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Drugs, Alcohol, and the Community College Student-Athlete: A Narrative Study

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Kevin A. Berg

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Walden University
2019

|

Abstract

Drugs, Alcohol, and the Community College Student-Athlete:

A Narrative Study

by

Kevin A. Berg

MSW, Cleveland State University, 2011

MA, Bowling Green State University, 2001

BA, Bowling Green State University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Research shows that student-athletes, whether at the high school or collegiate ranks, experience higher rates of alcohol consumption than their non-athlete student counterparts. However, one population that has not been studied is the community college student-athlete. Traditional community college students have different risk categories and needs than traditional 4-year university students. In this study, community college student-athletes provided their views and perceptions on drugs and alcohol. To obtain data, a qualitative narrative analysis was completed by interviewing 13 community college student-athletes to identify their views and opinions on drugs and alcohol. Once the interviews were completed, transcription and coding were completed to identify the themes and nuances of the narratives. The major themes identified within the study included varying perspectives in how student-athletes view drugs and the perceived effects that drugs have on athletic performance. Researchers have found that collegiate student-athletes experience unique stressors, when compared with other college students, such as balancing athletics and academics. However, in this study, an additional stressor outside of previous research was discovered in that community college, student-athletes struggle with the transition to the community college environment. Additional research is needed on community college student-athletes, including the possible development of tailored interventions to meet those targeted needs.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to Allison, McKenzie and Tyler. They put up with my irritability after countless sleepless nights to allow me to achieve a life-long dream.

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Special thank you go out to Dr. Sean Hogan and Dr. Takeisha George for their assistance along the way. Your tireless work allowed me to persevere and continue moving forward.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background	2
Problem Statement	5
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions	9
Framework	9
Nature of the Study	10
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations	12
Limitations	13
Significance.....	14
Summary	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review	19
Literature Search Strategy.....	19
Conceptual Framework.....	22
Literature Review.....	24
Culture of Athletic Substance Use.....	24
High School Student Athletes and Substance Use.....	27
Research on College Athletes and Specific Drug Categories	28
Factors Contributing to Differential Sports-Related Substance Use	35

Current NCAA Alcohol Intervention and Prevention Programs	39
Differences between University and Community College Students.....	42
Summary	43
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	45
Research Design and Rationale	45
Role of the Researcher	48
Methodology	51
Instrumentation	54
Data Analysis Plan.....	56
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	59
Ethical Procedures	61
Summary	63
Chapter 4: Results	65
Introduction.....	65
Chapter Organization	65
Setting	66
Demographics	66
Data Collection	67
Data Analysis	68
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	70
Results.....	71
First Research Question	72

Second Research Question.....	81
Third Research Question.....	86
Summary	92
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	94
Introduction.....	94
Interpretation of the Findings.....	94
Limitations of the Study.....	99
Recommendations.....	99
Implications.....	102
Conclusion	104
References.....	105
Appendix A: Script for Recruitment of Student-Athletes.....	127
Appendix B: Interview Guide	129

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to research, student-athletes are an at-risk population for increased substance use and dangerous levels of drinking (Hildebrand, Johnson, & Bogle, 2001; Mastroleo, Barnett, & Bowers, 2018), particularly when student-athletes believe that teammates approve of the behavior (Seitz et al., 2014). Although these findings are consistent for student-athletes at the high school and collegiate levels, community college student-athletes have been neglected in research. In this study, I conducted individual interviews of community college student-athletes to understand their views and perceptions of different types of drugs and alcohol and their effects on their sport. By understanding how community college student-athletes perceive these substances, social work programming, either prevention or intervention, can be developed and tailored to specifically meet the needs of the community college environment. These interventions could significantly increase the performance of community college student-athletes and their ability to be successful, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Within this section, I summarize current research, identify both the problem statement and purpose of the study, and present corresponding research questions. I outline the design of the study, including the conceptual framework and nature of the study. I also identify key definitions, assumptions, and limitations. Finally, I highlight the significance of the study and the rationale for its completion.

Background

Collegiate student-athletes are a special population with concern to their use of substances (Hyatt, 2003). Student-athletes, whether in high school or college, consume more alcohol, engage in more binge drinking, and drink more frequently than the rest of the student body (Hildebrand et al., 2001). According to Martens, Dams-O'Connor, and Beck (2006), student-athletes face up to six unique challenges that the rest of the college students do not: (a) balancing academics and athletics, (b) the unique status of being an athlete, (c) managing athletic success and failure, (d) minimizing or avoiding injury, (e) terminating their athletic career, and (f) weight issues (pp. 305-306).

With this special standing, researchers have explored the alcohol and drug use of college student-athletes. Research has found that collegiate student-athletes consume more alcohol (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006), drink more frequently and in larger amounts (Wechsler et al., 2002), and are more likely to drink for social reasons (Wilson, Pritchard, & Schaffer, 2004). Other researchers have found substance use differences between student-athletes and traditional college students with mixed results (Ford, 2008). Research has shown that participation in collegiate athletics is either a protective factor (Ford, 2008) or a risk factor due to peer pressure and social bonding (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000; Zhou & Heim, 2016). Whether a risk or protective factor, research on substance use among collegiate student-athletes has focused primarily on use, use comparisons, and identifying theories of use.

Although the research on substance use is important, little information has been gathered on the views and beliefs of student-athletes and how they perceive drugs and

alcohol (Druckman, Gilli, Klar, & Robison, 2014). Limited qualitative studies conducted with student-athletes have focused on the social aspect of drinking alcohol while ignoring other substances; furthermore, these studies were conducted outside the United States (Zhou & Heim, 2016). Depending on division, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) requires education prevention programming for student-athletes every semester, focusing on education about drugs and alcohol (NCAA, 2017a). This programming has been shown to be ineffective in curtailing substance use by student-athletes with substance use rates increasing through the years (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). In fact, inconsistent educational programming that is focused on drugs and alcohol has collegiate student-athletes requesting more specific information surrounding this topic (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Other prevention efforts have focused on using motivational interviewing (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014) and motivational interviewing with tailored feedback (Cimini et al., 2015). Both studies showed promising results in decreasing substance use in the short term, but additional research is needed to determine long-term effectiveness. The most promising research focuses on tailoring prevention interventions to the student-athlete (Cimini et al., 2015). By increasing the knowledge of how community college student-athletes view alcohol and drugs, tailored programming could be developed to meet the needs of community college student-athletes.

Research on collegiate student-athlete consumption within the United States has solely focused on the NCAA (Lisha & Sussman, 2010; Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006; Zhou & Heim, 2014). In the United States, there are three primary collegiate

athletic governing bodies: the NCAA, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Currently, the NCAA has 460,000 student-athletes, the NAIA has 60,000 student-athletes, and the NJCAA has 65,000 student-athletes (NCAA, 2017a; NAIA, 2018; NJCAA, 2018). Presently, one-quarter of collegiate student-athletes' needs, and voices have not been heard in the research.

The NCAA is currently divided into three divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III. Research has looked at consumption rates between the three divisions and between sports (Green, Uryasz, Petr, & Bray, 2001). Findings show that Division III student-athletes had higher rates of alcohol use than the other two divisions. Gender differences also appeared within the research with women's swimming and diving and women's soccer having the highest prevalence rates when substance use was compared by sport (Green et al., 2001). Although these studies are informative, they took substance use in the past year into account rather than any other measures. However, the lowest NCAA division (III) had the highest prevalence rates and the least amount of required educational programming (Green et al., 2001). With differences in alcohol and drug use between NCAA divisions, research needs to be conducted on all collegiate student-athletes, including the NAIA and NJCAA, to gather a full picture of the needs of this unique population.

Currently, no comparative information exists on substance use or consumption rates for community college student-athletes. Prior to engaging in research to compare NCAA and community college student-athletes, qualitative research should be conducted

to allow the voice of the community college student-athlete to steer the need for future research. Does the community college student-athlete perceive drug and alcohol use in a unique way requiring specific interventions to meet their needs?

Problem Statement

The field of social work is focused on empowering oppressed and marginalized clients toward success (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017). When identifying at-risk or vulnerable populations, student-athletes typically do not come to mind and are often viewed as having privileged status (Gill, 2008). Reality can be deceptive. According to research, collegiate student-athletes are a vulnerable population who exhibit heavy alcohol use (Rodgers, 2012), as well as increased rates of depression (Maniar, Chamberlain, & Moore, 2005), when compared with the general collegiate student body. The field of social work has been called to action to assist student-athletes and to provide needed and necessary interventions when problems are identified (Gill, 2009; Teasley & Gill, 2014).

One heavily researched area requiring social work intervention would be the use of drugs and alcohol by collegiate student-athletes (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Martens, Dams-O'Connor, Duffy-Paiement & Gibson, 2006). Research on NCAA student-athletes shows larger quantities of alcohol consumed on more frequent occasions by student-athletes, when compared with the general student population (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). However, all research on collegiate student-athletes to date has focused on the NCAA, missing student-athletes from the NIAI and community colleges (Lisha & Sussman, 2010). The NCAA mandates drug and alcohol

programming within Division I, but programming varies, is educationally based, and has shown mixed results (Larimer & Cronce, 2007; Martens, 2012). Research shows limited information pertaining to how student-athletes perceive drug and alcohol use, particularly when designing and implementing prevention or intervention programming (Druckman et al., 2014). The field of social work strives to provide evidence-based interventions and services that meet the client's needs, which is currently impossible with no data available on community college student-athletes (NASW, 2017).

According to the NJCAA (2017), 20 varsity sports are represented with nearly 65,000 student-athletes participating yearly and no research surrounding drug and alcohol use. Currently, the NJCAA does not mandate drug testing of, or drug and alcohol prevention programming for, student-athletes, leaving that decision up to the individual colleges themselves (NJCAA, 2017). Research shows that student-athletes may be more susceptible to substance use for many reasons, including hyper competitiveness (Kohlstedt & Visek, 2012), stress relief (Zhou & Heim, 2014), and social bonding of teammates (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, Duffy-Paiement, & Gibson, 2006). Although future research could focus on the differences between community college and NCAA student-athletes, in this qualitative research project, I aimed to use a narrative analysis to understand how community college student-athletes view drugs (illicit drugs, prescription medications, performance enhancing drugs and over-the-counter supplements) and alcohol use from the athlete's perspective.

Purpose of the Study

My primary purpose in this study is to further the knowledge of how collegiate student-athletes view drugs and alcohol by including a previously ignored population, *community college student-athletes*. The research on collegiate student-athletes has focused on 4-year NCAA student-athletes who are required to undergo varying degrees of educational programming and drug testing as mandated by the NCAA (Lisha & Sussman, 2010). Student-athletes in the NCAA frequently live together in dormitories, are afforded advanced standing at the college, and are provided a multitude of resources to assist them both athletically and academically (NCAA, 2017a). Community colleges typically serve students who are living at home, living in poverty, serve more minority students, and have multiple life stressors such as children or employment (Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011). Studies show that community college students experience more lifetime traumatic events than other university students (Anders, Frazier, & Shallcross, 2012).

Although the NCAA student-athlete has been well-researched (Green et al., 2001; Hildebrand et al., 2001; Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006), little is known about community college student-athletes, including their unique stressors or their perceptions of drugs and alcohol. Community college student-athletes may have additional barriers to their academic and athletic careers including failing to qualify for the NCAA Clearinghouse, academic deficiencies, and choosing to use performance-enhancing drugs or supplements to help them achieve their long-term goals of playing in the NCAA or professional ranks. Within this study, the community college student-athlete shared their experiences to highlight their unique needs.

In this study, I was not interested in asking student-athletes about their own substance use history. Instead, I sought to understand how the community college student-athlete viewed different substances, their views on substance use in high school and college, their views on drug testing and drug education programs throughout their career, and the effects that substances are having on their sport. Prevention programming offered by the NCAA is varied, allowing the individual institutions to determine the intervention of their choice (NCAA, 2017a). The NCAA has adopted the CHOICES grant and the Athletic Prevention Programming and Leadership and Education (APPLE) intervention as sponsored activities (Rodgers, 2012). The CHOICES grant is sponsored by Anheuser-Busch and focuses on alcohol education by providing \$30,000 in funds to focus on educating the student body and athletes about alcohol abuse (NCAA, 2017b). The APPLE intervention focuses on all members of the athletic department to develop and promote healthy lifestyles regarding alcohol and prevention of illicit drug use (Bruce & Crockett, 2007). While the APPLE program has been adopted by more than 400 programs nationwide (Rodgers, 2012), educationally based alcohol prevention programming has been shown to be generally ineffective (Larimer & Crouse, 2012; Martens, 2012). Several smaller studies have evaluated specific interventions that are tailored to the individual student-athlete and use motivational interviewing with promising results (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014). However, smaller sample sizes and no long-term studies mean that additional research is required (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014). As there currently is no mandated drug prevention programming in the NJCAA (2018), individual interviews allowed community college student-athletes to share their views

and perceptions on drugs and alcohol. The identified themes and results of the study could positively impact the design and implementation of tailored prevention and intervention efforts to address drug and alcohol use by collegiate student-athletes and college students overall.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What are community college student-athletes' perceptions of alcohol and different drugs (including illicit drugs, prescription drugs, and over-the-counter supplements)?
2. What are community college student-athletes' perceptions of student-athlete alcohol and drug use as it relates to athletic performance?
3. How can social work enhance the drug education, testing, and prevention efforts of community college student-athletes over the course of their athletic careers?

