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Female High School Athlete's Confidence about their Future in College Athletics

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Female High School Athlete's Confidence about their Future in College Athletics

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Abstract

Female athletes may begin at an early age in a sport and find success, but in many cases, there is a disconnect somewhere before entering college where females feel less confident and discontinue their athletic career before college. Some studies have looked at female athletes and their confidence level, however, there is more research that needs to be done to determine if females feel confident that they have the same opportunities available in college as their male counterparts. This study was designed to explore female athletes' confidence level for their future in college sports. Data was gathered from female athletes of all age levels in high school from two different schools and quantitatively examined to determine their confidence level for continuing to play sports at the college level. The results indicate that a majority of female athletes feel they have the same opportunities to play in college as their male counterparts, however, they did not feel confident that a college program would recognize their talent. More research should be done with high school female athletes and their confidence level to get a better understanding of why female athletes drop out of sports at higher rates as they approach high school and college age.

Keywords: confidence, female athlete, opportunity, Title IX

Female High School Athlete's Confidence about Their Future in College Athletics

The benefit of sport is equally important for both male and female. Participating in sports benefits all participants by giving positive health benefits, psychological health benefits, social benefits and physiological benefits as we age (Stewart & Taylor, 2000). Recent surveys show that girls drop out of playing sports at an earlier age than boys. Participation rates are equivalent between boys and girls under the age of ten (Arient, 2007). Nearly 50 percent of girls who participate in sport under the age of ten quit by the time they become teenagers (Butcher, 2002). According to statistics on the Women's Sports Foundation website, by the age of 14 girls drop out of sports at two times the rate of boys ("Factors Influencing", 2016). Because of these declining numbers participants, there are lower numbers of athletes in high school and college. When there are lower numbers of participants there may be less competition rates and giving a perception that female participation is of lower quality than that of male competition (Cragen, 2009).

Physical education is an integral part of the school day in elementary school and is something most students look forward to because it allows for a break from the classroom routine. However, even in the earliest experience in physical education, students are separated by gender in playing certain games, lining up or even from moving back and forth from class; already causing students to get the idea that separation is natural or expected (Lock, 1999). In a study of unique challenges facing female athletes in urban schools, it was found that gender discrimination experienced by females from peers in 9th grade was higher for athletes than nonathletes (Knifsend & and Graham, 2012). The perceived peer gender discrimination remained higher over 11th and 12th grades possibly due to older girls becoming increasingly aware of gender discrimination as they became more cognitively mature (Knifsend & and Graham, 2012).

Socialization in gender roles, such as parental pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and media messages about feminism affected perceptions of gender discrimination at greater frequency in athletes in 11th and 12th grades (Knifsend & and Graham, 2012).

There is a higher percentage of females participating in sports through collegiate years than any other time in history (Arient, 2007; Cragen, 2009). Professional women's sports are still minimal. The reason it is important to keep females in sports is because this is the way to create role models for the younger girls in sport. One of the most significant reasons that young girls drop out of sports at earlier ages than boys is the lack of role models. Society continues to send the message to females that they must be externally beautiful and feminine as opposed to strong, confident and muscular women. There are fewer female athletes to identify with to oppose this stigma, therefore, many girls will give in to the struggle to be athletic and feminine at the same time.

In a study of the influence of the volleyball uniform on female college athletes' perceived physical appearance, several athletes said they felt out of place growing up until they joined sports and found a place where their bodies were valued (Miller, 2018). Despite this positive report, they also said they were aware of and felt measured by acceptable gender expectations of femininity; being smaller, shorter and more petite (Miller, 2018). Some respondents mentioned that being tall and strong was viewed as masculine traits and that made them feel out of place, therefore when younger; they perceived those masculine traits as a downfall for them (Miller, 2018). The athletes in the study reported that the concern about conforming is always present in their minds and, even when they are in a sport where it is acceptable to be tall and strong, they still expressed concern or awareness that they should look like a woman (Miller, 2018).

With so many signals that society sends to females about their “acceptable” behavior and appearance, we can determine that there must be support from influential sources for them to continue their pursuit of sports. If there is not strong encouragement from parents, peers and coaches to stay in the game and help with finding a sport they enjoy from a very young age, it is quite likely that girls will drop out (Adachi, 2013). Success alone cannot drive an individual to take play to each higher level. Encouragement plays a major part in a female athlete's decision to continue to play at a higher level.

