athletes completed after the focus group discussion are displayed in the tables below (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). The results on the measures assessing disordered eating behaviors show that the athletes’ mean scores were lower than the normative/comparison groups’ scores, demonstrating lower levels of disordered eating. On the measure assessing embodiment, athletes’ mean scores were generally higher, demonstrating positive embodiment.

Table 1

*Results from Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire*

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<th>Community Mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
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<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.40-1.00</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.93</td>
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*Note.* The community norms are from a community sample of 243 young women (Fairburn & Beglin, 1994)
### Table 2

*Results from the Orthorexia Nervosa Inventory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Community</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.25</td>
<td>41.13</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17.14</td>
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<td>0.82</td>
<td>13.99</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.55</td>
<td>10.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
<td>Deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24-29</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Community norms include 847 participants, 47% were college students and 43% were community members (Oberle et al., 2020)
Table 3

*Results from the Experiences of Embodiment Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Participant Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Participant Range</th>
<th>Community Mean</th>
<th>Community Standard Deviation</th>
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<tr>
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<td>11.66</td>
<td>121-153</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Connection</td>
<td>29.83</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>27-33</td>
<td>21.30</td>
<td>5.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body Unencumbered</td>
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<td>4.17</td>
<td>19-30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency &amp; Expression</td>
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<td>2.88</td>
<td>22-30</td>
<td>22.35</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience &amp;</td>
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<td>2.79</td>
<td>9-15</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Care &amp;</td>
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<td>2.79</td>
<td>27-34</td>
<td>24.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Countering Self-Objectification</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>11-16</td>
<td>10.19</td>
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*Note. Community norms sample included 76 women between the ages of 18-45 (M=30) (Piran & Teall, 2012)*
Chapter 5: Discussion

The present study sought to understand the experiences of embodiment, eating and exercise behaviors, and the perceived pressures of maintaining a scholarship in Division II team-sport athletes. This study utilized a qualitative reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The findings that emerged from the focus group showed an overarching theme of pressure to perform impacts athlete’s life which captured the overall sense of stress expressed by the student athletes. Three themes were also developed through the reflexive thematic analysis to further expand on this overarching theme: athletes’ exhaustion from pressure, pressure causes disruptions in embodiment, and scholarship is an added pressure.

Although the study initially aimed to focus on questions regarding the student athletes’ experiences of embodiment, eating and exercise behaviors, and scholarship pressures, the main finding was that there is an overwhelming sense of stress that the athletes experience. Moreover, this overwhelming amount of stress interferes with aspects of the athletes’ embodiment, and scholarship pressures serve to intensify the perceived stress. Specifically regarding the athletes’ eating and exercise patterns, there were no clear findings that disordered eating behaviors and excessive exercise patterns were present. However, it appears that the student athletes’ eating and exercise behaviors were affected by the pressures that they face as student athletes and their need to keep up with the expectations placed on them.

Athletes’ Exhaustion from Pressure

When speaking with the athletes, an overall sense of exhaustion was endorsed. Specifically, the pressure to keep up with their multiple responsibilities and perform well in all aspects was a main source of the student athletes’ exhaustion. This finding is supported by the work of Huml and colleagues (2019), who explained that athletes experience a pressure to keep
going despite feeling tired or needing a break, which can lead to the student athlete experiencing burnout. This was apparent in the push through mentality that was expressed among the focus group participants. Participants expressed the need to keep going, despite their exhaustion, due to internal pressures that the student athletes place on themselves, and/or the pressure experienced from coaches and teammates. While much of the literature focuses on this response within professional or Division I athletes, Judge and colleagues (2012) focused on Division II athletes and found results consistent with the current study, suggesting that student athletes are at risk of burnout due to the exhaustion they experience regardless of the division level.

Overall, there are numerous responsibilities placed on the student athletes, and athletes feel the need to push through to keep up with these expectations. The exhaustion expressed may relate to the lack of self-care strategies reported by the athletes, as they are expected to be on top of all their responsibilities and therefore have difficulty finding time to take care of themselves in effective ways (i.e., eating proper meals, moving body in ways that feel good, getting enough rest). While the exhaustion or burnout experiences of athletes have been discussed in the literature, the finding related to minimal self-care strategies may be important for understanding this exhaustion. For example, student athletes reported not having time to make a real meal daily, little time with friends outside of their sport, and an inability to keep up with appointments. Another study examined athlete burnout and found that burnout in athletes results from the chronic stress that they experience due to the need to keep up with the high demands, and a fear of failing at those demands. This study further explained that a consequence of the high demands is the athlete feeling that the demands take priority over personal needs (e.g., self-care), which may lead to unmet goals and fatigue (Olsson et al., 2021).
Pressure Causes Disruptions in Embodiment

When reviewing the quantitative measures, the student athletes had higher scores of embodiment when compared to the community comparison group in their self-report on the Experiences of Embodiment Scale (Piran & Teall, 2012). However, this was not consistent with the findings from the focus group. Student athletes explained a push through mentality that was understood among all participants, meaning the need to keep going despite what their body cues were telling them. This included during games and practices (e.g., pushing through pain and injury), and in other aspects of their lives (e.g., pushing to keep up with academics when they needed rest). This push through mentality directly interferes with the body comfort and connection as well as the attuned self-care components of positive embodiment. These components place an emphasis on the individual feeling in tune with their body and its cues and acting on self-care strategies to care for the body in necessary ways (Piran, 2019). It is interesting that when responding to the Experiences of Embodiment Scale, the student athletes reported feeling in tune and at one with their body. Athletes also reported being attuned to self-care through endorsement of items reflecting feeling that they are proud of and take care of their bodies. Additionally, athletes endorsed disagreement with the idea of ignoring the cues that their body sends them. With these responses, the athletes scored high on this measure of embodiment, indicating more positive embodiment. Again, this was not consistent with the findings from the thematic analysis that indicated disruptions in embodiment. This demonstrates the importance of using qualitative research when working with student athletes, as the rich information gathered from the focus group helped capture the subtle discrepancies between how the athletes reported feeling connected to their body, and how they actually act in their bodies, particularly in relation to their sport.
The environment that the student athlete is in should be considered when evaluating risks for disruptions in embodiment. The literature has found that the level of body confidence experienced by athletes is affected by the environment they are in. More specifically, athletes reported feeling confident when they were engaging in their sport or when on their sport field/arena. However, when those same athletes were in a social context, they endorsed feeling more conflicted and experiencing more negative thoughts about their body (McColl, 2018). This suggests that the athletic environment offers some protective nature to the student athlete’s body image. However, this also supports the idea that body confidence that comes from being an athlete may not generalize to social contexts.