Framework

Qualitative research focuses on context, meaning, and understanding the experience under study (Patton, 2015). For this project, my primary emphasis was to understand how community college student-athletes view and make sense of drug and alcohol use and its impact on athletic performance. To accomplish this task, I used narrative theory. Narrative theory looks at the lives of respondents through storytelling by honoring their lived experiences as important outlets of information (Clandinin, 2013).

The basic belief of narrative theory is that “people’s lives and relationships are shaped by their stories and the ways of life they develop based on those stories” (Walsh, 2013, p. 283). The stories from the client are always unique but are shared to some degree with others in their community (Walsh, 2013). The personal narrative is fluid and dynamic, showcasing the dynamic nature of the theory and people (Walsh, 2013). The story provides the data and allows the researcher the ability to identify consistent themes across multiple interviews or mediums (Walsh, 2013). Narrative theory has been used by other researchers interested in the perception of alcohol among student-athletes (Taylor, Ward, & Hardin, 2017).

Nature of the Study

By focusing on how community college student-athletes view drugs and alcohol, a qualitative narrative inquiry approach was selected. Narrative inquiry posits that every individual construct their own life story that helps them understand themselves and their position in the world (Payne, 2005). Narrative inquiry allows respondents to share their story as data and allows the researcher to analyze the narrative and compare it to other stories for meaning and interpretation (Patton, 2015). Narrative inquiry requires detailed and lengthy accounts with different themes (Riessman, 2008). I offered in-person interviews to community college student-athletes to obtain the required information and to afford the researcher the opportunity to build rapport and obtain clarification of statements during the interview. Data collected on drugs and alcohol can be sensitive, which may alter how interviewees respond. I was not interested in the alcohol and drug usage history of the student-athlete but was focused on students’ own attitudes and

beliefs regarding different substances. With transcribed individual interviews, I identified themes within the data, which gave insight into how community college student-athletes perceive themselves and drugs and alcohol. Recommendations for prevention and intervention programming could then be tailored to meet the specific athletic, academic, and psychological needs of the student-athlete.

Definitions

For this research study, I clarified a few key concepts to ensure accuracy of information. First, community colleges are 2-year colleges that provide education beyond the high school level but only provide associates, or 2-year degrees (Anders et al., 2012). Research does show that students attending community colleges are different than their 4-year university brethren (Anders et al., 2012). This definition is consistent with previous research. Another key concept defined for this research study would be the term *student-athlete*. Although this term seems easily identifiable, numerous levels should be considered. Within most colleges and universities, student-athletes can play at the intramural level (within the college), club level (travel to other universities without varsity designation), and varsity level (highest level at the university, may include scholarships) (Leighliter, Meilman, Presley, & Cashin, 1998). For this research, *student-athlete* is defined as a varsity student-athlete. Club and intramural students were not eligible for this study. Finally, the *term drugs and alcohol* was left vague within the study. Although my purpose in this study was to understand the views and perceptions of community college student-athletes, I wanted the student-athletes to identify which drugs and alcohol that they believe may be affecting their sport. By not specifically identifying

and defining all drug and alcohol types and categories, this allowed the student-athlete to define it themselves and provide additional insight into the thought processes of community college student-athletes.

Assumptions

One main assumption that I made is that a difference exists between community college student-athletes and NCAA student-athletes. Research shows a difference in the types of students who attend 4-year universities and community colleges (Anders et al., 2012). I did not strive to compare the results with previous research on NCAA student-athletes. In this study, I addressed only the perceptions of community college student-athletes on drugs and alcohol. This will further the knowledge of all student-athletes and open the door for additional research comparing student-athletes at multiple levels.

Scope and Delimitations

For this research project, my primary focus was to identify and interview community college student-athletes to determine their perception of different types of drugs and alcohol. The key aspect of the research problem being addressed within this study was providing a voice to community college student-athletes. Prior to this research, community college student-athletes have been a hidden population with no understanding of their unique needs and experiences. Rather than assuming that all student-athletes have the same problems and issues, I have used this research project to allow the voice of the community college student-athlete to come through and provide valuable insight and data. Qualitative researchers seek to provide voice to those previously ignored populations and allow them to explain their reality. Through this research project, I

opened the door to the needs of community college student-athletes and added valuable insight that could lead to the development of tailored interventions.

Within this research project, the specific population under study was community college student-athletes. Any student-athlete officially listed on the community college athletic roster was eligible to participate. I recruited all active student-athletes, including student-athletes that are currently injured, to participate in the study. For this study, I did not select students who were participating in intramural or club activities at the community college level as the focus is on varsity athletics. Qualitative data are not designed for transferability to all subjects, such as all community college student-athletes (Creswell, 2014). However, in this study, a small number of community college student-athletes shared their experiences. Although limited in scope, I begin to address potential differences in student-athletes rather than just lumping all student-athletes together into one catch-all category.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations within its design. First, I conducted a qualitative research study to provide understanding of the views and perceptions of community college student-athletes. Qualitative research studies are not designed to provide transferable data across different student-athlete populations or different regions. With more than 65,000 student-athletes, I will provide information on a small number of community college student-athletes and is designed to begin research into the population.

Another limitation within this research study is researcher bias. For this research study, I was the interviewer, transcriber, and coder of the data. Although these measures

help to eliminate inter-rater reliability, it opened the door for potential researcher bias. To lessen researcher bias, I implemented two separate methodological strategies, a code/re-code process and member checking, to ensure that the data were coded consistently without bias and to ensure that the data were consistent with what the student-athletes were saying. These two steps lessened the potential for researcher bias.

Another limitation of the study was selection bias. I implemented a purposive sampling method by reaching out to every student-athlete at a local community college. After presenting to every sport team at the local community college, the student-athletes voluntarily agreed to either participate or not. It is possible that the student-athletes who consented to participate may be different than those student-athletes who chose not to. I took every step to ensure that selection bias was minimized. I recruited a diverse typology of student-athletes, including different sports and genders. I also provided incentives to the student-athlete to increase the population that agreed to participate and to lessen the likelihood of selection bias.

Significance

Up to the present study, no research has been conducted on community college student-athletes, particularly when it comes to drugs and alcohol. *Collegiate student-athlete* is a broad term that, up until this research study, has focused only on the NCAA. There are 60,000 community college student-athletes across the United States (NJCAA, 2017). Research shows that community college students typically have higher incidence of poverty and academic difficulties (Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011). Social work requires that interventions and programming be targeted to meet the needs of the client (NASW,

2017). For this to happen, research must identify what the specific needs of the community college student-athlete are and work to build research-based prevention and intervention programming to meet those needs.

Second, the field of social work has been called to action to engage with student-athletes and meet their needs (Gill, 2008). Student-athletes consume more alcohol, engage in more binge drinking episodes, and engage in more risky behaviors as a result of alcohol consumption even with educational interventions offered by the NCAA (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Although previous research is focused on the NCAA student-athlete, this research project provides needed information and insight into the needs of the community college student-athlete. In my research, I further supported the notion that social work interventions and programming are needed and, specifically targeting the unique athletic, academic, and psychological needs of community college student-athlete.

A large amount of quantitative data show that student-athletes consume more alcohol and binge drink more than traditional college students (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006); however, qualitative data focusing on the perception of athletes is extremely limited (Zhou & Heim, 2016). This study increases knowledge of student-athlete perceptions of drug and alcohol use by interviewing a group of student-athletes who do not have mandated drug testing from their regulating athletic body. Student-athletes under the NCAA's jurisdiction are required to complete drug testing and complete educational interventions (Bruce & Crockett, 2007; NCAA, 2017a). The mandated drug testing could cause the NCAA student-athlete to under-report substance

use and not answer truthfully in inquiries about perception. In this study, community college student-athletes were provided with the opportunity to provide insight into their perceptions of drugs and alcohol without mandated drug testing programs or required educational programs. The findings of this study may begin to shape prevention and intervention efforts specifically targeting the needs of community college student-athletes. Due to the lower graduation rates of community college students and the at-risk status of student-athletes, specifically tailored interventions for community college student-athletes could have lasting repercussions both academically and athletically. Future studies can begin to look at differences between student-athletes based on gender, location, college division, or type of college and potentially begin to shape drug and alcohol interventions targeting student-athletes prior to enrolling in higher education.

Research shows that student-athletes have numerous stressors that typical college students do not experience, including increased stress and time commitment issues (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Student-athletes within the NCAA typically have resources, such as athletic department staff and tutoring services, to help student-athletes be successful. At the community college level, the student-athlete is not provided as many resources to achieve their potential. This research project highlights views and perceptions of drugs and alcohol and the importance of providing resources to community college student-athletes. Frequently, collegiate student-athletes are lauded for either their athletic prowess or legal issues that can potentially embarrass their home institution (Gill, 2014). NCAA collegiate student-athletes graduate college at a higher rate than the traditional student body within the NCAA due to educational resources and

supports being provided to them (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). This study could change the way that community colleges view their student-athletes and provide additional resources to help them be successful.

Finally, this research project could create meaningful social change for those individuals most at risk. Within lower socioeconomic statuses, some individuals view athletics as their only path out of poverty. Research on community colleges shows that a higher proportion of the student body is of lower socioeconomic status (Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011). By beginning to understand the unique needs of community college student-athletes and ultimately providing resources to them, the community-college student athlete could benefit socially, academically and athletically. The NCAA student-athlete currently is graduating at higher percentages than the remaining student body (NCAA, 2017a). By providing resources to the community college student-athlete, education, not athletics, could have a lasting impact on individuals and communities and have a ripple effect throughout the entire community. This social change could have life-altering ramifications.

Summary

Within the current research, participation in athletics has been shown to coincide with increased drinking and substance use by student-athletes (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, Duffy-Paiement, & Gibson, 2006). Missing within this research is understanding the perspective of the community college student-athlete. In this section, I provided a brief foundation and rationale for conducting a research project on community college student-athletes. Included within this section were a brief background, the proposed conceptual

framework, and limitations of the study. In the next section, I will highlight the research on student-athletes, both collegiately and at the high school level, and the missing category of community college student-athletes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My primary purpose in this study was to understand the perceptions of drugs and alcohol as viewed by community college student-athletes. Research shows that student-athletes are an at-risk population for drinking alcohol at higher rates than the general student body (Nelson & Wechsler, 2001; Wechsler et al., 2002) and that educationally based interventions have been shown to be largely ineffective (Bruce & Crockett, 2007; Larimer & Cronce, 2002). In the literature review, I showcase how student-athletes are an at-risk population, whether at the high school or collegiate level, with unique factors contributing to substance use and perception of use. Additional insight is provided on factors contributing to use, including team participation, gender, competitiveness, perception of teammate usage, team norms, and attitudes. I also review research on interventions and programming offered by the NCAA and their outcomes along with the lack of interventions required by the NJCAA. Within this literature review, the research highlighted that no peer-reviewed research articles have focused on community college student-athletes, instead focusing exclusively on the NCAA. With the establishment that no research has been conducted on community college student-athletes, research highlighting differences between the general student body at 4-year universities and community colleges is included. In total, in the literature review, I highlight the need for research to understand the needs of community college student-athletes.

Literature Search Strategy

For this research project, I used a multitiered strategy to obtain all relevant and necessary documents to complete a thorough literature review. First, I used three primary

research databases to identify articles: Google Scholar, Walden University Research Library, and the Ohio Link Research Library. The Ohio Link Research Library connects all the major colleges and universities within Ohio to provide better access to articles and information. During the search process, Google Scholar was linked with Walden University to ensure access to the highest number of articles. During the search, I used SocINDEX, PsycINFO, ERIC, Education Source, PsycARTICLES, and Academic Search Complete to ensure a broad search focusing on social work, psychology, sociology, and education. I inputted all key search terms into both the Google Scholar/Walden Library and the Ohio Link Research Library. Due to lack of research consistency, I put the term *student-athlete* into research databases both with the hyphen and without. The key terms that I searched were as follows:

- *Student-athlete & substance use.*
- *High school student-athlete & substance use.*
- *College student-athlete & substance use.*
- *NCAA student-athlete & substance use.*

Once I completed the first round of research, I retained the *student-athlete* search term, and changed the *substance use* search term. Additional search terms replaced substance use to obtain new research articles. Once I ran each search term through both the Walden University/Google Scholar database and the Ohio Link database, I inserted another search term. The following is a list of the additional search terms:

- *Substance abuse.*
- *Alcohol.*

- *Amphetamine.*
- *Marijuana.*
- *Cocaine.*
- *Opiates.*
- *Opioids.*
- *Heroin.*
- *Prescription medication.*
- *Prescription opiates/opioids.*
- *Performance enhancing drugs.*
- *Diet supplements.*
- *Dietary supplements.*
- *Energy drinks.*

Due to the nature of the study, I also went to specific organizational websites for relevant information, including the NCAA, NJCAA, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Each website was reviewed for relevant documents, policies, and research articles pertaining to substance use or abuse by student-athletes.