Research on adolescent self-esteem reveals that individuals experience significant changes in their physical, cognitive, and social identities during their adolescent years, or starting even younger, and this plays an important role in developing their self-esteem. Self-esteem is the evaluative component of self-concept, the positive or negative manner in which a person judges herself or himself (Guinn, Vincent, Semper, & Jorgensen, 2000). Prior research also reveals a positive relationship between an adolescent's participating in structured extracurricular activities and well-being (Kort-Butler & Hagemen, 2011). Often times sport is the activity that parents will choose as part of the child's formative years and why it is so important for developing self-esteem in both genders. The findings in a study of activity involvement and adolescent self-esteem found growth in self-esteem from mid-adolescence into young adulthood when participating in extracurricular activities no matter what type it included (Kort-Butler & Hagemen, 2011). In addition, those who participated in school-based extracurricular activities had higher initial levels of self-esteem compared to those who did not participate (Kort-Butler & Hagemen, 2011). A research study by Magyar showed that the ability to build and maintain self-confidence in sport can enhance athletic performance and one's overall sport experience

(Magyar, 2001). This idea supports the thought that prior sport success is vital to helping individuals decide to continue or discontinue their sport play at each level.

Studies have shown that the main reasons for quitting sports include lack of enjoyment, chronic stress, conflict of interest and/or the person's concept of their competency in a sport (Stewart & Taylor, 2000; Cragen, 2009; Arient, 2007). It is critical that girls continue playing sports to maintain their health, improve self-esteem and develop life skills. Athletes from both genders benefit by maintaining a healthy weight and learning about nutrition. Playing sports helps build confidence in adolescents as well as helps them learn teamwork, communication skills and time management because that is what it takes to be part of a team. Activities, such as sports, give adolescents a place to establish their own identities and gives them stability of self-esteem into adulthood. To better understand a female athlete's confidence and motivation in sport is a reason to investigate this topic. In doing so, people in influential roles such as physical education teachers, coaches, athletic directors, administrators, and parents can get a better understanding of this topic as well.

Review of Literature

Gender division is a natural division in physical education classes (Lock, 1999). Beginning very early in the elementary years in school, boys and girls are separated for lining up or teaming up and these experiences reinforce gender differences as being natural (Lock, 1999). According to research done by Shen, a large majority of school children and adolescent girls are found to be less motivated to participate in physical education and the number of girls in physical activity or sport continues to decline with age (2015).

In the setting of a high school physical education class, gender becomes a dominate force in shaping and defining the lives of both girls and boys as stated by Lock in her research (1999). In a Canadian study of why females are less likely to choose physical education, when given a choice, it revealed that the public nature of PE, the presence of aggressive male students and social barriers were among the reasons (Robinson, 2013). Another study by Slater confirmed that image concerns and teasing from peers contributed to higher rates of withdrawal from physical activity for adolescent girls (2011).

Shen noted, in his study, that boys place higher value on participating in sport and physical education than girls (2015). Another study by Ross indicates that male participation in sport is considered natural and often encouraged by parents and peers. From a young age, males are told that sports will help them gain prestige, self-esteem and a better chance to be socially accepted (2008). These studies show the great disparity between the genders in regard to messages given them relating to sport participation (Ross, 2008).

In the United States, sports have become a major entertainment source for many people. It is easier than ever to follow sports through media sources like radio, television, twitter and other social mediums. This media coverage of athletics plays a role in developing perceptions

about athletes and their athletic worth (Cragen, 2009). There is a great disproportion between media coverage between the genders (Cragen, 2009). One reason for this difference is because typically sport has been a male-dominated industry (Cragen, 2009). Females were seen as less competitive and more of a feminine or sexual participant in sports (Cragen, 2009). As a result of this less than ideal situation, there are a lot fewer opportunities for young females to identify role models in their sport (Cragen, 2009).

Generally, females who find some success and enjoyment in physical education in their younger years very likely enjoy playing sports and even put time and energy into becoming a skillful athlete (Adachi, 2013). Many studies have pointed to the fact that being part of extracurricular activities in school, like sports, help build self-esteem in adolescents. Data shows that adolescent's with higher self-esteem play sports more frequently and enjoy sports more than adolescents with lower self-esteem (Adachi, 2013). In regard to socialization effects, the Adachi study suggests that the degree in which adolescents enjoy sports may be more important for increasing self-esteem than the frequency of their involvement in sports (2013). This study suggests that if persons are encouraged to find a sport that they enjoy immensely at a young age, they may experience increases in self-esteem, which may set them up on an active and healthy path in their adolescent and adult years (Adachi, 2013).