When expanding on the disruptions in embodiment that were present among the participants, negative body image was also consistent throughout the student athletes, as reported during the focus group. Participants shared that being a student athlete may lead to their body looking different (i.e., less feminine) than their nonathlete counterparts due to the intensity and nature of their workouts, which are meant to build muscle and a physically fit physique. Similar findings have emerged in research on individual-sport athletes where negative body image was found due to the emphasis on the body, and the pressure to keep a lean physique (Haase, 2009). The muscular physique that seems to be emphasized for team-sport athletes in order to stay in shape, can be experienced in a negative way. This was seen in the comments participants made regarding how they looked in clothing and the comparisons they made between their bodies and those of their nonathlete peers. Additionally, student athletes seemed to be conscious of the fit of their uniform within their sport, and even seemed to think about the way that they look/fit in their uniform during games rather than thinking about how well they were performing. The athletes reported they do not have a say in their uniform, and limited sizing options are available. The
style of the uniform and a poor fit may also influence negative thoughts and perceptions about their bodies. This finding was consistent with the literature, in that Anderson and colleagues (2012) found that one of the pressures that Division I athletes face is the need to fit into their uniforms (some sports having uniforms that are tighter/fitted), causing athletes to be self-conscious of their bodies in the uniforms, while also comparing how their body looks in the same uniform as their teammates. This study expands on these pressures by portraying the same pressure in Division II student athletes when it comes to their team uniforms and how they perceive themselves in their uniform.

Although findings on negative body image perceptions emerged from the focus groups, there were lower reports of disordered eating behaviors relative to community norms on the quantitative questionnaires as well as limited endorsement of disordered eating in the thematic analysis. When prompted with specific questions on eating and exercise patterns, the student athletes shared limited responses, and the athletes seemed to turn the attention instead to the pressure they experience or limited intake due to lack of time. This supports the idea that disordered eating is more prevalent among individual-sport athletes. Haas (2009) found that due to the nature of individual sports being focused on the athlete’s physique and more presence of social evaluation, the social physique anxiety was more prevalent among female individual-sport athletes when compared to team-sport athletes. More specifically, another study conducted by Zucker and colleagues (1999) looked at 130 women who participated in a team or individual sport and found that team-sport athletes scored significantly lower than individual-sport athletes on the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI-2, Garner, 1991), indicating less disordered eating. The present results seem to support these findings in the literature, showing less risk for disordered eating among team-sport athletes, and that being on a team sport may even be a protective factor.
for eating disorder behaviors in athletes.

**Scholarship is an Added Pressure**

Student athletes reported an underlying pressure experienced as a result of being on their team sport and needing to maintain their athletic funding. This underlying pressure leads to a need to perform well both on and off the field. Student athletes shared the need to get good grades and to act appropriately at all times (i.e., staying out of trouble) in order to maintain their scholarship. The participants were aware of the different scholarship opportunities that existed within their team. The knowledge of the different amounts awarded seemed to instill pressure on the athletes, and may cause competition between the student athletes and their teammates. An interesting note from the focus group was the limited knowledge on how one attains a scholarship, and how the amount a student athlete receives is determined. Based on the responses, it appeared that scholarships are not commonly talked about within the teams, and student athletes feel that they should keep their scholarship a secret from their teammates. By not feeling comfortable talking about their scholarship and thus not getting support from their teammates regarding scholarship pressure, it is not surprising that this would serve as another stressor for the student athletes. In addition, with not knowing exactly how they attained their scholarship, the unknown of what the student athletes need to do in order to keep their scholarship likely adds an extra layer of stress. This finding supports the competitive nature of scholarships on the Division II level, and helps support the idea that scholarship pressures are not unique to the Division I level, where most of the research lies due to the generous scholarships available at that level (Almodóvar, 2017).

In support of the current findings, Judge and colleagues (2012) examined the levels of burnout in Division II athletes and the major causes of their burnout. They found those who were
awarded athletic funding were more at risk of burnout due to feeling that they had to participate well both in their sport and academically to maintain their scholarship and uphold the public image of what being a student athlete entails. This directly supports the idea that the student athletes have an added pressure that is caused by their attainment of a scholarship. This pressure adds to the competitive nature of being on their chosen team. Athletes in the present study reported difficulty maintaining close relationships with their teammates due to the comparison that occurs among teammates, particularly teammates who play the same position and are being rotated to find the best player for the position. This finding was consistent with Sheehan and colleagues (2018), who found that team-sport athletes were likely to experience anxiety due to the social comparison between teammates that occurs and the fear that their teammates will perform better than them.

**Protective Factors**

Toward the end of the focus groups, participants were asked to reflect on what their overall experience of being a student athlete was like, and what they would tell someone else who wanted to become a student athlete. While the overarching pressure and need to do well was present within this conversation, some of the previously researched protective factors were also mentioned and are important to note. Athletes endorsed feeling that their sport is their life, and that they do not know what they would do without their sport, displaying a sense of identity with their sport. There was also a strong agreement among the focus group that the student athletes feel like they have learned a lot while being a student athlete, such as learning the value of having courage and developing resilience, as well as the ability to balance many different responsibilities. This was supported in the literature by Drew and Matthews (2019) who found that team-sport athletes endorsed higher levels of resiliency, and less symptoms of depression
and anxiety. The student athletes’ endorsement of learning skills like balancing many responsibilities was further supported in the literature by Pierce (2007), who found that student athletes who attended a Division I school excelled at skills such as time management and organization.

Consistent with the findings from the current study, other research shows that team sports are thought to offer a more protective nature as compared to individual sports (Giannopoulou et al., 2013). This was expanded on by Pluhar and colleagues (2019), who found that those who participated in team sports were less likely to endorse symptoms of anxiety and depression. The researchers further explained that there is a sense of community that is formed within the team-sport atmosphere, which is supportive of the athlete and offers an ability to build relationships and acquire support from their teammates. This also allowed athletes to feel comfortable and accepted by their teammates, which may help reduce emotional concerns and insecurities when playing their sport. Based on the present findings and those of past research, it appears that while team sports may offer some protection from anxiety and depression, team-sports are not immune from stressors and in some ways may experience heightened stress due to competition and comparison with teammates.

Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the literature by adding information on Division II team-sport athletes and lead to practical implications for the promotion of well-being for collegiate athletes. More specifically, the study revealed how the pressures athletes experience and their lack of self-care strategies can contribute to exhaustion, irregular eating patterns, and disruptions in embodiment. Thus, the study displayed a need for strategies within athletic departments to promote self-care to help manage stress and exhaustion experienced by student
athletes. Self-care strategies encompass many aspects. Based on the findings from this study, self-care strategies that should be considered are ways to properly fuel the body, engaging in mindfulness components to promote connection and replenishment of the body, and incorporating stress management.