As I read each research article for relevancy to the study, I reviewed the article's bibliography to identify additional articles that may have been missed during the data collection process. I then located each identified article using the Walden Library or Google Scholar and added to the literature review. Between the review of specific

websites, the initial literature review, and the snowball building nature of the research, the most relevant and current research was accessed and gathered.

Conceptual Framework

Within this research study, the key phenomenon of the study is the perceptions of community college student-athletes and how they view drugs and alcohol. Previous research has shown student-athletes as an at-risk population for high rates of alcohol and drug consumption (Nelson & Wechsler, 2001; Wechsler et al., 2002). Higher consumption rates by student-athletes has been shown at the high school level (Hildebrand et al., 2001), collegiate level (Nelson & Wechsler, 2001; Wechsler et al., 2002), and professional levels (Cottler et al., 2011). However, not all student-athlete populations have been researched, because NAIA and community college student-athletes have been ignored to date. My research will begin to fill the gap in the research by focusing on community college student-athletes and their perceptions of drugs and alcohol to determine whether unique perceptions or needs are identified for this population.

Most previous research studies have used a quantitative research framework with pre-established answers for the respondent (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Turrisi, Mallett, & Mastroleo, 2006; Zamboanga et al., 2016). Conducting a quantitative research study requires the researcher to assume that the needs of student-athletes are similar, regardless of sporting level (high school, club, college, or professional). Rather than making this assumption, I used the narrative inquiry approach within the qualitative tradition to answer the research questions. Narrative inquiry examines human lives by allowing the

respondent to tell stories of their lived experiences (Clandinin, 2013). The stories told by the experts provide valuable data and insight into the lived experience, in this example, the lived experiences community college student-athletes (Patton, 2015).

Narrative inquiry is a valuable research tool that has been used to provide understanding of lived experiences, which have led to the improvement of professional practices (Wilson & Saggars, 2014). Wilson and Saggars (2014) used a narrative inquiry framework to further the understanding of how young people view their progress in alcohol and drug treatment, which assisted in improved treatment processes and outcomes. Narrative accounts have shown how personal experiences intersect with cultural, societal, and institutional factors (Kirmayer, 2000). Research has shown that student-athletes have developed their own culture that can vary by sport and institution (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Specifically, narrative inquiry methods have been used with student-athletes to help obtain an understanding of their lived experience regarding the consumption of alcohol in England (Zhou & Heim, 2016). These findings add detail to the knowledge of alcohol consumption and sportspeople in England (Zhou & Heim, 2016). This research study expands on the work of Zhou and Heim (2016) and allows the community college student-athletes' stories and voices to be heard. The knowledge gained within this research study may open the door for additional insight into the lived experience of the community college student-athlete and allow their voice to help tailor prevention and intervention methods that meet their needs.

Literature Review

Culture of Athletic Substance Use

Student-athletes are frequently viewed in positions of prestige within universities due to their athletic prowess. However, researchers have identified that student-athletes are an at-risk population in a multitude of areas such as mental health and substance use. The study of student-athletes is interesting in that student-athletes are physically healthier individuals due to the exercise components, yet they also engage in more personally damaging behaviors regarding substance use (Zhou & Heim, 2014). Student-athletes also frequently suffer from mental illnesses, such as anxiety and depression, yet do not seek treatment due to lack of knowledge of treatment and the potential damage to the student-athlete's public perception (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2012; Reardon & Factor, 2010). Student-athletes consume more alcohol, engage in more negative behaviors while drinking, and drink more frequently than the rest of the student body (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Nelson & Wechsler; Wechsler et al., 2002). Specifically, student-athletes are more likely to engage in heavy drinking (five or more drinks for men, four or more drinks for women on five or more occasions in the past 30 days) and extreme drinking (10 or more drinks on any one occasion) (Green, Nelson, & Hartman, 2014; Martens, Kilmer, Beck, & Zamboanga, 2010; Yusko, Buckman, White, & Pandina, 2008).

Research on substance use within the student-athlete population has also been broken down by different classifications. Gender differences have been identified within the student-athlete population with males showing higher rates of consumption. More specifically, male athletes are 44% more likely to report heavy drinking as compared with

33% of female athletes (NCAA, 2014). Other studies have shown that males are six times more likely to engage in binge drinking than females (Wyrick, Milroy, Reifsteck, Rulison, & Dudley, 2016). Based on racial classifications, NCAA research has also shown that the highest risk student-athlete classification would be White/Caucasian males in their first year of school (NCAA, 2014). Both at the high school and collegiate levels, Caucasian males were the highest risk category in numerous substance-using categories (NCAA, 2014).

With increased substance use, other risky behaviors become more prevalent for student-athletes such as greater number of sexual partners, drinking and driving, and physical assaults (Brenner & Swanik, 2007). While these areas are concerning, student-athletes are also more likely to experience negative media stories and accounts, which are both personally damaging and damaging to the institution of higher education (Gill, 2014).

In addition to the increased risky behaviors, student-athletes also face negative consequences in their roles as athletes. Exercise research indicates that alcohol and drug use can impair strength, motor-coordination, and speed (Barnes, Mundel, & Stannard, 2014). Consumption either before sports performance or after workouts can lead to dehydration, which will impede injury recovery and prevention (Maughan, 2006). What is most perplexing is that, even with the knowledge that substance use can increase injury risk and lower athletic ability, alcohol use remains high with student-athletes. The culture of alcohol and substance use does not end with intercollegiate athletics. Cadigan, Littlefield, Martens, and Sher (2013) showcased that students who start athletics in

college consume more alcohol and engage in heavy drinking, while student-athletes who terminate their involvement in sports consume less alcohol after quitting the sport. The culture of substance use in college sports extends past just varsity sports as studies have also shown that student-athletes that participate in either intramural, club, or varsity sports all consume more alcohol than non-athletes (Barry, Howell, Riplinger, & Piazza-Gardner, 2015). What is not known is if this culture of alcohol and drug consumption reaches student-athletes at community colleges as well.

Research shows that student-athletes face six unique challenges that other college students do not: 1) Balancing academics and athletics; 2) the unique status of being an athlete; 3) managing athletic success and failure; 4) minimizing or avoiding injury; 5) terminating their athletic career; and, 6) weight issues (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). While these additional six challenges weigh on the student-athlete, underlying these issues is the fear of the “front-page” mistake that embarrasses both the student-athlete and the college or university in which the athlete attends (Taylor et al., 2017). Between athletic competition, academic responsibilities, and fear of repercussions, stress levels of student-athletes are high, which may lead to increased alcohol and drug use. With all the negative consequences that are possible due to alcohol and drug use by student-athletes, understanding the perceptions, reasons, and rationales for drug use consumption can assist social workers in developing intervention measures specifically tailored to meet the specific population.

High School Student-Athletes and Substance Use

There is a rich research history on drug use within the high school ranks based on the Monitoring the Future study. The Monitoring the Future study surveys 50,000 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students yearly on attitudes pertaining to drug and alcohol use (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2017). According to the Monitoring the Future study, substance abuse rates fluctuate over time, but alcohol consumption is highest with high school seniors (Miech, Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2017). Drug use, including marijuana and alcohol, has increased over the last two reported Monitoring the Future studies in 2015 and 2016 (Schulenberg et al., 2017). Research studies have showcased that early age onset of drinking and drinking games begin at the high school level and continue to college (Zamboanga et al., 2016). Researchers identify the older high school students and younger college students are at greatest risk of alcohol use, making this a population of interest (Zamboanga et al., 2016).

When analyzing high school student-athletes, research continues to show higher use among student-athletes. Student-athletes in high school reported alcohol use twice per week and binge drinking at rates higher (36%) than the general student body (21%) (Hildebrand et al., 2001). Studies also report greater substance use of student-athletes closer to graduation compared with non-athletes (Wetherill & Fromme, 2007). With research identifying graduating seniors with the highest rates of alcohol consumption, this places great emphasis on targeting transitioning first-year college students, whether to a 4-year university or community college. Studies also identify that high school student-athletes playing in college may have risk factors for problematic drinking due to their

self-identity and misperception of greater substance use by student-athletes in college (Grossbard et al., 2009). Donahue, Pitts, Gavrilova, Ayarza and Cintron (2013) found that Caucasian high school student-athletes in team sports reported more substance use, including alcohol, stimulants, and steroids, than non-athletes. With increased use of drugs and alcohol in high school athletics, how do community college student-athletes view drugs and alcohol?

Research on College Athletes and Specific Drug Categories

Alcohol. The majority of research into substance abuse and collegiate student athletes has focused on alcohol use. According to the NCAA, over 83% of collegiate student-athletes self-reported alcohol consumption in the past year and nearly half (49%) reported binge drinking episodes on one or more occasions (Wahesh, Milroy, Lewis, Orsini, & Wyrick, 2013). One area of research highlighting the importance of the present study has been comparisons between the drinking habits of non-athletic college students and their student-athlete peers. Research in this area has been mixed as results have shown that participation in sports is considered to be both a protective factor (Ford, 2008) and a risk factor (Wechsler et al., 2000; Zhou & Heim, 2016). Studies show more alcohol consumed and in more frequent time periods for student-athletes than the rest of the student body (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006; Wechsler et al., 2002). Other research has found that male student-athletes reported significantly more instances of consuming a greater number of drinks on their heaviest drinking day, when compared with male non-athletes (Yusko et al., 2008).

Studies have researched the negative consequences that student-athletes frequently experience due to consumption of alcohol. Studies show that student-athletes drink more alcohol, engage in more driving under the influence, have increased academic difficulties, use contraception less frequently, and report an increased number of sexual partners as compared to college non-athletes (Nattiv & Puffer, 1991). While this heavily cited study is seminal in health studies among collegiate athletes, additional research shows that college student-athletes were more likely than non-athletes to have experienced 18 of 19 possible negative consequences in the past year resulting from alcohol and drug use (Leichliter et al., 1998). Some of these negative consequences include unprotected sex, increased rates of drinking and driving, getting hurt or injured, and being taken advantage of sexually (Leichliter et al., 1998). Current research shows that substance use continues after the athlete has stopped playing or has entered a different phase of their lives (Donohue et al., 2013; Green et al., 2014). Most concerning about alcohol research is that it is based on self-report data, meaning that the information may be underestimated due to fear of repercussions and drug use testing in sport (Dimeo, 2011).

Marijuana. Studies currently show that marijuana use is “unexpectedly high” for student-athletes at both the high school and collegiate levels (Buckman, Yusko, Farris, White, & Pandina, 2011). What makes the preceding statement alarming is the fact that marijuana studies have shown several negative side effects that are detrimental to athletes, including decreased cardiovascular functioning (Hall & Degenhardt, 2009), accelerated muscle fatigue (Renaud & Cormier, 1986), and slower reaction time

(Wadsworth, Moss, Simpson, & Smith, 2006). Research on marijuana use by student-athletes is largely based on self-report studies, media reports, and positive drug screens. The lack of significant research data on marijuana studies on student-athletes means that media reports become a frequently used piece of material for college leaders and decision-makers (Gill, 2009).

While marijuana use rates are lower among student-athletes (27.2%), when compared to the general student body (40.2%), researchers point out that student-athletes are drug tested and know that they are going to be tested making their marijuana use rate higher than anticipated (Yusko et al., 2008). The NCAA has also identified the changing nature of marijuana acceptance nationally, the legalization of marijuana in several states, and the increase in the use of synthetic marijuana among student-athletes to avoid detection (NCAA, 2014). Research also shows that reasons for using marijuana are also different by gender, with female student-athletes most frequently using marijuana to deal with body-image stress and male student-athletes using marijuana for pleasure-seeking benefits (Buckman et al., 2011). However, there is limited information on how student-athletes perceive marijuana.

The perception of marijuana use has changed drastically in the last 30 years. Marijuana legalization and ballot initiatives nationwide have caused a cultural change in marijuana perception, yet universities continue to drug screen for marijuana on its drug testing panel (NCAA, 2017). One key factor on marijuana drug testing is the rate that the substance metabolizes in the body, taking from 2 weeks to 3 months to leave the body depending on body type and body fat content (Saugy et al., 2009). Since NCAA student-

athletes are drug screened, their ability to speak about their perception of marijuana may be silenced due to fear of repercussions to themselves or the university. This study will conduct interviews with a student-athlete population without fear of drug screens or repercussions from governing bodies. With the changing cultural acceptance of marijuana, understanding how the community college student-athlete views marijuana would provide valuable insight.