Athletic participation in high school had a positive effect on educational attainment including pursuing higher education as cited in Herbert Marsh's article (2003). Numerous studies link athletes, as opposed to nonathletes, with higher grades in high school which may contribute to athletes getting more scholarships and encouragement to attend college than nonathletes (Marsh, 2003). Participation in sports in high school also help athletes develop leadership skills by communicating with their teammates and coaches which gives athletes a useful skill when

being recruited for scholarships and gives them an advantage in college as opposed to their nonathlete classmates (Gayles & Baker, 2013) Transitioning from high school to college can be a stressor for nonathletes and athletes alike, however, Gayles believes that the added layer of encouragement and confidence building in the lives of athletes from parents and coaches gives them an extra boost not felt by other students (2013).

Females perform well in more ego-oriented environments as opposed to task-oriented where tasks are perceived as achievable no matter what the gender according to a study by Frauman (2013). In addition, females were less confident when put in an area or sport that was thought of as more fitting for a male (Frauman, 2013). Frauman's study involved the outdoor sport of kayaking, generally a sport seen as a male sport. This study revealed that it is more difficult for women to feel confident when participating in a sport that is seen to be inappropriate for their gender (Frauman, 2013). Fear of failure and embarrassment in their performance, especially in front of males, led researchers to point out that females are better at tasks relating to soft skills. Soft skills are defined as skills that involve emotions and communication rather than hard skills which are more technical, hands-on skills where generally males tend to excel (Frauman, 2013).

An interesting finding in regard to female competence and confidence was revealed in an article on sport programming, self-perceptions and burnout among adolescent female athletes (Lancellotti, 2010). The research found that as female competence in her athletic ability increased, so did her confidence in her ability to perform up to expectations in her current sport (Lancellotti, 2010). Perceived sport competence and social influences are reasons are main reasons so many girls drop out of sports by the time they become teenagers (Cragen, 2009). A study by Magyar found when the athlete herself was goal oriented, this became a huge source of

confidence for them (2001). This study showed that the majority of the sources of confidence were heavily influenced by the goal orientation a person adopts (Magyar, 2001). In addition, athletes who took on a task orientation and perceived mastery climate as established by the coach were more confident in their own ability as a result of their coach's ability to train, make good decisions and lead the team (Magyar, 2001).

In a study of competition, gender and the sport experience, college athletes explained their viewpoints on origins of competitive differences. According to a male athlete, competition comes naturally to males because of their hormones and the thrill of competition (Warner, 2013). On the other hand, a female athlete explained that women are scrutinized more for their actions because of certain stereotypes; too much competitiveness is seen as a masculine trait (Warner, 2013). Women athletes, in the study, gave both biological and social explanation for why males are more competitive than females. The biological explanation for males tends to suggest to them that they must live up to this belief of competitiveness in society, while women feel the need to moderate competitiveness (Warner, 2013).

Whether stress experienced during competitive sport play attributes to an athlete's decision to continue play at a higher level is certainly a question that should be addressed. Top stress sources, stated by athletes in the study, were conflicts with game officials and coach dissatisfaction especially when the athlete was reprimanded by the coach in public (Gan, 2009). A study of Chinese college athletes in regard to sources of stress as a function of gender and skill level revealed that there was no significant difference between men and women in the perceived intensity for each stress source (Gan, 2009).

Athletes are said to be motivated to continue play for several reasons. Motivation is an internal condition that initiates, manages and sustains an action and can be thought of as an inner

energy that helps people reach their aims (Sari, 2015). The two basic types of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic as defined by prior research studies. Intrinsic motivation occurs when a person participates in an activity for its own sake and extrinsic motivation when a person is motivated by rewards and social recognition (Sari, 2015). The Sari study revealed that there was significant gender difference for intrinsic motivation and self-confidence; males showed higher scores on intrinsic motivation (2015). It was shown that the length of sports year, that the sport was practiced, was significantly correlated with self-confidence (Sari, 2015). Furthermore, the study indicates that athletes that feel high self-confidence and trust in their abilities will be motivated to practice their sport.

Overall conclusions of the 2015 Sari study point to the fact that athletes' self-confidence and sufficient beliefs about their abilities could be related to their higher intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to practice their sport. Lower-self-confidence and disbelief in their abilities could be reasons why they are not motivated to do their sport (Sari, 2015). Results from a study by Carpentier suggests that to increase athletes' feelings of competence and confidence, coaches should give quality change-oriented feedback in a descriptive way combined with promotion-oriented feedback that is confirming (2016).