**Properly Fueling the Body**

Proper education on how athletes can fuel their bodies as a form of self-care amidst their busy schedules is an important step in ensuring the well-being of Division II student athletes. Additionally, initiatives similar to the Fueling Program, developed by Dr. Christine Karpinski and her students, would be beneficial for athletic programs to offer their student athletes as a resource. More specifically, it would be beneficial to incorporate designated times where student athletes can utilize the Fueling Program resource. This includes having food carts with healthy snack options at practice for athletes who are limited with time between practices and classes. Additionally, the program offers snacks for away game bus rides to ensure athletes are properly fueling before games. This program allows athletes to feel comfortable making choices about balanced foods and adhering to the needs of their body through nutritional components. The Fueling Program (Karpinski, 2022) helps to ensure that the athletes have access to foods to fuel their bodies amidst juggling their many responsibilities. These food carts should be implemented within all athletic programs, with designated times before or after practices or games to allow student athletes ample access to nutritious snacks and to encourage athletes to feel comfortable utilizing this resource.

From the findings of this study, it is clear that student athletes would benefit from promotion of proper nutrition within the athletic department. This could be done through holding workshops specific for the student athletes and creating safe spaces for athletes to get support on
proper eating (from dieticians or coaches). These implementations may aid in displaying the importance of taking time for self-care behaviors such as getting balanced meals throughout the day for student athletes, as this is a key factor in ensuring a student athlete can maintain peak performance (Desbrow, 2021). This is further supported in the literature on the Female Athlete Triad, which explains how a low energy deficit due to limited food intake interferes with the athlete’s ability to perform their best (Siobhan, 2020). Overall, emphasizing the importance of balanced nutrition and promoting the athletes to engage in this form of self-care would be beneficial in allowing the student athlete to perform at their best. Moreover, registered dieticians, coaches, and trainers should be aware of the barriers of maintaining a nutritious diet for student athletes, including but not limited to lack of time, access to foods, food cost, lack of knowledge on what is healthy, and lack of cooking skills (Brauman et al., 2021). Using this knowledge to help student athletes receive education on strategies (e.g., meal planning, team cooking classes) may help to promote balanced nutrition for student athletes.

**Promoting Positive Embodiment**

Additionally, strategies to help athletes feel connected with their body and its needs would be beneficial. One strategy is through mindfulness meditations (e.g., body scans) that allow the athletes to become aware of their body in the moment and acknowledge their bodies’ cues to understand what it is they are needing. To incorporate an approach that allows the athlete to enhance their mind-body connection and feel more in tune with their body’s needs, coaches may encourage their teams to engage in mindful exercises, such as yoga practices or body scans prior to the start of games or practices. One study examined the consequences of athlete burnout and found that practicing mindfulness (i.e., meditations for self-care), particularly through
allowing the athlete to be present with the thoughts and feelings coming up for them as a result of burnout, was an effective strategy in minimizing burnout in athletes (Gustafsson et al., 2017).

When thinking of specific therapeutic techniques, some aspects of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) can be used to help athletes engage in a mind-body connection to combat disruptions in embodiment or disconnection from the body that the athlete may be experiencing. One example of a mindfulness skill used in DBT that would be helpful for student athletes is the Wise Mind skill, which focuses on how the emotional mind is controlled by the individual’s emotional reactions and the reasonable mind is controlled by logic. The skill encourages individuals to make the best decision for themselves by attending to both their emotional and reasonable minds and finding a balance between both (Linehan, 2014). In the case of a student athlete, the emotional mind may focus on the desire to push through pain or exhaustion because of the worry of what their coaches or teammates will think of them, but the reasonable mind may consider what the body cues are telling them and what they need in that moment (e.g., rest). Therefore, the Wise Mind skill would allow the athlete to recognize both minds and make decisions that are best for them based on the balance between their emotional and reasonable desires.

Another important aspect that was endorsed within the focus group was negative body image. This negative body image was seen through the comments made regarding the type of uniform that the student athletes are asked to wear, and how they feel about their body as a female due to the need to have a muscular physique. One study looking at 18 female team-sport athletes found that the student athletes feel on display in their uniforms due to the revealing nature, and that they felt their uniform type brought awareness to particular body parts. This led to the athletes focusing on their body in their uniform, rather than focusing their attention on
performing well in their sport. This same study also found that student athletes reported a desire to engage in manipulation of the body in order to fit into the uniform that they were being asked to wear. The researchers suggested the need for more awareness of the types of uniforms available to athletes, and to promote encouragement from teammates to feel comfortable and to empower one another rather than engaging in comparison making (Lauer et al., 2018). Since these findings were consistent with the current study, athletic departments should reconsider the types of uniforms that student athletes are being asked to wear. Additionally, access to more sizes would ensure that the sizes the student athletes must choose from are inclusive and can help make the student athletes feel more comfortable in their uniforms.

**Stress Management Strategies**

Understanding the overwhelming amount of pressure that student athletes face can help athletic departments catch signs of stress or exhaustion within student athletes. Some warning signs of exhaustion may include a decrease in physical movement, fatigue, irritability, and impairment in functionality. Recognizing these signs in student athletes would allow for early intervention to prevent burnout (Dubuc-Charbonneau, 2016). Overall, encouraging self-care strategies for the athletes through stress management techniques would be a necessary step in caring for athletes. A self-care promoting strategy that could aid in managing negative emotions and stress for student athletes is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). MBSR is typically run as an 8-10 week group intervention program. Participation in these groups includes learning skills that are within the context of mindfulness (e.g., meditation, body scanning, and simple yoga postures). This type of intervention uses these strategies to help the individual focus on acceptance of negative thoughts and emotions and build resilience. Through MBSR, individuals can recognize their negative mood states and choose how they respond rather than
simply react. Principles such as non-judging, acceptance, and letting go are central to MBSR (Grossman et al., 2004). One study examined MBSR interventions used with high school and collegiate athletes and the effect that these strategies had on the student athletes’ stress levels. The researchers found that mindfulness-based interventions demonstrated improvements to the athletes’ thinking patterns (i.e., being more positive), and that the student athletes were better able to manage and understand their negative emotions. They also found that by reducing the stress levels within student athletes through MBSR, student athletes were able to be more goal-oriented and displayed higher levels of motivation (Petterson & Olson, 2017).

Athletic departments working with athletes can also teach emotion regulation skills, an aspect of DBT that aims to target negative emotions (e.g., stress) experienced. Specifically, improving emotion regulation would be beneficial in reducing the intensity and frequency of the negative emotions experienced by student athletes. The purpose of emotion regulation is to encourage the individual to prepare for and have control in reaction to their emotions through establishing skills that help with management of emotions. One skill from this component that could be promoted to student athletes would be establishing healthy habits to promote emotional control. When an individual has irregular habits in their day, they are more likely to experience dysregulation which can result in large fluctuations in their emotions. The establishing healthy habits component of emotion regulation involves identifying areas of an individual’s life where their habits may be negatively affecting their mood (e.g., not getting adequate nutrition, not getting enough sleep) and setting achievable goals to promote their desired habits. An example of this might be if a student athlete would like to establish a regular sleep schedule, their goal may be going to bed and waking up at the same time during the weekdays. With established healthy habits, the student athletes would improve their ability to regulate their emotions and
therefore minimize the frequency and intensity of negative emotions experienced (Gratz & Tull, 2010).