Performance enhancing drugs. Performance enhancing drugs (PED), such as hormone precursors, steroids, and stimulants, have been used by athletes to increase athletic performance, lessen the chance for injury, or help them heal from injuries (Buckman, Farris, & Yusko, 2013). Research on student-athletes and steroid usage has shown varying levels of use. Certain sports, such as cycling, have shown higher rates of usage than other sports (Bahrke, 2015). The overall rate of steroid use for high school students is estimated at 5% (Mottram, 2011) with athletes accounting for the greatest portion of users. In fact, sport participation combined with recreational drug use by high school athletes are both predictors of steroid use (Lorang, Callahan, Cummins, Achar, & Brown, 2011). Within the high school ranks, drug testing is frequently mandated for student-athletes; however, not all drug screens test for PED's and the positive drug testing rate is very low for PED's causing many to question the cost (Bahrke, 2015).

Within the collegiate student-athlete ranks, research shows that males who use PED's when compared to non-PED using males are using them to increase sensation seeking tendencies, more negative reasons for using (e.g., coping motives), and engage in riskier behaviors (e.g., drinking and driving) (Buckman, Yusko, White, & Pandina,

2009). With the limited research available, studies show that student-athletes who engage in PED use are more likely to engage in any substance use (i.e., alcohol, illicit substances, supplements, or illegal drugs) regardless of whether it helps or hinders their athletic career (Buckman et al., 2013). Community college student-athletes may have athletic goals beyond the community college ranks, placing them at increased risk for using PED's. The importance of understanding how community college student-athletes view performance enhancing drugs is critical to developing interventions targeting this specific population.

Prescription drugs. Prescription drug use can be used for a variety of medical conditions, including pain management, stress relief, sleep assistance, and anxiety relief (Ford, 2008). Research finds that approximately 1.2% of the US population 12 years of age and older have misused some form of prescription pain reliever medication in the past year (SAMHSA, 2017). The NCAA has reported that nearly 23% of student-athletes self-reported using pain medication in the past year with 6% of student-athletes doing so without a prescription (NCAA, 2014). This over-representation of pain medication use is even more concerning when 71% of retired professional football players admitted to abusing prescription opiates (Cottler et al., 2011). Some studies have shown a positive correlation with sports involvement and prescription opioid consumption (Cottler et al., 2011; Gallucci, Martin, & Morgan, 2015). Other research shows that student-athletes are less likely to use prescription drugs nonmedically, except for stimulants, when compared to the general student body (Ford, 2008). The NCAA allows student-athletes to use prescription medications, such as stimulants, when they can provide a therapeutic use

exception (TUE) from a physician (NCAA, 2014). However, collegiate student-athletes are leery of other student-athletes who use the TUE for medical uses as they are still viewed as cheating or getting an unfair advantage (Overbye & Wagner, 2013). All these factors lead the way for additional research and insight into how student-athletes view and use prescription medications.

Illicit drugs. Researchers have found that participation in sports comes with increased alcohol consumption but it has also shown to be a protective factor against the use of other illicit drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, inhalants, amphetamines, and heroin (Lisha & Sussman, 2010). Other studies corroborate low rates of illegal substance use with approximately 7 to 8% of athletes admitting use in the last year (Dunn & Thomas, 2012; Dunn, Thomas, Swift, & Burns, 2011). Student-athletes believe that illegal drug use, along with cigarette smoking, are detrimental to athletic performance, which lessens the usage rates (Lisha & Sussman, 2010). The NCAA acknowledges lower self-reported illicit drug use rates for student-athletes outside of alcohol. However, certain team sports showcase higher use rates of illicit substances, such as lacrosse players showing higher use rates of alcohol, cigarettes, spit tobacco, marijuana, synthetic marijuana, cocaine, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder medication (NCAA, 2014). While the overall NCAA findings are promising, most of the research articles focus on self-reported substance use in the past year. However, when lifetime prevalence is questioned, almost half of all student-athletes (45%) knew of another student-athlete who had used illicit drugs (Waddington, Roderick, & Naik, 2005). This discrepancy highlights the necessity

for additional research into student athletes' perceptions of numerous forms of illicit substances and not just alcohol.

Supplements and energy drinks. Two key areas of concern that the NCAA has identified are the use of dietary supplements and energy drinks among student-athletes. While student-athletes view illegal substances as detrimental to their athletic performance, the use of dietary supplements is viewed as a part of the game and it helps them to remain healthy (NCAA, 2014). Hoyte, Albert, and Heard (2013) surveyed 462 college students who participated in varsity, club, and intramural sports at an NCAA university about consumption of dietary supplements, energy drinks, and prescription medications. Findings show that nearly 86% of students reported to using at least one substance in the last year to assist with athletic performance (Hoyte et al., 2013). The highest prevalence of use were energy drinks (80%) followed by dietary supplements (64%) and prescription medications (53%). Of the three athletic levels, use was most prevalent amongst the varsity student-athletes at 89.4% and club athletes at 88.5% (Hoyte et al., 2013). These findings support the concerns of the NCAA, particularly with the additional research that shows that dietary supplements frequently contain substances not on the label or containing anabolic steroids (Denham, 2017). Student-athletes are at an even greater risk of possible positive drug tests caused by supplements as research shows that student-athletes get supplement recommendations most often from coaches and trainers, not physicians (Denham, 2017). While student-athletes view PED's as harmful and detrimental, student-athletes do not view dietary supplements and energy drinks in

the same vein even though many dietary supplements are banned by the NCAA (NCAA, 2017b).

Energy drinks are specifically marketed to adolescents and student-athletes who are engaged in an active lifestyle (Galluci et al., 2016). Energy drinks frequently contain caffeine and other substances, such as sucrose, niacin, ginseng, and taurine (Ballard, Wellborn-Kim, & Clauson, 2015). Student-athletes view energy drinks as a way to maintain high energy levels and assist with maintaining weight (Ballard et al., 2015). However, research shows that increased use of energy drinks is associated with heavy episodic drinking and prescription stimulant use (Galluci et al., 2016).

Factors Contributing to Differential Sports-Related Substance Use

Collegiate student-athletes may have unique stressors and characteristics that may have an impact on their substance use (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Student-athletes have excessive stress and pressure caused by academics, as well as athletic performance placed on them by coaches, family, friends, and peers (Green et al., 2001). These unique stressors can lead to increased substance use and, if left untreated, could lead to mental health issues and potentially suicide (Green et al., 2001). Do these stressors apply to all student-athletes or does the community college student-athlete have additional stressors? Understanding the unique stressors of student-athletes and tailoring interventions to them is imperative.

As stated above, the sport that the athlete participates in has been researched to determine if different sports are related to greater use of alcohol or drugs than others. Martens, Dams-O'Connor, and Beck (2006) identified that alcohol drinking patterns may

be different based on the specific sport played and gender. For example, student-athletes who participate in baseball, soccer, and swimming/diving reported higher alcohol consumption than other sports such as basketball or track and field, which has held consistent across studies (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006; NCAA, 2014). Additional research separated student-athletes into either individual sports, such as golf or gymnastics, or team sports, such as baseball, basketball, football and volleyball. The researchers found that student-athletes participating in team sports reported higher rates of alcohol consumption than non-team sports (Brenner & Swanik, 2007; Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Lacrosse student-athletes had the highest rate of use of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana for both males and females according to self-report studies (NCAA, 2014). Other researchers added additional substances and found that college student-athletes in team sports reported more use of alcohol and chewing tobacco than non-team sports (Rockafellow & Saules, 2006). Researchers have hypothesized that the increased reported drinking in team sports is caused by socialization and bonding factors of drinking with teammates (Brenner & Swanik, 2007). While the research has maintained this differentiation, other researchers believe that team versus individual sport is not the most important factor, but that the culture of the team set by upperclassmen, leadership, and coaches leads to greater motivations to drink (Taylor et al., 2017). Taylor et al. (2017) highlight the importance of coaches and athletic administrators understanding what motivates their student-athletes to drink. This highlights the importance of this study: listening to the voice of the student-athlete and developing tailored interventions to meet the needs of the community college student-athlete.

Researchers have looked at alcohol use rates of student-athletes both during the sport season and outside of the sport season (Brenner & Swanik, 2007; Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006; Mastroleo et al., 2018; Yusko et al., 2008). Studies have shown that drinking among student-athletes decreases during the competitive season (Shields, 1998). Wyrick et al. (2016) identified that drinking increases during the off-season and for student-athletes participating in team sports. Mastroleo et al. (2018) showcased that student-athletes consumed more alcohol on specific days of the week and had specific daily and weekly patterns of consumption as compared to non-athletes. The primary reason given for the different use rates focused on sports performance and the focus of not doing anything to impact the performance in games versus practice (Evans, Weinberg, & Jackson, 1992; Mastroleo et al., 2018). Additional suppositions of increased alcohol use during the off-season included increased free-time and less structured activities such as voluntary practices or games (Wyrick et al., 2016). However, most of the evidence does support the notion that substance use is elevated during the athletes' off-season (Doumas, Turrisi, Coll, & Haralson, 2007; Hummer, LaBrie, & Lac, 2009; Yusko et al., 2008).

One key area of research that must be understood is the motives for using alcohol and drugs. Drinking motives have been positively correlated with alcohol consumption levels and an increase in negative consequences (Carey & Correia, 1997). Understanding the drinking motives is critical to developing measures for prevention and intervention (Martens, Cox, & Beck, 2003). There is a large amount of research on understanding the drinking motives of the general student population (Kassel, Jackson, & Unrod, 2000;

Lecci, MacLean, & Croteau, 2002). This research project is interested in the perception and views of drugs and alcohol by community college student-athletes. Researchers have attempted to identify unique reasons that student-athletes engage in behaviors that are counter-productive to their athletic goals (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, Duffy-Paiement, & Gibson, 2006). Drinking motives include motives that are positively reinforcing, such as social improvement and social enhancement, and negatively reinforcing, such as coping measures and conformity (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, Duffy-Paiement, & Gibson, 2006). Martens, Watson, Royland, and Beck (2005) identified three sets of drinking motives specific to student-athletes: (a) positive reinforcement (i.e., drinking to celebrate or build friendships); (b) stress specifically related to student-athletes and coping (i.e., drinking to deal with the stress from coach or performance); and (c) team and group norms (i.e., drinking to fit in with the team). These three alcohol drinking motives stayed consistent even after controlling for general student population drinking motives (Martens, Labrie, Hummer, & Pedersen, 2008; Wahesh et al., 2013). One major question is whether these same drinking motives will be identified within the community college student-athlete population?

Another drinking motive that has been identified would be impulsivity or trait urgency. Trait urgency has been defined as the "tendency to commit rash or regrettable actions as a result of intense negative affect" (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001, p. 677). Researchers have speculated that student-athletes may experience greater negative alcohol experiences due to impulsivity and trait urgency (Martens et al., 2008). Martens, Pedersen, Smith, Stewart, and O'Brien (2011) showcased that student-athletes with high

trait urgency were more likely to drink for both positive and negative reinforcing reasons. Research also shows that student-athletes may be more susceptible to binge drinking if they view it as normative behavior on the team (Graupensperger, Benson, & Evans, 2018).

Another area of study regarding alcohol and drug use among student-athletes would be the extreme competitiveness of student-athletes. Ryckman, Hammer, Kaczor, and Gold (1990) identified the term hyper-competitiveness as “an indiscriminant need by individuals to compete and win (and to avoid losing) at any cost as a means of maintaining or enhancing feelings of self-worth, with attendant orientations of manipulation, aggressiveness, exploitation and derogation of others across a myriad of situations” (p. 630). Hyper-competitive individuals have been found to have more interpersonal difficulties and personal-emotional issues than those who are not hyper-competitive (Kohlstedt & Visek, 2012). Researchers have found that student-athletes have higher than average rates of hyper-competitiveness and a win-at-all-costs mentality (Eitzen & Sage, 2015). Student-athlete hyper-competitiveness has also been linked to increased alcohol consumption and negative risk-taking behaviors (Eitzen & Sage, 2015).

Current NCAA Alcohol Intervention and Prevention Programs

Currently, the NCAA requires educational prevention programming for student athletes every semester, particularly focusing on education about drugs and alcohol (NCAA, 2017a). The education prevention programming is mandated by the NCAA, but the means to deliver the message is left up to the member institution itself. The lack of uniformity in educational programming has caused inconsistency in terms of means of

delivery, inconsistent messages between universities and differences in terms of programming offered by Division (Donohue et al., 2013). The most common form of drug and alcohol prevention programming offered by the NCAA is educational programming (Donohue et al., 2013). Even though educational programming is the most widely offered, the effectiveness of educational programming has been shown to be ineffective in curtailing substance use by student athletes with usage rates increasing over the years (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006).