American society projects standards of femininity on female student athletes that says that they should not be muscular, but thin and well-toned (Steinfeldt, Carter, Benton, & Steinfeldt, 2011). This often causes conflict for female athletes who need to be muscular to excel at their sport and yet see the need to conform to societal pressure to follow feminine standards. Stereotypes such as men are superior athletes, or women are fragile still exist in our society, however, Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972 made gains in leveling the playing field for male and female athletes. This federal law required any federally assisted education

program or activity to comply with mandated standards that allowed for equity along gender lines in participation (NCAA, 2014). Schools were to give both women and men equitable opportunities to participate in sports. This did not mean there must be identical sport offerings, but equitable opportunities. One good result of the law is that Title IX opened more educational and athletic opportunities for women. In many instances, these opportunities for women gave them a boost of confidence. However, there are still females, both locally and across the world that do not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts to participate in sport (Fisher, 2016). One important reason to care about this gender inequity and the future of women in sport is because it is the right thing to do (Fisher, 2016). For this reason, the United Nations along with the International Olympic Committee have set a goal to increase the self-efficacy and development of women through global sport programs (Fisher, 2016).

Sport participation is considered natural for males and strongly encouraged by parents and peers (Ross, 2008). As gender equality has continued to evolve in women's sports, encouragement by coaches, parents and peers has become influential; as well, spurring female athletes on to consider playing the sport longer. Females may participate in sports for different reasons than males and may respond to coaching techniques differently as well. In a study of burnout experiences of among adolescent female gymnasts, an athlete reported she struggled to adapt to five different coaches especially since she thought some were negative and degrading (Dubuc, Schinke, Eys, Battochio, & and Zaichkowsky, 2010). The athlete explained that her coaches were contributing factors to her burnout because they paid little attention to her and provided her with minimal encouragement, however, she did not withdraw from the sport because she felt her teammates were like family and, this particular athlete had a very encouraging parent, and for these reasons she did not give up (Dubuc, Schinke, Eys, Battochio,

& and Zaichkowsky, 2010). Two out of three of the gymnasts in the study experienced extreme levels of burnout, however, they stated that the caring and encouragement of parents and their most recent coach's encouragement helped them overcome this condition (Dubuc, Schinke, Eys, Battochio, & and Zaichkowsky, 2010). Coaching behaviors that are acceptable or permissible with male athletes may be perceived by female athletes as rude, unfair, or not encouraging enough (Stewart & Taylor, 2000). The study by Stewart emphasizes the need for coaches to be trained in the varying reasons why female athletes play sports so that these barriers are reduced (Stewart & Taylor, 2000). There are various reasons why athletes quit a sport, but reasons such as negative or rude comments, little encouragement, or the perception of unfair practices are things that a coach can control to lessen the chance an athlete may quit the sport. The impact of encouragement by coaches, family and friends is definitely an important factor for the female athlete to continue to play sports.

Cultural and family heritage could play a role in the female athlete's perception of the importance to continue playing sports as they advance to the next level of play. A study on activity involvement, goal perspective and self-esteem among Mexican American Adolescents revealed that allocentrism is a predominant characteristic identified in Mexican American adolescents (Guinn, Vincent, Semper, & Jorgensen, 2000). Allocentrism is a self-orientation emphasizing the collective needs, objectives, and points of view of the group and has been associated with conformity and influence by others (Guinn, Vincent, Semper, & Jorgensen, 2000). Mexican-American cultural value differs in significance from the mainstream American self-orientation values of competition, individualism, and achievement (Guinn, Vincent, Semper, & Jorgensen, 2000). A study of sources of acute stress for Chinese college athletes as a function of gender and skill level notes that influence of culture may attribute to some of the explanations

of no significant differences between men and women in perceived intensity for their stress source (Gan, 2009). The author of the Chinese athlete study notes that Chinese females are encouraged to participate in sport activities (Gan, 2009). Chinese female athletes have the same opportunities as their male counterparts to develop their abilities in sports (Gan, 2009). Chinese women's teams were among the best in the world as seen in the XXVIII Olympic Games in Athens and are seen as more competitive than their male counterparts in modern sports (Gan, 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider the athlete and their cultural heritage when trying to determine their confidence level and decision to continue to play sport in high school, college and beyond.

A study of basketball players noted that coaches that build trusting positive relationships with their athletes help develop the perception of self-efficacy in their athletes. Perceptions of self-efficacy are important in the motivation of athletes (DeBoer, 2011) and is a strong reason for athletes to play at higher levels of their sport. Coaches that build trusting positive relationships with their athletes set good positive examples and form great expectations for their athletes helping athletes to be more successful than coaches that do not (Wooden, 2004). Coaches that help develop the perception of self-efficacy in their athletes will see better quality teams (Wooden, 2004).