All in all, the present findings suggest support for student athletes is needed. Techniques such as those mentioned above (e.g., the Fueling Program, MBSR, mindfulness, emotion regulation) can assist the athlete in their self-care, reduce stress, and support positive embodiment.

Limitations

While a qualitative reflexive thematic analysis resulted in rich information from the athletes and identified aspects of exhaustion, disruptions in embodiment, and pressure of maintaining scholarships that the quantitative measures did not, limitations exist with the study. Due to difficulty recruiting from male team sports, the study only consisted of female team-sport athletes; thus, these findings cannot be generalized to male team-sport athletes. While the initial plan was to recruit both male and female team-sport athletes, the primary researcher was unable to obtain male volunteers. Only one football player responded to the initial recruitment email, but due to no athletic funding received, he did not meet criteria for the study. Other than this one individual, no other responses were received from male team-sport athletes from the initial recruitment email, and then no responses were received from the male team-sport coaches when requesting to attend practices to recruit in person. Due to the lack of responses, the primary researcher decided to continue with the study while just focusing on female team-sport athletes, since this would still help to address the gap in the literature on embodiment in athletes and qualitative focus groups for team-sport athletes.

Additionally, the study conducted only one focus group with three sports represented in the study sample, so generalizations regarding all team sports cannot be made. It is also important to...
note that of the sports represented in the sample, four participants were on the volleyball team. This may have impacted the responses that emerged in the focus groups, due to the revealing uniforms that volleyball players are required to wear. Body image of volleyball players was examined by Steinfeldt and colleagues (2013), who found that volleyball players experience negative body image as a result of the expectation of their bodies to be fit, feeling that their uniform is distracting while playing their sport, the perceptions of others seeing them in their uniform, and their engagement in social comparison with teammates in the same uniform. This suggests that the volleyball players in the present study may have had more body image concerns as compared to the other athletes present in the focus group who do not have fitted/tight uniforms. Because the nature of each team sport is variable, including more women from different team sports may have added more diverse responses and expanded on the findings. However, while this served as a limitation, the findings from the focus group showed enough resounding agreement across the three sports that participated to suggest that these findings may be consistent should more team sports be included in the study.

It is also important to consider the focus group atmosphere, and how the pressure of speaking in front of other team-sport athletes may have influenced the answers that the athletes provided. The student athletes may have been hesitant to share their true experiences for fear of what someone from another sport may think. Additionally, student athletes may have been hesitant to share their true experiences if they had teammates present, not wanting their responses to affect what a teammate thinks about them. However, focus groups were used as opposed to individual interviews due to wanting to explore the unique perspectives of student athletes in a rich and natural context through social interaction (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was thought to produce more comfortability among participants. In support of this, the level of
participation across participants was high. This suggests the focus group atmosphere did not negatively impact the findings and instead seemed to support the sharing of information among the participants.

It is also important to consider that the study recruited participants on a voluntary basis. This selection effect is something that should be considered as it is not known how this may have impacted the results. For example, the $25 compensation provided to participants may have influenced who volunteered. That is, if athletes who were experiencing financial burdens were attracted to the study by the financial compensation, scholarship pressures could be more salient for this group than for those who did not volunteer. Another potential selection effect could be that those experiencing more problematic behaviors may be less willing to share these experiences in a group setting and so did not choose to partake in the study.

**Future Directions**

When considering future directions, it is recommended that this research be expanded to include both males and females in order to compare their experiences as team-sport athletes in relation to experiences of exhaustion, embodiment, and scholarship pressures. To make the findings more generalizable, it would be important to gather a wider range of team-sport athletes, such as other team sports that the university offers (e.g., rugby, soccer, softball, field hockey, and cheerleading) so that more than three team sports are represented. Perhaps examining sports individually may help to best understand risk and protective factors for each sport. For example, volleyball players may have more body image concerns and may engage in more social comparison as a result of preoccupation with the fit of their uniform and the practice of replacing the main players on the court (Steinfelt et al., 2013). More exploration on sports that do not have tight/fitting uniforms or that require more players on the field at once and therefore are more
used to switching in and out of the game would be helpful in fully understanding the factors that influence risk and protective factors for different sports.

It would also be beneficial to expand on this study at other Division II universities to see if these experiences are similar for other Division II student athletes. Additionally, exploring these findings among Division III athletes can help to support the idea that the pressures of being a student athlete are not unique to Division I athletes, as a majority of the literature focuses on Division I. Although there are no athletic scholarships present at the Division III level (Bandre, 2011), exploration on the funding that these athletes do acquire (e.g., financial aid) that are not as competitive in nature would result in interesting findings of whether the pressures that student athletes experience are still relevant.

Finally, due to the discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative findings in the present study, there may be a need for the development of questionnaires specifically for athletes that explore relevant aspects of body image and eating disorders. This may provide a more valid and reliable measure to help coaches, sports psychologists, and trainers detect early signs of negative body image and eating disorders (Pope et al., 2015).

**Conclusions**

The findings from this study suggest there is an overwhelming amount of stress that student athletes experience, and that more attention to student athletes is needed. Student athletes experience exhaustion as a result of wanting to keep up with the expectations placed on them, which led to athletes taking little time for self-care, placing them at risk of burnout. Additionally, the pressures student athletes face lead them to respond to their body in a way that is incongruent with what their body is needing; therefore, demonstrating a disruption in embodiment. Lastly, the added pressure of maintaining an athletic scholarship serves as a stressor, due to student athletes
feeling that they are in competition with their teammates for their spot on the team. Within the findings, there were some protective factors apparent as a result of being a student athlete. This was demonstrated, for example, by lower means than the community norms for disordered eating behaviors and higher scores in embodiment, indicating positive embodiment. While this may provide some support for a protective nature within team sports, the findings from the focus group highlight another perspective, specifically that the competitive nature and high expectations within team sports add to the overall pressure that the student athletes experienced.
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Huml, M., Bergman, M., Newell, E., & Hancock, G. (2019). From the playing field to the classroom: the academic challenges for NCAA Division I athletes. *Journal for the Study*


Karpinski, C. personal communication, April, 24 2022.


Appendix A

Hello,

My name is Kelsey Blum and I am a doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program at West Chester University. I am currently looking for athletes to participate in my dissertation research about the experiences of team sport student athletes at the Division II level, and their eating and exercise behaviors. I’m hoping you will be willing to forward the email below to your athletes. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about my research, and would appreciate if you could respond to let me know if you would be willing to forward this email on my behalf.

My name is Kelsey Blum and I am a doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program at West Chester University. I am currently looking for athletes to participate in my dissertation research about the experiences of team sport student athletes at the Division II level, and their eating and exercise behaviors. You will receive a $25 Amazon gift card for your participation in the study. If you choose to participate, you will be agreeing to one 90-minute group meeting via Zoom with other team-sport athletes of your same gender. During this meeting, you will be asked to share your experiences as an athlete at West Chester University. You will also be asked to complete a few brief questionnaires. The total time commitment will be 2-hours or less. You would be compensated for your time by a $25 Amazon gift card after completion of the study.