One of the primary educational prevention methods implemented by the NCAA is the Athletic Prevention, Programming and Leadership Education (APPLE). APPLE is a comprehensive substance abuse prevention model that is targeting student-athletes by using educational programming and voluntary leadership training that is designed to impact the culture of each specific sports team to reduce dangerous substance consumption (Bruce & Crockett, 2007). However, institutions that have implemented the APPLE model have shown either a small impact on curbing substance use or shown no impact at all (Larimer & Cronce, 2002).

APPLE is not the only intervention method that has been implemented and researched. One promising area of research includes the implementation of interventions using motivational interviewing and efforts to allow the student-athlete to come to their own conclusions regarding drinking (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014). Although the research showed positive steps in reducing substance abuse, the sample size was small and focused on African-American student athletes, a population that traditionally has lower rates of binge drinking in comparison with other cultural groups (NCAA, 2014). Another

prevention intervention that has shown promising results targets using motivational interviewing with tailored feedback (Carey, Scott-Sheldon, Carey, & DeMartini, 2007). Within this measure, the brief motivational intervention was completed in two sessions and in conjunction with educational programming (Carey et al., 2007). Both studies showed promising results in decreasing substance use in the short term, but additional research is needed to determine long-term effectiveness. The most promising research focuses on tailoring the prevention interventions to the student-athlete (Cimini et al., 2015; Martens et al., 2010). Both Cimini et al. (2015) and Martens et al. (2010) utilized brief screening measures to determine alcohol usage but also included student-athlete specific content, such as effects of drinking on athletic performance. Results showcase that focusing information to student-athletes that is important to their health and athletic ability may be an important component of prevention and intervention programming (Martens et al., 2010).

Other prevention studies have shown reductions in alcohol consumption and their corresponding negative consequences (Doumas & Haustveit, 2008; Doumas, Haustveit, & Coll, 2010; Martens et al., 2010; Turrise et al., 2009). These interventions include a family inclusion model (Turrise et al., 2009) that targets getting parents actively involved in dealing with negative alcohol behaviors. Research has shown that college students use less alcohol in college when parental involvement is included (Turrise et al., 2009). One recent innovation is the creation of My Playbook. My Playbook is an online educational curriculum that is designed for the first-year student-athlete that is free of charge to any

NCAA institution (Milroy et al., 2014). Currently, no research studies are available showing the effectiveness of the My Playbook research tool.

All the above research is being mandated and conducted on NCAA student-athletes. NCAA student-athletes may have resources that community college student-athletes may not have, including athletic residence halls, individualized and personal educational assistance, monitoring by athletic staff, and NCAA compliance officers. Tailoring intervention programming to the student-athlete achieves the best results, but what are the needs and views of the community college student-athlete? This study will begin to assess how community college student-athletes view alcohol and drugs and begin the process of developing tailored programming that is specific to this population.

Differences Between University and Community College Students

One of the most important aspects of this study is the belief that the community college student, more notably the community college student-athlete, may have different needs than the traditional university student. Currently, 46% of all college students attend community colleges, yet studies including community college students are rare (American Association of Community Colleges [AACCC], 2016). No studies were found comparing student athletes demographically between community colleges and universities. Studies have identified that community college students are different than traditional university students, such as students being older, less likely to persist from the first to the second year, being more likely to be minority students and being less academically prepared (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). Regarding the limited number of articles that address substance abuse in community colleges, substance abuse is identified

as a concern with binge drinking rates estimated at 50% for males and 35% for females (Blowers, 2009; Velazquez et al., 2011). Community college students are more likely to be single parents (17%) with 36% of students being first-generation college students (AACC, 2016).

For this study, the focus is on community college student-athletes, which eliminates the increased age of students. Other research studies have shown that community college students experience more negative life exposure events than traditional university students (Anders et al., 2012). These factors indicate that the need for social work programming, whether prevention or intervention, should be more prevalent on community college campuses. However, more services are provided and mandated by the NCAA, particularly to the higher Division NCAA athletes, than the community college student-athlete (NCAA, 2014).

Summary

As shown above, substance use by student-athletes is a public health concern at every level, whether high school (Hildebrand et al., 2001), college (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006) or professional (Cottler et al., 2011). Specifically, student-athletes have been shown to drink alcohol in larger quantities, engage in more risk-taking behavior, and continue using substances past their athletic careers (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Research also shows that drinking rates appear to be at their highest from senior year in high school to second year in college (Zamboanga et al., 2016).

However, community college student-athletes are missing from published research. When compared to traditional university students, community college students are less academically prepared, more likely to be living in poverty, and are more likely to be a minority (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). No published reports highlight the difference between community college and university student-athletes. What is known is that community college student-athletes are not required to participate in any mandated drug or alcohol interventions as a part of sports participation in the NJCAA (NJCAA, 2017). Interventions that have shown decreases in substance use rates are tailored to the individual and their specific needs (Doumas & Haustveit, 2008; Doumas et al., 2010; Martens et al., 2010; Turrisi et al., 2009). Currently, the needs of the community college student-athlete are unknown.

This research project fills a gap in the research by beginning to identify the perceptions of community college student-athletes on drugs and alcohol so that tailored interventions can be developed to meet their unique needs. Community college student-athletes lack the academic supports, mandated interventions, and living arrangements that many of their 4-year university brethren enjoy. Their needs may be different and, therefore, may require a different intervention. This research project attempts to address that gap by conducting a qualitative exploratory study to understand the unique needs of an at-risk population -- the community college student-athlete.

Chapter 3: Research Method

My primary purpose in this study was to further the knowledge of how collegiate student-athletes view drugs and alcohol by interviewing a previously under researched population: *community college student-athletes*. Previous research has established that student-athletes, at both the NCAA 4-year university and high school level, are an at-risk population for binge drinking and increased frequency of problem drinking (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). This study explored how community college student-athletes view drugs and alcohol to determine whether tailored programming, such as intervention or prevention efforts, may be needed to meet their specific athletic, academic, and psychological needs. The following sections contain information detailing the study's methodology, conceptual framework, and the role that I had within the study. I will also detail the data collection measures and emphasize numerous steps to ensure the confidentiality and protection of research participants. Finally, I will detail any ethical issues that may arise out of this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Presently, a dearth of information exists regarding the needs, unique circumstances, or problems of community college student-athletes. For this research study, I used a qualitative inquiry using narrative theory. Qualitative research studies seek “to take situated activities that locate the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). The goal of qualitative research is to locate hidden populations and give them a voice in describing their reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Narrative theory allows researchers

to examine the lives of respondents through storytelling by honoring their lived experiences as important outlets of information (Clandinin, 2013). This research study is an exploratory study in which I sought to understand the views and perceptions of community college student-athletes and their unique academic and athletic needs.

Research on NCAA student-athletes hypothesizes that collegiate student-athletes create their own culture and this culture adds to negative drinking behaviors (Barry et al., 2015). Current research showcases that the culture of the leadership of each sport team has an impact on the drinking patterns and behaviors of the rest of the team (Taylor et al., 2017). Historically, most research on student-athletes is quantitative in nature, thereby providing student-athletes established responses rather than hearing the voice of those being served (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Turrisi et al., 2006; Zamboanga et al., 2016). Currently, research on 60,000 community college student-athletes is nonexistent, meaning that the unique academic, athletic, and psychological needs of these individuals are currently unknown. In many respects, community college student-athletes are an invisible population, allowing the research on the NCAA student-athlete to erroneously represent their needs. The voice of the community college student-athlete needed to be heard.

Multiple qualitative traditions could provide insight into the community college student-athlete. I selected the narrative inquiry methodology for this project for a multitude of reasons. First, narrative inquiry places the interviewee in the role of expert and allows interviewees to share insight into their reality through stories (Patton, 2015). Researchers use narrative inquiry to examine the lived experience as an important piece

of information and understanding (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry views stories and narrative as different entities. As stated by Wilson and Sagers (2013), “Stories are what people tell, while narratives suggest a structure that storytellers themselves may not be conscious of” (p. 115). It is within these structures and hidden meaning that valuable information can be ascertained. Narratives can be collected as biographies, family stories, interviews, notes, or life histories (Patton, 2015). Research also shows that young people particularly are appropriate for narrative inquiry methodologies due to their desire to share their voice (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Narrative inquiries have been used within this specific population, both with student-athletes (Zhou & Heim, 2016), as well as with drug and alcohol topics (Wilson & Sagers, 2013). By building on the work of Zhou and Heim (2016), I used narrative inquiry to allow community college student-athletes an opportunity to provide their perceptions of drugs and alcohol.

I aimed to answer three primary research questions:

1. What are community college student-athletes’ perceptions of alcohol and different drugs (including illicit drugs, prescription drugs, and over-the-counter supplements)?
2. What are community college student-athletes’ perceptions of student-athlete alcohol and drug use as it relates to athletic performance?
3. How can social work enhance the drug education, testing, and prevention efforts of community college student-athletes over the course of their athletic careers?

Role of the Researcher

Within the qualitative tradition, the researcher understands, “The socially constructed nature of reality and the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 14). I attempted to identify how community college student-athletes perceive drugs and alcohol to determine their needs and possibly any targeted interventions. Within this research project, I fulfilled the role of qualitative interviewer within the narrative tradition. My goal within the research project was to stimulate and encourage the interviewee into sharing their unique views and perspectives on drugs and alcohol (Jovchelovich & Bauer, 2000). To accomplish this goal, I built a collaborative relationship between the researcher and each interviewee to allow the story to emerge from the verbal exchange (Creswell, 2014). By being the sole interviewer for the entirety of the project, I eliminated any researcher bias related to multiple interviewers and had the opportunity to observe all the interviews, including interactions, non-verbal communication, and voice fluctuation, first-hand. This allowed me to conduct the interview, take field notes of the interview, and transcribe the data in a more trustworthy manner.

I am employed as an academic counselor who provides academic, career, and personal counseling to more than 30,000 enrolled students. The community college in question did not assign counselors to any students at the college; therefore, it was highly unlikely that any student-athlete would have a professional relationship with me. Student-athletes at the community college in question were not assigned to any specific counselor, using counseling services in general for their academic needs. The greatest likelihood for

my having a relationship with a student-athlete was in the role of an academic counselor who is focused on developing a schedule and completing a degree. To eliminate the potential for any bias, I cross-checked any student-athlete who volunteered to be interviewed against the record keeping system kept by each academic counselor. If the student-athlete has previously met with the researcher in a counseling capacity, I excluded the student-athlete from participation in this study.

At the community college in question, there are four campuses, with athletic sports teams at three of the campuses. I am employed at the southern branch campus, which also houses the men's baseball team, the men's soccer team, and the women's softball team. The community college also has the eastern branch campus, which has the women's volleyball team and the women's basketball team. The northern branch campus houses the men's basketball team and the women's cross country/track team. To lessen the likelihood for potential selection bias, all student-athletes for each sport team had an equal opportunity to participate, regardless of campus.

The counselor/student role is not one that was based in a power dynamic. Instead, the relationship is built on a mutual understanding that the student is the expert and the counselor is there to provide information and options to help the student make a strong, educated decision. During data collection, I taught two general studies courses and one sociology course in which no student-athlete was enrolled as a student. To afford any professor/student dynamics, any student-athlete who was enrolled in one of the courses would have been excluded from the study. This was enforced through both checking of the student roster of the courses being taught and checking the roster of all sports teams.

To minimize interviewer bias, any student who had previously seen me was eliminated as a possible research participant. During the recruitment period, only one student-athlete had a previous relationship with me and was not selected for an interview for this reason. All interviews took place outside of the Counseling Office in pre-established quiet study areas located on campus, at a local library with private study rooms, or where the student-athlete and I agree to, as long as it was a private location. The separation from the place of employment assisted in the elimination of any potential bias of the findings. The locations for the interviews were agreed to by both parties.

Student-athletes have numerous stressors in their lives, including academics, a rigorous practice schedule, and training activities (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Research shows that student-athletes are also least likely to seek services, particularly mental health counseling (Gulliver et al., 2012; Reardon & Factor, 2010). Although this research project is focused on perceptions of substances, I offered incentives to student-athletes to obtain a broad sample and to incentivize the participation of the student-athlete even with the numerous stressors that the athletes have. Research has shown that using incentives can increase the rate of participation, particularly in populations that may be distrustful or with time constraints (Head, 2009). Without the use of incentives, I feared that the sample would not be large enough to achieve saturation. To obtain saturation, I offered incentives in the form of gift cards to any student-athlete who agreed to participate. Research also shows that the use of incentives can be viewed as coercive and conflict with free consent, particularly within poor communities (Head, 2009). I feel that this risk was minimal as most of the student-

athletes in question received financial scholarship awards to offset the cost of their education, which lessened the coercive element within poor communities. The use of incentives followed the parameters of the National Junior College Athletic Association to ensure that no financial transactions occurred that could jeopardize the amateur athletic status of the student-athlete. I offered a \$30 gift card to any volunteer participant to a store of their choice. Student-athletes were a challenging population to study. The goal of qualitative research is to obtain a sample that provides rich data amongst a specific population but varied enough to develop a strong feel for the entire culture (Patton, 2015). The use of incentives assisted in obtaining the sample with information regarding incentives outlined within the Consent for Participation (See Appendix A). No incentives were provided until after the final interview was started. If the student-athlete opts out after the interview is completed (i.e., two weeks after the interview is complete), the participant would keep the incentive.