Peer pressure is something adolescents must face growing up in today's world, but this pressure is even more prevalent for a female athlete. This is why young girls need strong, confident female athlete role models (Olmstead, 2015). These role models can encourage adolescent girls to get involved in physical activity as well as join a sports team endorsing the lifelong benefits of having a healthy body and mind. Most adolescents must achieve certain

grades to be part of a team in middle school or high school, therefore, benefiting them in their academic area as well.

Sports can be a way that benefit many female athletes to continue their education by securing scholarships as well as by being confident leaders in the work force. In her article on benefits of female role models, Olmstead states that there are lots of former female athletes now working at Fortune 500 companies. Having girls hear about these successful athletes who have transitioned to success in the work force shows the girls the importance of staying in school and working hard (2015). The 2019 USA women's soccer team set the bar high for young female athletes. The team demonstrated that hard work, confidence and belief in their ability and their team are more important than a certain body image. It is important that our society provide opportunities for young female adolescents to see these successful female athletes, both former and present, to help young girls build confidence in their future and what they can achieve.

The hypotheses, for purpose of this study, was that female athletes would feel they have the same opportunities to play sports in college as their male counterparts. Taking a look at the athlete's motivation and self-confidence were definitely effects that had to be taken into consideration to examine the hypothesis. In addition, information was gathered on the encouragement the athlete received from coaches and family members during their sport career. It was also important to find out if there were previous family members, or friends that had played sports in college to perhaps see a relationship with that reality and their decision for future sport play in college. Lastly, it was important to look at whether finding a college sports program that would recognize their ability in a sport contributed to their perception of having the same opportunities as their male counterparts to play sports in college.

Methods

Participants

This study was designed to investigate the female high school athlete's confidence about their future in college athletics. The participants in this study were 229 high school female athletes between their freshman and senior years in school who attended a high school in the Midwest region of the United States. The subjects were identified by the Athletic Director at the individual school according to participation rosters. The research was conducted in the spring semester at both schools at the time when athletes had either completed their season of play or were in their last sport for the school year. One of the high schools was in a rural town in Iowa with athletes of very similar socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures. The other high school was in a suburban community just outside of Chicago, Illinois. The athlete respondents from Illinois lived in many different towns in the surrounding area and came from many different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. There were 166 student athletes that came from the Illinois school and 63 from the rural Iowa school. The athletes' educational experience was very similar in the fact that the schools were both nonpublic. The respondents consisted of 47 freshmen, 52 sophomores, 70 juniors, and 60 seniors. Sports offered at these schools were: Cross Country, Track, Basketball, Soccer, Dance, Cheer, Baseball, Softball, Bowling and Volleyball. All respondents had played one or more of these sports throughout the year.

Data Collection

Data was recorded in a couple of different ways. First, the survey that was given to the students in the Illinois school was written on paper. That data was collected and compiled by hand and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The data from the Iowa school was taken by the students using a Google form that provided live updates on their results after taking the test.

Assumptions for this research were that the survey forms are readily understood by the participants and are valid for the purpose.

The data from both schools was combined on an Excel spreadsheet and sorted in several different ways. The data was grouped by freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior and also grouped by the type of sport each student played. If there were students that played multiple sports, they were listed as such and their answer was recorded one time. These groupings allowed for a more in-depth look into similarities, differences and trends that were occurring throughout the data.

Findings

Data Analysis

The research question used was, "Do female high school athletes feel less confident about their future in college athletics than male high school athletes"? These questions guided the study: 1) do you feel you have the same opportunities to play sports in college as your male counterparts, 2) has either your coach or your family encouraged you to play sports in college, 3) are you confident that you will find a college sports program that will recognize your ability in your chosen sport, and 4) do you have female family members or friends that are or have been athletes in college. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for characteristics of age, gender, grade level, athletic sport team and year in sport.

The data from this research confirms that the older the individual, and probably more experienced, the more confident they are in playing sports. Initial results showed that female high school athletes feel they have the same opportunities as males to play college athletics. Over two-thirds of the female athlete respondents said they are confident they will have the same opportunities to play sports in college as their male counterparts. Such positive results maybe, in part, due to the gains made in women's sports over the past four decades.

As was noted in the literature review, boys seem to gain a lot of their confidence through playing sports (Ross, 2008). The table below confirms that the majority of females believe they are given the same opportunities as males to play sports in college. Over 70 percent of all respondents from all age levels say they feel they have the same opportunities to play sports in college as their male counterparts. The data shows that slightly more juniors and seniors (76%) are confident than the freshmen and sophomores (61%) when it comes to feeling they have the same opportunities to play sports in college.