The following criteria are needed to qualify for the study:

1. Must be an athlete on one of the following sports teams: basketball, baseball, football, soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, rugby, softball, and volleyball
2. Must have participated at least one full year in your chosen sport at the Division II level
3. Must have an ATHLETIC scholarship (either partial or full scholarship)
4. Must be available for 2 hours during ONE of the following “focus group” times:
   a. Day, time
   b. Day, time
   c. Day, time
   d. Day, time
   e. Day, time
   f. Day, time

If you fit the above criteria, please email me directly at KB823727@wcupa.edu stating your interest in participating, what sport you play, the type of scholarship that you currently have (i.e., full or partial), and ALL of the focus group days/times that would work for you by (insert date one week after email was sent).

Thank you for your time!

Kelsey Blum
Appendix B

Good afternoon!

You may recognize my name from my past emails regarding recruiting student-athletes for my dissertation study. If not, my name is Kelsey Blum and I am a doctoral student in the clinical psychology program at WCU. I have been actively trying to recruit participants to participate in my research study which involves student athletes discussing their experiences with eating, exercise, embodiment, and scholarship pressures. My hope is to recruit some participants from your team who receive any funding from the university in order to hold these discussions and collect data for my dissertation.

Since I have tried to email a few times and have not been able to recruit enough participants using that method, I am emailing to ask whether you would be willing to have me come speak to the student athletes in person (either before or after practice)? This would take me 5-10 minutes to just explain my study and seek interested participants. I am thinking if the student athletes are able to see me and hear about my study in person, they may be more open to participating. If this would be something you would be okay with, would it be possible to send me the day/time of your practices so I can pick a time to come?

I really appreciate you taking the time to consider this, and look forward to hearing back regarding a time that would work!

Kelsey Blum
Appendix C

Good afternoon,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation study. Based on the times provided and what the majority chose, the focus group will be occurring on Monday, October 25th at 6:30pm. I know that this is not a time you indicated being able to attend, but I wanted to let you know in case you would be able to make the time work. If not, I understand and appreciate your interest in my study!

If you would be able to make the Monday, October 25th at 6:30pm focus group time now, please let me know as soon as possible so I can send you an informed consent form. As a reminder, you will be awarded a $25 Amazon gift card for your participation!!

If not, thank you again for your interest and good luck with your season!

Kelsey Bum
Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter

IRB-FY2021-75 - Modification: Modification

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Tue 11/23/2021 4:27 PM

To: Zotter, Deanne <DZotter@wcupa.edu>; Blum, Kelsey E. <K8823727@wcupa.edu>

Nov 23, 2021 4:27:16 PM EST

To: Kelsey Blum
Psychology

Re: Modification - IRB-FY2021-75 Embodiment, Scholarship Pressures, and Disordered Eating Behaviors in Division II Collegiate Athletes

Dear Kelsey Blum:

Thank you for your submitted modification to your WCUPA Institutional Review Board approved project Embodiment, Scholarship Pressures, and Disordered Eating Behaviors in Division II Collegiate Athletes. We have had the opportunity to review your modification and have rendered the decision below effective November 23, 2021.

Decision: Approved

Sincerely,
WCUPA Human Subjects Review Board

IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB000005030
FWA#: FWA00014155
Appendix E

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study! You have been selected to participate for 2 hours in a focus group via Zoom followed by online questionnaires on day/time. Please read through the attached informed consent form completely and sign, should you agree. If you are still interested in participating, you must sign the consent form and return it to me by (insert date from one week after email was sent). You will be sent a Zoom link once you have completed and returned your consent form. Please keep in mind that you will be asked to keep your camera on throughout the discussion. You will also be asked to join the Zoom meeting from a quiet place where you will have privacy. This will eliminate outside noise, enable you to speak freely, and prevent others outside of the focus group from hearing our discussion.

BEFORE YOUR SELECTED ZOOM MEETING TIME: Once you have read through and signed, please email the informed consent form back to me at KB823727@wcupa.edu. The informed consent form must be signed and returned prior to you joining the Zoom meeting or you will not be able to participate in the study.

If you have any questions about the study, feel free to email me at KB823727@wcupa.edu. Thank you again for agreeing to be a part of this study!

Kelsey Blum

(Attach informed consent)
Appendix F

Informed Consent Form-

1. **Nature and purpose of this study:**
   o The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of team sport student-athletes at the Division II level, and their eating and exercise behaviors. The study will also explore the perceived pressures of being an athlete, and what pressure is present when maintaining an athletic scholarship.

2. **Explanation of procedures:**
   o You will attend (via Zoom) your chosen focus group day and time and participate in a discussion facilitated by the researcher. The focus group will consist of roughly 10 student athletes of your same gender. The discussion will focus on your experiences as a student-athlete, specifically your experiences of your body and of maintaining an athletic scholarship.
   o Following the focus group discussion, the researcher will provide a Qualtrics link in the Zoom chat that directs you to questionnaires to be completed before leaving the Zoom meeting. These questionnaires will ask about your eating and exercise behaviors and your experiences with embodiment.
   o Once you complete the questionnaires, you will be directed from Qualtrics to a form that is separate from your questionnaire responses where you will be asked to provide your name and email address as proof that you completed the full study.
   o Once the emails have been acquired, the researcher will email your $25 Amazon gift card as compensation for your participation.
   o Participation in this study will take no more than 2 hours of your time.

3. **Identification of any experimental medical treatments or procedures.**
   o There are no experimental medical treatments or procedures associated with this study.

4. **Is there any risk to me?**
   o Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: Potentially feeling uncomfortable discussing your eating, exercise, scholarship, and feelings about your body.
   o If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with West Chester University Counseling Center, 610-436-2301.
   o If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

5. **Is there any benefit to me?**
   o Benefits to you may include: The opportunity to connect with other athletes on the pressures that they experience, and potentially promoting a sense of support; and assisting in a study meant to increase knowledge on the perceived pressures experienced by college athletes and how these pressures impact their feelings and behaviors.
   o Other benefits may include: adding information to supplement current knowledge on athletes and their eating/exercise behaviors in order to improve support for collegiate athletes, particularly those who maintain an athletic scholarship.
6. **How will you protect my privacy?**
   - The focus groups will be video-recorded through the Zoom application, and audio-recorded on a password protected phone. The audio-recording will serve as a back-up in the event of a Zoom recording malfunction. The researcher and the research assistants are the only people who will have access to the recordings.
   - You will be asked to join the Zoom meeting from a private location so that you can speak freely for the duration of the Zoom focus group. If you are unable to join from a private location, please wear headphones during the Zoom meeting to help eliminate distractions and so others nearby are unable to hear the discussion. You will also be asked to keep your cameras on to help facilitate discussion.
   - You will be informed that all information discussed in the focus group should not be shared with others, and that you are not to discuss the information with others not involved in the study.
   - Your records will be private. Only Kelsey Blum and the trained research assistants will have access to your name and responses. The research assistants are trained on procedures to maintain confidentiality.
   - Focus group recordings will be transcribed and your names will not be used in the transcription. Data analysis will utilize the transcripts only.
   - Your names will **not** be used in any reports.
   - Records will be stored on a password protected computer and phone. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be deleted.
   - All records will be destroyed three years after study completion.