Methodology

For this research study, a combined sampling strategy was the plan of attack. To begin the research project, a criterion purposive sampling method was used. A criterion sample requires participants to have a specific condition that also allows the subject to be compared with individuals who do not meet the specific criteria (Patton, 2015). A criterion sample was initially selected due to the focus of a selected group of individuals, community college student-athletes. For this project, the identifying criteria was the identification of the individual as a community college student-athlete. At the community college in question, student-athletes are both recruited and/or try-out for the sport of their

choice during the summer months with the playing seasons initiated during the Fall and Spring semesters. Any student-athlete that agreed to participate was compared against the official sport roster to ensure participation and appropriate designation as a community college student-athlete. The roster of each sport was available through the Student Life office and was located on the college website.

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, a meeting was scheduled with the athletic director at the community college. This meeting was to obtain the support and buy-in from the administration even though IRB approval had already been obtained from the college. Once the meeting had been accomplished, I reached out to each coach via email to setup a brief in-person meeting with the team to outline the research project. The day after the email was sent to the coaches, a phone call was completed to each of the coaches to setup a meeting time and answer all questions. The script for the meeting with the team is in Appendix B. At the meeting, I provided copies of the Consent for Participation to the student-athletes but only accepted consents via email or text. Each meeting with the specific sports team provided enough volunteers to satisfy the project. Once the student-athletes were informed of the project, all the student-athletes who consented to participate were contacted via text (the preferred method of the student-athletes) to setup an interview time amenable to both parties. For the sports teams that had more student-athletes agree to participate than were needed, I placed all of the student's names for that team into a hat and randomly selected names out of the group. The primary objective was to have interviewees from a number of different sports as opposed to having respondents from one sport in an effort to minimize participation bias.

Once the interview was scheduled, I arrived to the pre-arranged location early to setup and ensure a timely start. Once the interviewee arrived, I went over the Consent to Participate and ensured that the interviewee is okay with both the voluntary nature of the study and the agreement for audio-recording. I requested permission to take notes during the interview to ensure re-call during the coding process and to highlight non-verbal communication. All student-athletes were okay with the recording and the personal note taking. Once consent was achieved, the interview was conducted. I followed the outline of the Interview Guide and conducted the interview (Appendix B). The semi structured interview allowed me to obtain targeted responses from individuals by asking consistent questions while allowing me the freedom to obtain clarification on any answers provided or to explore new information that may have previously been unknown (Patton, 2015). Once all interview questions have been asked, I provided the interviewee the opportunity to provide any feedback or additional commentary. After each interview, I informed the interviewee that a transcript of the interview will be completed and sent to them to ensure accuracy. Each interviewee was informed that their additional input would be requested, not required, via email when preliminary findings were completed. This member checking provided valuable insight and ensured accuracy in the findings. Once completed, I thanked the interviewee for their participation and immediately provided the incentive.

To achieve saturation within the study, I targeted completing 12 individual interviews with community college student-athletes. There is no consensus number of interviews that a qualitative researcher needs to target to ensure saturation within this

area of study (Mason, 2010; Patton, 2015). Mason (2010) highlights that saturation in studies can be achieved in a wide variety of interviews and is based on sampling methods, methodology and conceptual framework. Ranges for saturation within qualitative frameworks varies from 6 interviews within the phenomenological framework to 35 interviews for ethnographies (Mason, 2010). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) highlight that three important factors directly impact achievement of saturation: Interview structure, content, and participant homogeneity. Researchers believe that the narrower the study parameters and respondent homogeneity, the fewer interviews are needed to achieve saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Due to the narrow focus of this study, the homogenous group being interviewed, and consistency with other research (Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010), it was believed that saturation would be achieved by the 10th interview.

Instrumentation

For this research project, two primary data collection instruments were utilized. First, an original 10-item semi structured qualitative interview schedule was used (Appendix B). The interview questions were piloted on three former student-athletes to ensure their accuracy and that the goal of the interview were achieved. I audio-recorded and transcribed each individual interview verbatim. Although this is something that could be outsourced, I transcribed the interviews myself so that I could further dive into the interviews and understood each as a unique data source. I believed that by transcribing my own interviews, confidentiality of the information remained strong as no outside individuals had access to the information, particularly because questions were asked

surrounding perceptions of drugs and alcohol. Also, this strengthened the research project by ensuring that no inter-rater reliability scores were needed as the only person that transcribed, coded, and scored the data was the researcher himself. This did open the door to bias through intra-rater reliability. However, a code/re-code process was utilized during the coding process to help lessen this concern.

Once all the interviews were transcribed and the first round of coding was completed, I emailed the interview transcription to each respondent with initial findings from the coding process. This member check helped to ensure the accuracy of the information. If the interviewee determined that any inaccuracies exist, the audio tape was reviewed and changed to the transcription or coding findings. Upon receipt of the completed transcription, the interviewee officially fulfilled all responsibilities to this research project.

The second primary data collection tool that was utilized within this research project was a reflective researcher journal. The reflective researcher journal allowed me to take notes during the entirety of the research process including pre-interview, during the interview and post-interview (Ortlipp, 2008). The reflective journal allowed me to be self-reflective and assist in keeping “methodological rigor and paradigmatic consistency” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 704). Narrative interviewing focuses on understanding the entire process as the “story” comes from the interaction between the researcher and interviewee (Creswell, 2014). Due to the number of interviews completed, it would be easy to become confused about what was stated or to allow the responses from one interview to “creep” into the second interview. The journal allowed me to keep accurate notes while

also highlighting specific quotes, emotions, facial expressions, or interesting statements while the information was fresh. The journal was reviewed during the data analysis and coding process to ensure the true “story” of the narrative was achieved.

Data Analysis Plan

The first primary research question of the research project was, “What are community college student-athletes’ perceptions of alcohol and different drugs (including illicit drugs, prescription drugs, and over-the-counter supplements)?” To answer the research question, the student-athletes were asked numerous questions surrounding specific drug categories, such as alcohol, marijuana, opiates, and other drugs of abuse. Questions #2 thru #7 spoke specifically to this research question as the information provided insight into student-athletes’ perceptions of specific drugs. I sought to obtain insight into and across different drug categories through stories and personal accounts of what the student-athlete had experienced.

The second research question sought to understand how student-athletes perceive drug and alcohol use and its impact on athletic performance. Two follow-up questions were asked specifically to address impact on athletic performance. This provided the student-athlete the opportunity to think about drugs and alcohol in groups and their impact on athletic performance. With the second follow-up question, the researcher asked if there was any other drugs that could be impacting the sport they participate in. This open-ended question provided insight into not just the pre-established categories but any new drugs or other substances that had recently been identified. Additional questions

were asked regarding impact on athletic performance based on the statements made during the interview or to provide clarification.

The third research question sought to understand what needs the community college student-athlete had surrounding drugs and alcohol. Currently, the NCAA mandates drug and alcohol education and testing and conducts research on usage rates (NCAA, 2017). However, information is limited on what educational needs the student-athlete has surrounding drugs and alcohol. If student-athletes view prescription painkillers as “a part of the sport”, prevention and intervention efforts may be different than the student-athlete who is abusing prescription opiates for the high effect. Within the interview, questions 8 and 9 were designed to obtain the student-athletes’ needs educationally surrounding drugs and alcohol.

Once all the interviews were transcribed, I progressed through four levels of coding consistent with Connolly and Clandinin (1990). I did not utilize any computer software for narrative analysis. Although qualitative researchers are increasingly using software, other researchers do not find them useful for narrative analysis as they miss the subtle nuances and the true story of the interviews (Connolly & Clandinin, 2006). I conducted four levels of coding for this research project: Broadening in level one; re-coding level two; burrowing in level three; and storying in level four (Connolly & Clandinin, 2006).

The first level of coding focused on broadening the data. I conducted a holistic coding in which the transcribed data was reviewed per statement and provided simple statements or phrases that describe each segment of transcript (Saldana, 2016). I wanted

to be careful not to over simplify the data and miss the overall tone or theme of what the interviewee was trying to say (Patton, 2015). Once an interview was completed, the coded transcript was saved under a different name. Once all interview transcripts were coded initially, I waited a short period of time, 10 days to 2 weeks, and then completed the same process again using clean transcripts. This re-coding of the data was completed to increase intra-rater reliability and help strengthen the findings to ensure that the researcher was coding the data consistently. Both rounds of coding were then compared to ensure accuracy and themes.

The third round of coding sought to burrow the data (Kim, 2015). The purpose of burrowing was to investigate all the data collected and pay attention to the interviewee (Kim, 2015). The subtle nuances of the respondent including their emotions, their facial expressions, and their reaction to questions or statements all provided valuable data for the narrative (Kim, 2015). Within this coding, I reviewed the research journal during the third coding to add additional insight into the interviewees understanding and dilemmas during the interview. Broadening the data allowed the interviewees' words, actions and feelings into the narrative and provided additional insight (Kim, 2015).

The final round of coding sought to take the results of the first three rounds of coding and attempt to identify patterns. Saldana (2016) highlights that pattern coding works to take the initial codes and place them into themes or categories. These emergent themes were then categorized to provide insight into the research questions and give voice to the community college student-athlete. The creation of concept maps assisted in

the creation of the coding themes. The findings developed out of the final coding were then emailed to the interview respondents for final feedback.

Throughout the entirety of the coding process, I was careful to code the data and information as presented. Discrepant cases were handled as data and reported as findings. Qualitative studies, particularly narrative inquiries, sought to understand the life and experiences of the respondent (Patton, 2015). Ethically, qualitative researchers need to be careful not to eliminate discrepant data that is outside of a pre-conceived notion of what the findings should be. As stated by Kim (2015), “The use of arbitrary interpretation, particularly when we “appropriate” data to fit our philosophical orientation, often becomes a mode for saying what we want to say or hear instead of really listening to or seeing what is being said” (p. 15). I strived to include all data to “hear” exactly what community college student-athletes were saying about their perceptions of drugs and alcohol.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Within each data analysis plan, a strong qualitative research project needs to understand and account for each element of trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). Pertaining to issues of credibility, I chose to conduct a narrative inquiry study of community college student-athletes to understand their reality and perceptions of drugs and alcohol. Measures were adhered to as strictly as possible to the narrative tradition by developing a strong interview guide, strictly adhering to the interview guide, and allowing the respondent to speak on their reality. I focused on the collaborative element within

narrative interviewing, including transcription of the data by the researcher and utilization of a research journal to focus on non-verbal communication and voice intonation.

In addition to strictly adhering to the interview guide, I incorporated member checking and reflexivity into the project to reduce the potential for researcher bias. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted that member checks are a crucial piece of qualitative research as it focuses solely on credibility of the data. As interviews are completed, transcribed and coded, I offered the student-athletes the opportunity to review the research findings and provide feedback to the researcher moving forward. I then reached out to the interviewees when major themes were coded and provided them the opportunity for feedback (Creswell, 2014). The primary purpose of member checks was to eliminate researcher bias when interpreting results (Anney, 2014). Member checks were critical within this study due to the fact that I, alone, was the interviewer, transcriber, and coder. The member check helped to ensure that the researcher's biases did not creep into the codes and findings were the voice of the community college student-athlete.

Pertaining to the issue of transferability within the study, I provided a clear description of the study participants. Purposive sampling strategies assisted the researcher in transferring the results to other areas (Anney, 2014). The researcher chose to conduct semi structured interviews with the respondents and to transcribe the interviews verbatim to provide thorough and detailed descriptions of the data.

Dependability refers to the stability of the information over time (Anney, 2014). To achieve dependability, I implemented an audit trail and a coding/re-coding strategy. I

provided a clear and thorough outline within this project outlining each step.

Transcription of the data, the coding process, and the research journal were kept for cross-checking and to ensure that any findings or themes were consistent. Finally, I was clear and concise as to the boundaries of the study to ensure that the interviews did not go off in different directions, particularly as this study included drug and alcohol perception (Shenton, 2004).

Finally, confirmability of the study was accounted for to ensure that the findings are clearly delineated from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). To achieve confirmability, I implemented the audit trail and the research journal to ensure the alignment of the data and the findings. Keeping the research log allowed other researchers to see how the data were coded or how I came to make decisions (Shenton, 2004). Within the narrative research tradition, the primary goal was to allow the voice of the interviewee to be heard through stories without the bias of the interviewer's opinions.