It might be reasonable to conclude, according to this research, that the confidence they said they had seemed enough to motivate them to continue to pursue playing in college despite the negative messages or experiences they had in younger years. The majority of females in the study were confident enough in themselves to feel they were given the same opportunities to play college athletics as their male peers.

Table A1	
<i>Number of females athletes who feel they have same opportunities as males</i>	
<u>Total Responses “Yes”</u>	<u>Total Responses “No”</u>
161	68
<u>Senior</u>	<u>Senior</u>
44	16
<u>Junior</u>	<u>Junior</u>
56	14
<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>
32	20
<u>Freshman</u>	<u>Freshman</u>
29	18

The Chi Square Goodness of fit test was used to determine significance level for the above data. There is statistically no significant difference in the number of observed ($n = 161$) than expected ($n = 165$), with weak practical significance, $\chi^2 = 0.35$, $p > .05$, $\Phi = .56$ for the question on female athletes feel they have the same opportunities to play sports in college as their male counterparts. The numbers on the chart above show that perhaps females may gain

confidence from playing sports as they get older and have more playing years as the number of older respondents surpassed the number of younger respondents with positive responses.

The table below shows whether the athletes have been encouraged to continue to play sports at the college level by family members or coaches. Of the athletes in all age groups, 52 percent have been encouraged to play sports in college by either coaches or family members. The data reveals that as players get older, they get more encouragement to continue to play sports in college. Juniors and seniors had a combined 65 percent of parents or coaches encourage them to play at the next level whereas only 41 percent of the freshman and sophomore respondents had been encouraged to play at the college level. The data shows that there is a very similar number of female athletes who are confident they will have the same opportunities as males in college athletics as those who have been encouraged by family or coaches indicating that encouragement is an important component to keeping female athletes in sport at the college level.

Table A2	
<i>Number of athletes encouraged to play in college by family or coach</i>	
<u>Total Reponses “Yes”</u>	<u>Total Reponses “No”</u>
121	108
<u>Senior</u>	<u>Senior</u>
39	21
<u>Junior</u>	<u>Junior</u>
43	27
<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>
25	27
<u>Freshman</u>	<u>Freshman</u>
14	33

The Chi Square Goodness of fit test was used to determine significance level. There is statistically significant difference in the number of observed ($n = 121$) than expected ($n = 165$), with strong practical significance, $\chi^2 = 41.98$, $p < .05$, $\Phi = 0.00$ for the questions on has your coach or family encouraged you to play sports in college. The expectation was for most of the respondents to respond that they had been encouraged to continue play while in reality just over 50 percent said they were encouraged. An interesting fact is that 70 percent of the athletes say they have the confidence to play in college, but only 52 percent have been encouraged by family and coaches to continue to play in college, therefore, it is probable that there are definitely more motivating factors involved in their decision. An indirect observation from my study indicated that, although a small sample, all the athletes had definite plans to attend college, although only a little less than half of them planned to play sports in college.

The impact of encouragement by coaches, family and friends to continue to play sports in college is definitely a factor for the female athletes in this study. The data showed that just over half of the respondents were encouraged by coaches, family or friends to continue play sport in college. This closely corresponds with the fact that slightly less than half of the athletes felt confident that a college program would recognize their talent. The data from this research study showed that the majority of the athletes that were encouraged by coaches and family to continue to play were juniors and seniors; probably because of them being older and closer to making the college decisions.

As shown in the table below, only 44 percent of all athletes overall age levels felt confident that their talents would be recognized by a college program in their chosen sport. Seniors and freshman showed a higher confidence level of getting recognized for their talent than sophomores and juniors. Perhaps freshman felt more confident because high school sports are the start of a new opportunity and their level of competition hasn't changed much from middle school. The fact that the survey was administered in the spring might have helped seniors feel confident that their talent would be recognized because they were already advanced in the college process and had a handle on what colleges will offer them; however, it is likely that juniors are anxious that colleges will not recognize their talent as they are just beginning to get looks from recruiters.

Table A3	
<i>Number of athletes confident colleges will recognize their talent</i>	
<u>Total Reponses "Yes"</u>	<u>Total Reponses "No"</u>
102	127
<u>Senior</u>	<u>Senior</u>
32	28
<u>Junior</u>	<u>Junior</u>
26	44
<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>
19	33
<u>Freshman</u>	<u>Freshman</u>
25	22

The Chi Square Goodness of fit test was used to determine significance level. There is statistically significant difference in the number of observed ($n = 102$) than expected ($n = 165$), with strong practical significance, $\chi^2 = 86.07$, $p < .05$, $\Phi = 0.00$ for the question on confidence that a college program will recognize your talent. Therefore, most feel they will be recognized for their talent which agrees with the hypothesis.