7. **Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
   - You will receive a $25 Amazon gift card through email at the completion of the study.

8. **Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**
   - For any questions with this study, contact:
     - **Primary Investigator:** Kelsey Blum at KB823727@wcupa.edu
     - **Faculty Sponsor:** Deanne Zotter at dzotter@wcupa.edu

9. **Future use of data**
   - Data gathered from you will only be used for this study and will not be used for any future projects.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, _________________________________ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.
Appendix G

Hello,

Thank you for submitting your completed informed consent form! I am contacting you to remind you that your group discussion on your experiences as a WCU athlete will take place on X/X/XXXX at X:XX. I have attached your focus group Zoom link below. Please keep in mind that you will be asked to keep your camera on throughout the discussion. Please join the Zoom meeting from a quiet place where you will have privacy. This will help to eliminate outside noise, allow you to speak freely, and prevent others outside of the focus group from hearing our discussion. If for any reason you are no longer able to participate, please contact me immediately so I can invite another interested student athlete to participate. Thank you again for agreeing to be part of my study!

Thanks,
Kelsey Blum

(Insert Zoom Link)
Appendix H

Hello,

I am contacting you to remind you that your group discussion on your experiences as a WCU athlete will take place today at X:XX. Please keep in mind that you will be asked to keep your camera on throughout the discussion. Please join the Zoom meeting from a quiet place where you will have privacy. This will help to eliminate outside noise, allow you to speak freely, and prevent others outside of the focus group from hearing our discussion. Thank you again for agreeing to be part of my study!

Thanks,
Kelsey Blum

(Insert Zoom link)
Appendix I

INTRODUCTIONS
Script: Welcome! My name is Kelsey Blum. I am a third-year doctoral student in the clinical psychology program at West Chester University. This discussion that you will be participating in is part of my dissertation research, so I want to thank you for your participation. I have asked you here today to listen to your perspectives and experiences as a Division II athlete on West Chester University’s campus. I am really interested in hearing about what it is like being an athlete at WCU, what it is like maintaining a scholarship, your eating and exercise behaviors, and your feelings about your body. I am going to ask that you keep your camera on during this Zoom meeting to facilitate discussion. You may mute yourself if you are not in a quiet place, but please remember to unmute yourself when you have something to contribute to the discussion. I am interested in hearing from everyone.

INFORMED CONSENT
Script: Earlier, I had you sign an informed consent form. I am going to go over some things from that form to ensure that everyone understands and is comfortable with what is being asked of them.

- **Confidentiality:** All of us in the group are expected to keep everything shared in the discussion confidential. If you are not alone and in a quiet location, please wear ear buds or headphones during the focus groups to eliminate outside noise and prevent others outside of the focus groups to hear our discussion.

- **Withdrawal:** Being a part of this group is voluntary. If at any time, you feel uncomfortable or no longer wish to participate, you are welcome to leave the meeting. However, I would love to hear from each of you about your experiences and hope that you stay to share them.

- **Recording:** This group discussion will be video and audio recorded. This will help ensure that I don’t miss anything said.

- **Security:** The video and audio recordings that we do today will be kept on a password protected laptop and phone. Only myself and the research assistants on the project will have access to the recording. All members on the research team are trained in research confidentiality.

- **Anonymous material:** The discussion will be anonymized before we analyze the data. That is, no one’s perspectives/experiences will be associated with their name at all.

Is everyone comfortable with all of that?

EXPLANATION OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION
Script: With this study, I am hoping to gather information regarding what it is like to be an athlete at WCU with an athletic scholarship, and what the team culture around eating, exercise, and your relationships with your bodies is like. I hope to use the information you provide to better understand the pressures collegiate athletes are under in order to inform efforts to support collegiate athletes. Because of this, I really appreciate all opinions, and for you to be as honest as possible. As a reminder, your individual information will be kept confidential.
I will be serving as the moderator, which means I will just be facilitating the discussion. I ask that you all participate and engage in a conversation with everyone. With that being said, I ask that:

• Please keep your camera on so that we can all see your face when you are speaking and to ensure that you are in a distraction free environment.
• When speaking, please unmute yourself if you are muted and make sure you speak up and address the whole group since we will not be following a specific order for speaking.
• Please speak one at a time so we can ensure that we hear everyone.
• Please be honest; there are no right or wrong answers.
• Please be respectful of any disagreements, and feel free to contribute if you have a differing perspective.
• At the end, you will be asked to fill out a few questionnaires electronically and then will be given a $25 Amazon gift card to compensate you for your time.

Are there any questions before we start?

MEETING THE ATHLETES
Script: Now let’s take some time to introduce ourselves. I am going to ask that you say your FIRST NAME ONLY, what year you are at WCU, and what sport you play.

Script: Now I would like to hear about your relationship with your body as an athlete.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

TOPIC 1: EXPERIENCES OF EMBODIMENT AMONG MALE AND FEMALE TEAM-SPORT ATHLETES
Key Question: How do you feel in your body?
Probes:
Do you feel in tune with your body?
Can you recall times when you feel good in your body?
Can you recall times when you feel bad in your body?
Additional leads:

Key Question: How does being on your chosen sport team affect how you feel about your body?
Probes:
Are there positive ways being on your team sport impacts your feelings about your body?
Are there negative ways being on your team sport impacts your feelings about your body?
What expectations of your body do you have regarding your chosen sport?

Additional leads:

---------------------------

Key Question: What do you do to take care of your body?

Probes:
What types of things do you do to take care of your body?
If your body is tired or sore, how do you respond to your body?
Do you feel that you can make your own choices about your body?
Do you feel comfortable asking for what you need from coaches, teammates, yourself?

Additional leads:

---------------------------

Script: You all participate on a team sport of some kind and hold an athletic scholarship. I am curious to hear more about what being on a team sport at WCU entails for you and what pressure you experience as a result.

TOPIC 2: PERCEPTIONS OF ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS AMONG MALE AND FEMALE TEAM-SPORT ATHLETES

Key Question: What types of pressures do you feel as a student athlete?

Probes:
What expectations are placed on student athletes?
Who do you feel pressure to meet these expectations from?

Additional leads:

---------------------------

Key Question: What type of pressure do you feel as a result of your athletic scholarship?