Ethical Procedures

To gain access to the student-athletes of a community college, multiple layers of approvals were needed. First, successful applications to the IRBs of both Walden University and Cuyahoga Community College were submitted and accepted. Once the IRB approvals were granted, the researcher met with the athletic director of the local community college for their consent and to obtain access to each of the coaches. This step was a formality as the contact information for each coach was available online. However, due to the bureaucratic nature of the community college, I did not want to upset the athletic department or skip the chain of command. I also wanted to re-state to the athletic

director and coaches that no transcriptions of the interviews or data from the interviews would be made available to the athletic department.

Two primary ethical considerations for this study related to the sensitivity of the information and the guarantee of confidentiality. Any research study that included the subject of drugs and alcohol could be difficult to conduct due to the fear of repercussions from authority figures or the unwillingness to share the information. I explained the confidentiality within the Consent for Participation, but it was also re-stated prior to the interview. The goal was to build trust and confidence in the interviewee to obtain the most accurate information. I also built in extra steps (meeting with the athletic director, placing the completed transcriptions in locked files, maintaining audio-tapes in a password protected computer and file) to ensure that all collected information was confidential.

During interviews, every researcher must be prepared for the unexpected. Respondents to this study were voluntary and could remove themselves from the study at any moment. To ensure that the student-athlete was aware of this, I highlighted this within the Consent for Participation and prior to conducting the interview. If a respondent decided not to participate prior to the interview, all the respondent's information was removed and the Consent for Participation would be shredded. If a respondent decided half-way through the interview that they no longer want to participate, the interview would stop immediately, delete the interview on the laptop in front of the respondent, and shred the Consent for Participation and any notes taken in front of the student. This procedure provided proof that the information obtained during the interview had been

removed and the information will not be used within the study. However, no student-athletes declined to participate once the interview commenced. Every possible stride was taken to make sure that the respondents were voluntary in nature, understood their rights as subjects, and were comfortable prior to completing the interview.

Another major ethical area covered was the self-disclosure of a student-athlete who expressed the need for assistance for drugs and/or alcohol. Although I fulfilled the role of the researcher during the project, I was also a licensed social worker within the state of Ohio. To prevent a student-athlete from disclosing the need for drug and alcohol information at the end of the interview, every interview would conclude by the researcher providing a packet of information to the interviewee. The packet of information included a Help is Here brochure, referral sources for treatment, online screening tools, and potential treatment providers. The community college in question had the availability of counseling services of social workers, counselors, and psychologists. Depending on the needs of the student-athlete, I was prepared to offer services or referrals as necessary to meet the student's needs and help the respondent get the help that was desired.

Summary

Currently, research shows that student-athletes are an at-risk population regarding their use and perception of drugs and alcohol (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). However, within all the data collected, the community college student athlete has largely been ignored. This chapter outlined the qualitative research project that would focus on conducting semi structured in-person interviews of community college student-athletes to understand their views and perceptions of drugs and alcohol. Attention was paid to the

research methodology, the role of the researcher within the study, and numerous ethical implications that need to be cared for prior to completing the project. I also included an appendix of items including the interview protocol and interview guide. The goal was to provide a clear outline of the research project that will shed light on a previously ignored research population, the community college student-athlete.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

My primary goal in this research study was to hear the voice of the community college student-athlete surrounding their perception of drugs and alcohol. Previous researchers have focused on the NCAA student-athlete and shows larger quantities of alcohol consumed and on more frequent occasions by collegiate student-athletes, when compared with the general student body (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). To begin understanding the needs and perceptions of community college student-athletes, in this research project, I asked three primary research questions:

1. How do community college student-athletes perceive different categories of drugs and alcohol?
2. How do community college student-athletes perceive drugs and alcohol's impact on athletic performance?
3. How can social work enhance drug and alcohol education, drug testing, and prevention efforts for community college student-athletes?

Chapter Organization

My primary purpose in this study was to understand how community college student-athletes view drugs and alcohol and provide them an opportunity to voice their reality and specific athletic, academic, and psychological needs. The following sections contain detailed information regarding completion of the individual interviews, including the setting, demographics of the student-athletes, and the data analysis. Evidence of

trustworthiness is included along with the measures used to ensure it. Finally, I discuss the thematic results, broken down by research question, which include numerous quotes directly from the student-athletes supporting the analysis.

Setting

The research study took place during the spring semester at a community college located in the midwestern United States. There were not any personal conditions of the researcher that affected the study. Organizationally, one team's coach was relieved of their duties at the beginning of the semester, prior to data collection and recruitment. This organizational change made contacting the student-athlete's challenging, focusing on recruitment through email. Another potential organizational effect was the timing of the recruitment of community college student-athletes. I noted that it was more challenging to schedule the student-athletes who were in their respective sport season than those that were in their off-season. I do not believe that this influenced participation but actually may have caused more of a limitation in that it may have prevented more student-athletes from agreeing to participate due to time management issues.

Demographics

To begin the recruitment process, I contacted each head coach via email to inform them of the research study. The next day, I followed the email up with a phone call to each coach to setup a time to present the study to each team. Of the seven coaches whom I initially contacted, five of the coaches replied to me and I identified a day and time to present to the team. Two coaches never replied to me and one of the coaches delayed for 45 days due to his sports season. I was still able to include one of the athletic teams that

did not respond to me due to word of mouth from the student-athletes of other teams. I am unsure why the coaches did not contact me, but both were in the middle of their season, which may have had an influence. I am unsure whether the timing of the recruitment contact had any bearing on participation.

I recruited study participants from among five athletic teams: women's cross country, women's track, women's softball, men's basketball, and men's baseball. Although not receiving the initial recruitment pitch to the team, the men's soccer team participated in the data collection thanks to word of mouth within the athletic community. The breakdown of participants was as follows:

Table 1

Participant Breakdown

Women's track	2 participants
Women's cross country	2 participants
Women's softball	3 participants
Men's baseball	4 participants
Men's basketball	1 participant
Men's soccer	1 participant

Data Collection

Once the student-athlete consented to participate, each athlete had an individual interview time setup that was conducive to both the student-athlete and me. The location

of the interview varied based on availability. I completed every interview in a private location, including local libraries, private study rooms, empty classrooms, and private offices. The interviews took place in the course of 2 months during the spring semester. The interviews varied in time from 22 minutes to 47 minutes in duration. Each interview was recorded on a password protected laptop and placed into a password protected folder. The data collection plan was followed verbatim without the need to conduct any snowball sampling methods, as the initial recruitment cycle was more than enough to obtain the required participants. For two teams, I received more volunteers to participate than was needed. Within these two sports teams, all of the athlete's names who consented to participate were placed into a hat with two names being drawn for an interview. This ensured that the research study was diverse in terms of gender and sports played. No unusual circumstances were encountered during the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Once all of the interviews were completed, I transcribed each interview into an Excel spreadsheet to begin coding. Each interview had two clean copies in the Excel spreadsheet analysis with different numbers and all identifying information removed. A first and second round of coding then took place in the course of 3 weeks. The first round of coding established identified themes every six to 10 words in alignment with established qualitative coding analysis (Creswell, 2014; Saldana, 2016). Ten days later, a second round of coding was completed to ensure the thematic consistency from the codes in the first round. I then compared the duplicate interviews for coding consistency and to help improve credibility. Following the development of overall themes, I gave each

student-athlete an opportunity to provide feedback. I emailed the student-athletes a copy of the transcript and the overall thematic findings from the research. I then included responses from the student-athletes during the member checking into the final thematic codes to ensure that the true voice of the community college student-athlete was represented in the study.

Once I completed all coding, I used concept maps to move the codes into thematic areas depending on the research question. The concept mapping process helped to develop the overall themes of the study across all of the student-athletes. I developed several unique themes throughout the data analysis process, including a new community-college student-athlete stressor not previously identified within research (transitioning to the community college environment), varying perspectives of specific drugs, such as marijuana, within the same sport, and the use of certain drugs, such as energy drinks, that are viewed as negative in terms of athletic performance but necessary to meet academic needs. To provide the greatest detail, thematic codes targeting each research question are included later in the study, including corresponding quotations that support the thematic codes.

For the present study, I did not identify any response or response set as a discrepant case. There are discrepancies within this study between student-athletes, between genders and between sports. For example, numerous community college student-athletes viewed energy drinks as having a negative impact on athletic performance. However, one baseball player identified the use of energy drinks prior to specific showcase events as a means to optimize performance. Eliminating any discrepant case

from this qualitative research study could bias the results. The primary objective of this study was to provide a voice to community college student-athletes. Due to this directive, I was able to include the voice and expertise of the student-athlete in this study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

One important item to remember about this research project is the fact that this research project is qualitative in nature. The transferability of these findings to community colleges nationwide should not be attempted. This study should be used as information and a steppingstone to conduct additional research and insight into the needs of community college students and student-athletes.

Within this research study, several measures were put into place to account for issues of trustworthiness. First, the interview guide was used during each individual interview with all respondents responding to the original 10 questions but also being allowed to provide their own voice and stories about their experiences as community college student-athletes. Several questions were asked throughout the interview to allow the respondent the opportunity to expand and provide clarification of their lived experience. All transcriptions of the data were transcribed by the researcher and a researcher journal was kept with all thirteen interviews which focused on the non-verbal's. The researcher diligently attempted to honor the narrative inquiry tradition by focusing on these issues of credibility.

In accordance with the data analysis plan, the researcher completed the member check by sending a copy of the transcript and preliminary findings to all 13 respondents. Several respondents did provide confirmation of the findings and even added additional

details. This member check process helped to ensure the elimination of researcher bias and ensure that the true voice of the community college student-athlete was being heard.

Regarding dependability, the interviews were completed following the interview guide and kept on target for each student-athlete. While the student-athletes were given the freedom to tell their story, the focus of each interview stayed focused on their perception and never strayed into personal use. Once the interviews were completed, the data analysis plan was followed verbatim, including the research journal and the coding/re-coding strategy.

Finally, a clear audit trail has been maintained to ensure that the findings are separate from the data. The research journal, the interview transcriptions, and the audio recordings of the interviews have all been secured and maintained. The final concluding step that the researcher implemented that was not in the initial project was the use of concept mapping to translate the data into overarching themes. These concept maps were created straight from the coded materials and assisted the researcher in developing the themes. The primary goal was to ensure that the data drove the decisions.

Results

Prior to discussing each research question in detail, one overarching theme emerged after the completion of all the interviews: Variability between student-athletes. Whether the focus would be on the education that each student-athlete received on drugs and alcohol in high school or how different categories of drugs and alcohol were perceived, there was variability and inconsistency across the study. For example, two student-athletes in high school received yearly information on drugs and alcohol, were

drug screened, and understood the impact that drugs and alcohol have on their athletic performance. These two student-athletes were of the minority, however. The majority of the community college student-athletes received little to no drug and alcohol education as student-athletes, very few were drug screened in high school, and health courses, which taught about drugs and alcohol, were optional. The only consistent thing that all of the student-athletes could recall was the use of Scared Straight prevention models prior to major events, such as prom or homecoming that missed the target, according to the respondents. The inconsistency and variability within the study are discussed in detail within each research question.

First Research Question

The first research question focused on how community college student-athletes perceive different categories of drugs and alcohol. The primary drug categories identified within the study were alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, opioids, energy drinks, and supplements. Other drugs that were mentioned by the student-athletes were tobacco (specifically dip), numerous specific supplements, Xanax, and vaping. There was variability between sport and between student-athletes within each sport, depending on the drug. Alcohol, marijuana, and supplements had perhaps the greatest variability in how student-athletes perceive them. Other drugs, such as heroin, tobacco, and energy drinks were all overwhelming viewed negatively by student-athletes.

Depending on the sport, alcohol was viewed either positively (baseball, softball) or negatively (track, cross country, soccer, & basketball) by the student-athletes. Within

baseball and softball, alcohol was viewed as a normal part of the game and the lack of alcohol consumption could cause distrust of any teammate. One student-athlete remarked,

It's one of those things like . . . If you don't, then are you really into that sport?

It's like if you don't drink, then you are not really a baseball player and if you do drink, then you are like, you are a baseball player. It's a part of the culture. But if you get like way . . . overboard, then you are just being stupid. It's like there is a happy medium where like you are having a couple of brewski with the boyski's and just enjoying the time being together. And then there is that dude acting stupid who is like . . . we don't want to be around you.

Within baseball and softball, there appears to be a social norming and bonding aspect to alcohol consumption. Alcohol is viewed as a bonding opportunity with teammates and an opportunity to relax after games and/or practices. Baseball and softball players were also cognizant of the "line" of use and "not getting stupid." While no player could provide specific numbers, they stated that these things were just known by the team. One softball player stated,

I think that all sports kind of have that, kind of have that perception that all jocks, sports athletes are going to go and party and drink every weekend. That's kind of like expected, I guess you can say. You don't really get a choice because if you don't do those things, they you probably won't have friends or be very known. Which is kind of sad.