When the participants were asked if they had any female family members that are currently playing sports in college, or have played sports while in college, the results were comparable to the data recorded above for athletes who feel confident they will find the same opportunities as males in college sports. The data revealed, as seen in the table below, that 70 percent of the females surveyed had family connection to the next level. It is interesting to see that the freshman group had the most family connection to the college level, but showed the least amount of confidence. Because the numbers were very closely related for confidence level and

family members who have played at the college level, it may point to the fact that a female athlete’s confidence is given a boost when they have family role models.

Table A4	
<i>Number of athletes who have family members who are or have played collegiate sports</i>	
<u>Total Reponses “Yes”</u>	<u>Total Reponses “No”</u>
161	68
<u>Senior</u>	<u>Senior</u>
32	28
<u>Junior</u>	<u>Junior</u>
52	18
<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>
37	15
<u>Freshman</u>	<u>Freshman</u>
40	7

The Chi Square Goodness of fit test was used to determine significance level. There is statistically no significant difference in the number of observed ($n = 161$) than expected ($n = 165$), with weak practical significance, $\chi^2 = 0.35$, $p > .05$, $\Phi = .56$ for the question on do you have female family members or friends that are or have been athletes in college. The data showed that 70 percent of female athletes have had a family member or friend who played college sports. It is important to note that there was the same amount of respondents with female family members or friends who played sports in college as the number of respondents who felt they have the same opportunities to play sport in college as their male counterparts. Therefore, the data indicates that

female athletes are more likely to feel they have the same opportunities to play in college as males if they had a family member or friend as a role model.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

High school male athletes are generally encouraged, by coaches, family and friends, to get stronger and play harder from a very young age which helps boost their confidence level and increases their opportunities to play sports in college (Ross, 2008). Female athletes, on the other hand, may begin at an early age in a sport and find success, but in many cases, there is a disconnect somewhere before entering college where females feel less confident and discontinue their athletic career before college (Adachi, 2013). Society continues to send messages to females that they should be strong, but not overly muscular maintaining a petite and less competitive image (Steinfeldt, Carter, Benton, & Steinfeldt, 2011). This disparity, between genders, in making the decision to continue sport play in college is something that was of interest and lead to further study.

Major findings from the research show that a majority of female athletes feel they have the same opportunities to play sports in college as their male counterparts. As noted in prior research, sporting activities affect different girls in different ways. Sports participation appears to foster the self-esteem of girls who enjoy sporting activities because they perceive themselves as benefiting in some ways by their participation (Shaffer, 2006). Since the current study focused on high school students that already had some success in their sport at a younger age, the fact that they enjoy sport may give them a more positive perception of the opportunities available to them in college. They may also definitely see a positive benefit to themselves for continuing to play their sport career in college.

It is most significant to note that confidence level was higher for females if they were encouraged by family members or coaches to continue play at the next level. The study showed

that slightly more than half of the respondents were given encouragement from their families and coaches to continue play at the college level which closely corresponds with the fact that slightly less than half of the athletes felt confident that a college program would recognize their talent.

The data in the current study suggests that role models matter. There was significant correlation between feeling confident in having the same opportunities to play sport in college with those who had a family member or friend who had played a sport in college shown in the data collected. There were almost three-fourths of the respondents with friends or family that had played collegiate sports. The data collected showed exactly the same percentage of athletes who indicated that they have the same opportunities to play sport in college as their male counterparts. This correlation gives support to other research studies as well that role models are important for female athletics in giving them confidence to continue to choose to play sports at each higher level.

This study and prior research agree that female athletes that disregard social barriers and are given constant reassurance of their ability in a sport are more likely to further their pursuit of collegiate athletics. Coaches play a huge role in encouraging individual athletes under their care to believe in themselves and to build confidence and self-esteem needed for the next level. In addition, physical education teachers, athletic directors, parents and physicians are in a strategic role to explain the benefits that might be incurred from participating in sports such as physical capabilities, weight control, and learning more assertiveness; especially for females. This encouragement can be an important contributing factor to a female athlete's future decision to play sports at each level.

Limitations of the Study

One important consideration is the time of year that the survey was given. Since participants were in the second semester of the year, most seniors probably had already made their decision about playing sports in college and had already explored the possibilities of scholarship opportunities with different colleges. Freshmen were probably adjusted to high school and more confident in their abilities more so than they would have been in the beginning of their high school career.