Probes:
What kind of expectations do athletes who have a scholarship face?
What do you need to do to get and maintain your scholarship?
What are ways that one would lose their scholarship?

Additional leads

---------------------------

Key Question: How do those pressures affect you?
**Probes:**

*How do the pressures you experience make you feel?*

*How do you respond to those pressures?*

**Additional Leads**

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

**Script:** Let’s transition and talk about eating and exercising expectations as a collegiate athlete.

**TOPIC 3: EXPERIENCES OF THE TEAM-SPORT CULTURE OF EATING AND EXERCISING AMONG MALE AND FEMALE TEAM-SPORT ATHLETES**

**Key Question:** When it comes to eating, what are your experiences like as a collegiate athlete?

**Probes:**

*What is the team culture surrounding nutritional attitudes and behaviors?*

*Do you get any meal planning advice/have any expectations put on you around your meals?*

*Do you have any rules about food that you follow?*

*Do you avoid any types of food in order to maintain your performance?*

**Additional leads:**

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

**Key Question:** When it comes to exercising, what are your experiences like as a collegiate athlete?

**Probes:**

*What do your exercise schedules look like?*

*Are there any specific team expectations around exercising?*

*If so, how are these expectations shared?*

**Additional leads:**

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Key Question: What messages do you receive about your body as a result of being on your team sport?

Probes:
How often do you hear these messages?
Who typically is giving you these messages?

Additional leads:

___________________________________
___________________________________________

___________________________________
_____________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Final Question: If someone were to ask you to describe what it is like being an athlete in your specific sport at WCU (e.g., “what is it like being a football player at WCU?”), what would you tell them?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

QUANTITATIVE PORTION

QUESTIONNAIRE: Now I am going to ask you to complete a few questionnaires. They will take about 10 minutes to complete. I will put a Qualtrics link in the chat. Please click on the link and answer the questions completely. When you are done, please press submit. At the end of the questionnaires, there is a spot where you are welcome to write in any additional information that you did not share with the group, but that you feel would be important for us to know. Please do not leave the Zoom meeting until you have completed the questionnaires. Feel free to put a message in the “chat” if you have any questions about any of the questionnaires. After the surveys, there will be an additional link for you to click. You will then be directed to an independent website, thus your survey responses will not be tied to your name, where you will be asked to provide your email address. Once you have completed this step, I will send you your $25 Amazon gift card reward to thank you for your participation.

Once you have completed the online questionnaires, you are free to leave the Zoom meeting. I want to thank you all for your participation in the discussion group. Your perspectives and experiences will be very helpful in understanding the culture of being a Division II athlete at WCU.
Hello,

Your gift card for participating in this study is attached. I want to thank you again for your participation in the discussion group. Your perspectives and experiences will be very helpful in understanding the culture of being a Division II athlete at WCU.

If participating in this study has caused you distress, please contact the Counseling Center at 610-436-2301 or the National Eating Disorder Association Hotline at 800-931-2237.

If any additional information comes up that you feel would be helpful for me to know, please email your comments to KB823727@wcupa.edu.

Thank you again for your participation!

Kelsey Blum
Appendix K

What is your age? _________

What is your gender?
1. Male
2. Female
3. Gender Fluid
4. Transgender Male
5. Transgender Female
6. Other _____________

What is your ethnicity?
1. Caucasian
2. Asian Indian
3. Asian or Pacific Islander
4. Black/African American
5. Native American
6. Latino/Hispanic
7. Puerto Rican
8. Other: _____________

What is your socioeconomic status?
1. Upper Class
2. Upper Middle Class
3. Lower Middle Class
4. Working Class

What year are you in at WCU?
___ First year
___ Second year
___ Third year
___ Fourth year
___ Fifth year

What is your current living situation?
___ Dorm Room/On-Campus Housing
___ Off-campus apartment/own house
___ Home (with parents/guardians)

What sport do you play?
1. Basketball
2. Baseball
3. Football
4. Soccer
5. Field Hockey
6. Lacrosse
7. Rugby
8. Softball
9. Volleyball
Instructions: The following questions are concerned with the past four weeks (28 days) only. Please read each question carefully. Please answer all the questions. Thank you.

**Questions 1 to 12:** Please circle the appropriate number on the right. Remember that the questions only refer to the past four weeks (28 days) only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On how many of the past 28 days .....</th>
<th>No days</th>
<th>1-5 days</th>
<th>6-12 days</th>
<th>13-15 days</th>
<th>16-22 days</th>
<th>23-27 days</th>
<th>Every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Have you been deliberately trying to limit the amount of food you eat to influence your shape or weight (whether or not you have succeeded)?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Have you gone for long periods of time (8 waking hours or more) without eating anything at all in order to influence your shape or weight?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Have you tried to exclude from your diet any foods that you like in order to influence your shape or weight (whether or not you have succeeded)?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Have you tried to follow definite rules regarding your eating (for example, a calorie limit) in order to influence your shape or weight (whether or not you have succeeded)?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Have you had a definite desire to have an empty stomach with the aim of influencing your shape or weight?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Have you had a definite desire to have a totally flat stomach?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Has thinking about food, eating or calories made it very difficult to concentrate on things you are interested in (for example, working, following a conversation, or reading)?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Has thinking about shape or weight made it very difficult to concentrate on things you are interested in (for example, working, following a conversation, or reading)?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Have you had a definite fear of losing control over eating?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have you had a definite fear that you might gain weight? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Have you felt fat? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Have you had a strong desire to lose weight? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Questions 13-18: Please fill in the appropriate number in the boxes on the right. Remember that the questions only refer to the past four weeks (28 days).

Over the past four weeks (28 days)....

13 Over the past 28 days, how many times have you eaten what other people would regard as an unusually large amount of food (given the circumstances)?

14 ..... On how many of these times did you have a sense of having lost control over your eating (at the time that you were eating)?

15 Over the past 28 days, on how many DAYS have such episodes of overeating occurred (i.e., you have eaten an unusually large amount of food and have had a sense of loss of control at the time)?

16 Over the past 28 days, how many times have you made yourself sick (vomit) as a means of controlling your shape or weight?

17 Over the past 28 days, how many times have you taken laxatives as a means of controlling your shape or weight?

18 Over the past 28 days, how many times have you exercised in a “driven” or “compulsive” way as a means of controlling your weight, shape or amount of fat, or to burn off calories?
EMBODIMENT, SCHOLARSHIPS, AND EATING IN ATHLETES

Questions 19 to 21: Please circle the appropriate number. Please note that for these questions the term “binge eating” means eating what others would regard as an unusually large amount of food for the circumstances, accompanied by a sense of having lost control over eating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Over the past 28 days, on how many days have you eaten in secret (ie, furtively)?</td>
<td>No days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>On what proportion of the times that you have eaten have you felt guilty (felt that you've done wrong) because of its effect on your shape or weight?</td>
<td>None of the times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Over the past 28 days, how concerned have you been about other people seeing you eat?</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions 22 to 28: Please circle the appropriate number on the right. Remember that the questions only refer to the past four weeks (28 days).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Has your weight influenced how you think about (judge) yourself as a person?</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Has your shape influenced how you think about (judge) yourself as a person?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>How much would it have upset you if you had been asked to weigh yourself once a week (no more, or less, often) for the next four weeks?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>How dissatisfied have you been with your weight?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>How dissatisfied have you been with your shape?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is your weight at present? (Please give your best estimate.)