Another potential concern may be the differences in instrumentation for the survey. Respondents from one school used paper copies to record their answers and data was recorded manually. The other school's respondents took the survey electronically and data was initially calculated electronically, but later incorporated with the other school's data. Furthermore, the multisport athletes completed only one survey. The respondents may not have focused on their strongest sport alone when answering the questions. If they were given one survey for each sport they participated in throughout the year, there may have been more accurate data results.

A limitation to consider is that it is a small sampling. There were only two high schools that participated in the study with a total of 229 participants. In addition, the schools were very different demographics. One school was in a rural area of with athletes of very similar backgrounds and cultures. The other school was a suburban school located only a few miles from a large metropolitan area that had athletes from a large radius of towns in that area and, therefore, athletes came from many different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. A similarity for both schools were that they were nonpublic schools, however, this could be a limitation as well.

Lastly, a disadvantage might be that this study did not seek to determine the athlete's family attitude toward women in sports. In some cultures or within some family structures, females are not encouraged to participate in sports beyond a certain level or age. Even female athletes with excellent skills in a sport might be discouraged from higher level play if that is not acceptable in their family or culture.

Despite its limitations, the current study has important practical implications. First, that the majority of female athletes feel they have the same opportunities to play sports in college as their male counterparts. This finding is encouraging to high school and sports programs that are wanting to continue to develop their women's sport programs. Secondly, the results showed that confidence level for females were higher when encouraged by family members and coaches. This is valuable information for families and coaches as they guide young athletes in their decisions about their sport career. Coaches, especially, have the ability to influence their athletes to stick it out when the going gets tough, or when athletes are not finding a college program that recognizes their ability in the sport. Coaches should see that they are a vital link to the future of their athlete's future in sports.

The direct correlation between having a family member or friend that played sports in college with the athletes' confidence of having the same opportunities to play sport in college as their male counterparts is significant to note. As cited in the literature review previously, social pressure to conform to societal expectations of femininity can be devastating and can be the difference between continuing in sport, or ending the career. The current study findings suggest that it is important for females to have role models in college so they may be encouraged to continue their sport career. Research shows that sports benefit a female in many ways including providing a way to further their education as well as helping them become confident leaders in

the work force. Educational leaders must recognize the importance of women's sports in developing future leaders in our society.

Further Study

This study informs high school and college athletic administration of the perception of female high school athletes and gives heightened understanding of females' confidence to their future playing of sports. This study provides physical education teachers, coaches and parents valuable information when advising female athletes for their future in athletics. This study also adds to the literature base in the field of athletics.

This study did not look into racial demographics. It would be valuable to future studies to look at race as it relates to perception of female high school athlete's confidence about their future in college athletics. It may give more clarity to check for statistical differences along racial lines as to the significance of female perception about continuing their sports play in college.

Family heritage was not taken into consideration in this study. It is important to determine if family heritage plays a role in the perception of female high school athlete's confidence about their future in college athletics. Factors that determine a prior family member's sport play in college as it relates to the encouragement a current female family member receives when deciding to continue her sport play in college may give credibility to when and why an athlete quits a sport.

Further study into female perception of playing sports in high school, when moving from the middle school level, would strengthen the findings in this study. In addition, further study of female athletes that decided to transition from playing college to professional sports, or Olympic sport would also provide understanding. Gaining insight into the perception and confidence level

of athletes as they make a decision about continuing play at the next level would be valuable for professionals working with female athletes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the perception of female high school athletes' confidence to their future of playing college athletics. In examining female confidence level, the perception of opportunities available in comparison to their male counterparts and encouragement by others were considered to determine: 1) if female athletes are confident that they have the same future opportunities available to them as male athletes in college, and 2) if female athletes are encouraged to take the opportunities available to them to play sports in college from coaches, family and friends. A review of literature indicated that females that find success and enjoyment in physical education in their younger years will very likely enjoy playing sports and put time and energy into becoming a skillful athlete. In addition, studies show when a female athlete has reassurance and confidence, they are more likely to continue with athletics. These research findings were the impetus to study the topic further. A survey was designed to examine the hypothesis that female athletes would feel they have the same opportunities to play sports in college as their counterparts.

Overall, the results indicated that a majority of female athletes feel they have the same opportunities to play in college as their male counterparts. Confidence level was higher for females if they were encouraged by family members or coaches to continue play, or had family members that played college sports. There was a strong correlation between female athletes who knew a family member or friend that had played a sport in college and the perception they had to find the same opportunities to play sports in college as their male counterparts.

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