What is your height? (Please give your best estimate.)

If female: Over the past three-to-four months have you missed any menstrual periods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How uncomfortable have you felt seeing your body (for example, seeing your shape in the mirror, in a shop window reflection, while undressing or taking a bath or shower)?

How uncomfortable have you felt about others seeing your shape or figure (for example, in communal changing rooms, when swimming, or wearing tight clothes)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Orthorexia Nervosa Inventory (ONI; Oberle et al., 2020)

For each statement, select the response option indicating how true the statement is for you based on your current eating habits.

1. I feel much guilt or self-loathing when I stray from my healthy diet
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

2. I care much more about the healthiness of what I eat than the pleasurable taste of food
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

3. As a result of the amount of time I devote to my healthy diet, I have spent less time than I used to with my family or friends
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

4. I follow a health-food diet rigidly, only eating what my diet allows and not allowing myself any deviations from this diet
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

5. My food restrictions have led me to lose more weight than people would say is good for me
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

6. Preparing food in the most healthful way is very important in my diet
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

7. My healthy eating is a significant source of stress in my relationships
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

8. Over time, my diet has come to include elimination of entire food groups that I believe are unhealthy
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

9. When I stray from my healthy diet, I can only think about what a failure I am
   1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

10. Health professionals have expressed concern that my diet is too restrictive
    1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

11. I follow a healthy diet with many rules
    1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

12. My cleanses or fasts have become more frequent or severe over time
    1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

13. Whenever I eat anything unhealthy, I feel a great sense of personal impurity
    1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

14. Even though I have eaten much healthier over time, my physical health has actually declined
    1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

15. Healthy eating is among the most important things in my life
    1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very

16. As a result of the amount of time I devote to my healthy diet, I have either missed time at work or missed classes at school
    1 = not at all  2 = slightly  3 = mainly  4 = very
17 I either do not buy processed food products or I compulsively check the nutrition labels to ensure that only healthy and pure ingredients are included.

18 The number of healthy dietary rules that I follow has progressively increased over time.

19 Whenever I feel sick, family or friends comment that the illness may be because my diet is too restrictive.

20 While spending time with family or friends, I am frequently distracted by thoughts of eating healthily.

21 Just the thought of me eating something unhealthy makes me very anxious.

22 I strictly avoid all foods I feel are unhealthy.

23 Feeling good about my body is completely dependent on me strictly following my healthy diet.

24 The stricter I become with my diet, the more I seem to experience one or more physical symptoms such as fatigue, faintness, heart racing, nausea, diarrhea, pain, etc.
Appendix N

Experience of Embodiment

Please choose the number from the following that best describes how you feel about each of the statements listed below. Indicate your response by selecting a number beside each statement: That is, “1” if you Strongly Disagree; “2” if you Somewhat Disagree; “3” if you Neither Agree nor Disagree; “4” if you Somewhat Agree; OR “5” if you Strongly Agree. Please provide responses for how you currently feel (past four weeks).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel in tune with my body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel at one with my body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel &quot;detached&quot; and separate from my body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel depressed/anxious/scared in/about my body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I care more about how my body feels than about how it looks</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I focus more on what my body can do than on its appearance</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My eating habits are a way for me to manage my emotions or how I have felt about myself</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Generally I feel good/comfortable in my body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am proud of what my body can do</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel dissatisfied, envious and frustrated when I compare my body to other females</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel joy in my body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. My body reduces my sense of self worth in the world</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. I sometimes tend to blame my body for difficulties I am having</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. I am comfortable with my sexual feelings/desires</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I engage in potentially harmful or painful behaviours (e.g., disordered eating, binging, purging, denying physical needs, skin cutting, burning, drug use, excessive alcohol consumption)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I have an eating disorder</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I take good care of, and am respectful of, my body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I ignore the signs my body sends me (e.g., of hunger, stress, fatigue, illness/injury)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I spend a lot of time/energy/money engaging in activities that I hope make me fit with cultural ideals of beauty (e.g., exercise, clothing, make-up, hair, plastic surgery, skin bleaching)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20. I am comfortable voicing my views, opinions and beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. I find it difficult to express my emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. I am aware of my needs</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23. It is hard for me to read/identify my feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. I am comfortable with, and proud of, who I am</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I consider myself to be a powerful woman</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I am aware of, and confident in, my strengths and abilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. My dissatisfaction with my body/appearance has a negative effect on my social life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I feel disconnected from my own sense of sexual desire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I express what I want and need sexually</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I feel that I cannot express what I want or need in a dating/partnership relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. I have difficulty asserting myself with others in the world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. I believe in my ability to accomplish what I desire in the world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I put a priority on listening to my body and its needs (e.g., stress, fatigue, hunger)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I constantly think about the way my body fits with cultural standards of beauty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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If there was any additional information that you were unable to share during the focus group that you feel would be helpful for the researcher to know, please provide that anonymous information here:

__________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix O

**List of Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connected to body</th>
<th>Uncomfortable in uniform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No connection to body</td>
<td>Performance influences confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Push through mentality”</td>
<td>Expectation to perform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to make choices for body</td>
<td>Juggling many responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches/Athletic trainer have final say</td>
<td>Repetitive schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy with food</td>
<td>Passionate about sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to eat healthy</td>
<td>Little time for self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited food intake</td>
<td>More care for body in off season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to eat</td>
<td>Burnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-eating episodes</td>
<td>Sport is life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger affects performance</td>
<td>Requirement to stay eligible for sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food affects performance</td>
<td>Represent team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fueling body with food is important</td>
<td>Do not want to let the team down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resting body is important</td>
<td>Avoid social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough rest</td>
<td>Perform better than teammates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt around rest</td>
<td>Difficult friendships with teammates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less body confidence off season</td>
<td>Fear losing scholarship funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative feelings about having athletic build</td>
<td>No outside workouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative body image</td>
<td>Daily/Almost daily workouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for weight loss</td>
<td>Intensity of workouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear weight gain</td>
<td>Dislike workouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working out instills confidence</td>
<td>Enjoyable workouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body comparison to teammates</td>
<td>Workout in off season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body comparison to non-athletes</td>
<td>Stereotypes for sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-athletes have freedom</td>
<td>Scrapes/bruises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to be strong and fit</td>
<td>Playing is worth it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in shape</td>
<td>Good program at WCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small/tight uniforms</td>
<td>Choose career path</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>