However, there was a disparity between other sports and the social norming viewpoint of alcohol. Other sports viewed alcohol with a much more negative perception.

Track and cross-country athletes unanimously stated that consumption of alcohol has a tremendous negative impact on performance and usage was widely panned. Each athlete highlighted the slowing down of times as caused by consumption of alcohol, flying directly in the face of their goal as a student-athlete and an individual runner. Soccer and basketball discussed the perception of alcohol as negative due to the impact that is has on the athlete the next day. All of the student-athletes who viewed alcohol negatively discussed the way that their body feels both that day and the next day after alcohol use.

While the perception of alcohol use varied by sports, another aspect of alcohol within sports at community college is how the student-athlete perceives themselves and their use. Some community college student-athletes view alcohol consumption at the college level, whether 4 year university or community college, as normalized college student-behavior. They view their role as a student-athlete and their role as a college student as two different things, which were in conflict. One student-athlete highlighted how difficult of a decision it was for some individuals:

Well, everybody drinks a lot, I think. Especially on the weekends at least. I think it's a thing just like every other college kid that's like. . . . they hang out and it happens. . . . I think that it is just part of college life in general.

The difference between the student-athlete and the community college student conundrum focused heavily on acceptance and fitting in socially. Some athletes view the use of alcohol to help build friendships both within the team and with the non-athletic student body and to avoid boredom and loneliness. One athlete noted,

People are pretty bored at community colleges. Like I know that there are a lot of things to do but it is not the thing to do. I feel like at other colleges there are like events going on all the time, things to keep people occupied. I feel like here it is more like, hey, do you want to get high or this and that and like that's the thing to do. I feel like it may be different here, but I have friends that go to other community college's and play softball and they say the same thing.

Additional research may be needed on student-athlete alcohol consumption and the interplay between university culture, loneliness, boredom, and social norming.

Alcohol was not the only drug that had differences in perception. Of all of the drug categories that were identified within the study, no drug had a larger discrepancy in perception between athletes than marijuana. The perception of marijuana changed between each student-athlete and each team. Several student-athletes viewed marijuana positively due to its relaxation properties and its widespread use. One student-athlete remarked,

Every athlete does it. I don't care what athletes say they have tried it. If they haven't tried it . . . I can guarantee that every athlete in college has tried it.

Basketball, baseball, football . . . They may not find it right away, but I am 90% sure that most athletes in college have tried using marijuana.

Another student athlete commented not on its widespread use but the daily usage of the drug. Student-athlete A stated, "Well, marijuana has become such an everyday thing with teammates we are just used to it. If one girl walks into practice high every day, you get used to it. It's the Spring now, so it is normal to us." The overall view of marijuana

during the interviews is that it is viewed more as alcohol and tobacco (legal drugs) and that it has fewer negative side effects, particularly lack of physical addiction.

Other community college student-athletes did perceive marijuana in a negative light. First, the fact that marijuana remains illegal and that being caught using could have a negative impact on their scholarship was a consistent theme between athletes and sports. Other student-athletes highlighted the illegality of marijuana and that it does not help with performance and, therefore, should be ignored. Another negative perception of marijuana within student-athletes was marijuana's impact on motivation. More than one student-athlete highlighted the negative impact that constant use has on motivation, both athletically and academically. One student-athlete stated,

Well, at community colleges you don't get drug tested. And that kind of gives people more of a reason to do it . . . I would say that it definitely makes you less motivated, especially with athletes. When an athlete does it a lot, it's kind of something a lot of JUCO do because there really isn't a lot to do. And you can do it. It's against the law but you are not going to get drug tested. I perceive it as something that keeps you really unmotivated and keeps you from achieving your goals.

What was most interesting was that the student-athletes who perceive marijuana negatively did not hold those individuals who chose to use in as negative light as "harder drugs," such as heroin or other opioids. The findings of this study regarding marijuana perception are one that is changing. More research is needed on perceptions of marijuana use and its impact on athletics.

One unexpected finding of this study was the influence that role models have on the perception of many different types of drugs and alcohol. One drug that was consistently mentioned as being primarily driven by role modeled behavior was dipping within baseball. Each baseball player identified dip as a culture within baseball. When asked where this perception comes from, most athletes identified their first perception of it being either major league baseball players dipping or imitation of a teammate on a travel/high school team. Pop culture can also feed into this perception as well. As one baseball player put it,

I would say that the only thing that is impacting baseball or like used in baseball is tobacco. Dipping. I would say is big in baseball. . . . I honestly think it's because when you look back and they did it back in the day. It gets passed on and passed on. Look at the movie . . . The Sandlot! They are doing it in The Sandlot.

However, the influence of role modeled behavior on the perceptions of drugs and alcohol extends beyond baseball. Student-athletes across sports identified other high-profile athletes that are perceived as using certain substances, including Michael Phelps and Tim Lincecum, even when these athletes play sports that are different than the participant. One track athlete remarked,

Now, marijuana is different because I feel like, I hear a lot of things. I forget the swimmers name . . . (Michael Phelps) . . . yes! I don't know if this is true or not, but I heard that he has been one of those people who has used marijuana. Now whether or not it is true, I don't know. I feel as if like track and swimming are kinda like the same, you use your lungs a lot. You are breathing in the pool and

using your breath as much as you are using your breath on the track . . . but for people like him, if he does do it, I don't know how it doesn't benefit him.

Still other student-athletes admit to learning about the use and benefits of supplements from older athletes on the same team. One athlete remarked,

Yeah, like the first week, two-a-days during the summer. We were all like, our bodies were exhausted by like Wednesday. So, we all started talking, one of the older players told us how he drank protein, which helped him a lot. So, a couple of others started using to help them.

Role modeled behavior may be a factor in experimentation of new substances or changing perception of different drugs, particularly within community college athletics. Additional research is needed on how student-athletes' perceptions of drugs and alcohol are influenced by teammates or successful high profile athletes perceived use of specific substances.

Student-athletes had very strong feelings about over-the-counter supplements and energy drinks. There was a spectrum of responses about supplements, with several student-athletes outright hating their use within the sport. One athlete stated,

They are terrible. I mean like people take pre-workout and that stuff. I never drink that stuff. Like after a workout, I drink chocolate milk . . . I just want to do things naturally. Like if I need protein or if I need energy, then I just like to eat better. Or I eat a lot of greens, fruits, and vegetables and stuff like that. I would rather get energy that way and sleep.

Some student-athletes view supplements as cheating or a complete waste of money, believing that a better diet has the same impact as high priced supplements. However, other student-athletes viewed supplements in a more favorable light. These athletes viewed supplements as a great way to maintain their weight or speed up recovery from workouts. One athlete stated,

I think they can be good for you, like whey protein, you can drink a shake after a workout and get a lot of protein and there is also something called creatine. I am on that right now. You just mix it with water, and it helps you keep your water weight up. During the baseball season, we have a tendency to lose a lot of weight. Because we are out there sweating, and we don't get a lot of food. Like if we are out there for a double header at 10, we will be out until 7 and the only thing that we get is a peanut butter and jelly, a granola bar, and a banana. So we are losing weight. So, if you can get something that will prevent you from losing weight, then you should do it. You don't put in the time in the winter, and then go out and lose it in three months.

However, this variability in perception means that additional education may be required for student-athletes particularly about what is legal within the NCAA and how these drugs are influencing athletes long-term.

Energy drinks were perceived very negatively by community college student-athletes, particularly when athletic performance was involved. The perception of energy drinks is that there are negative physical problems that stem from the use of energy drinks. One student-athlete noted,

My opinion is that they are horrible. . . it can cause a coating around your heart. Your heart can beat too fast, you can have a stroke. I think they are horrible, but I do see people that are like, we are playing a double header and they wake up and drink a Red Bull. And then after the first game and before the second game they pound another Red Bull. Then we get to the hotel and they have homework and they have another one. I am like it just isn't that good for your heart.

The negative perception crossed all sports with most stating that they did not enjoy the feeling of energy drinks, particularly increased heart rate and jittery feelings. However, one common theme did emerge from the study. While most of the student-athletes did not like energy drinks in relation to athletics, most student-athletes stated that their use to deal with academics is widespread and an acceptable practice.

One interesting commonality between student-athletes and sports would be the fear of the use of opioids, including prescription opioids, but the high rate of use of Ibuprofen. Nearly all of the student-athletes discussed the pain involved with recovering from their sport, either in terms of muscle recovery or recovering from games. As one athlete put it, "Ibuprofen . . . There's a funny saying with Ibuprofen. Ibuprofen means I be playing." Just as universal was the fear of opiates within community college student-athletes. Most student-athletes did not view them as impacting their sport at all or were outright afraid of their use. As one athlete stated,

I think that everybody is terrified of pain killers. At least my generation.

Everybody knows that nothing good comes from it. I think we are in a generation that is more . . . I think the generation before was afraid of marijuana so they

would take a Vicodin or an Oxycontin. Now, they are transitioning to this (marijuana) is a bit healthier.

The use of low-level pain killers is important, but it is having no positive effects on how opioids are perceived. Additional research would be needed to determine the reason for this perception and the impact that marijuana is having.

Second Research Question

The second research question centered around how student-athletes view drugs and alcohol and its impact on athletic performance. There was variability across sports when it comes to drugs impact on performance. Cross country and track athletes were all adamant about the impact that drugs have on running times, citing anecdotal evidence from high school where another athlete was “slowed down” due to consumption the night before. Cross country and track athletes have perhaps the easiest correlation between alcohol and drug use and impact on athletic performance as the “watch doesn’t lie.” They also view everything put into the body as fuel in either positive or negative directions. Other sports had greater variability and different viewpoints on drugs and alcohol.

One drug that was universally panned for its negative impact on athletic performance was alcohol. Each student-athlete pointed to witnessing teammates impacted by previous night’s consumption of alcohol. Although alcohol did not show any positive benefit to athletic performance, some student-athletes view drinking positively as long as the timing of use does not impact practices or games.

There was discussion across sports about teaching student-athletes about drinking in moderation. One baseball player stated,

More education on the right times to do things. Telling an athlete you can't drink, you can't do this is never going to happen. You are never going to go to a college campus and go to a sports team on an off day and some member of the team isn't going to be doing something. It's inevitable. If there was teaching about being smart about it. I think that there are wrong ways to go about it and there are smart ways to go about it. I think that you can definitely have your fun and be extremely careful.

Marijuana is perceived differently by many student-athletes, but its impact on performance was fairly consistent. Most community college student-athletes viewed marijuana as having a positive impact on performance, dependent upon the sport. For example, some student-athletes view marijuana as helping student-athletes improve performance by helping the athlete concentrate. One athlete stated, "Honestly, I know a lot of players play better when they smoke weed. I noticed that myself. . . . I have actually seen some, actually seen, that have done it and it just slows them down, they focus better." Other student-athletes viewed marijuana as impacting muscle recovery and helping with inflammation. Again, most viewed role models, particularly successful role models, who allegedly used different substances as influencing their understanding of the positive benefits of marijuana. One baseball player stated,

I think it can be good if it is used correctly. If you are just using it to get high, then it really is not benefitting you at all. But if you are using it for inflammation, pain, stuff like that they it can be helpful. I don't know but if you are using it before games then there is no point. It is not going to make you any better . . . If

you use it as a tool instead of recreational. Say, like Tim Lincecum. I think he is a big advocate of it after he pitches. It helps with inflammation and shoulder pain. And stuff like that. I am no expert on that.

Perhaps no part of the quote could be more appropriate than the statement that athletes are no experts. There is inconsistent drug and alcohol education at the high school level meaning that these community college student-athletes are collecting information from any source available to them. Many are following role models or learned behaviors from other student-athletes without the support of research. More research is needed to further understand how student-athletes view marijuana as helping their athletic performance and the reasons behind it.

While alcohol is viewed by student-athletes as having lingering effects on performance, marijuana was viewed differently. Several student-athletes remarked that the use of marijuana does not impact the next day's performance nearly as much as alcohol does. One track athlete stated,

I feel like, the people that I am surrounded by, when you intake alcohol, you feel different the next day whereas for marijuana it's like you are in a high for the moment and it doesn't like fade into the next day. Say for instance you intake alcohol the day before a meet, you may not be feeling as well the next day. You obviously aren't going to do your best. Whereas marijuana it won't affect you the next day, so it won't impact your performance.

In fact, within this study, the only negative impact on performance that student-athletes view marijuana causing is a decrease in motivation and preventing student-

athletes from achieving their optimal performance level. Just as the perception of marijuana is changing nationally, additional research is needed on student-athletes and what impact the marijuana is having across sports.

Energy drinks were perceived by most to have a negative impact on athletic performance. Many of the athletes were surprised that the interview included energy drinks. Most of the student-athletes did not view them as drugs and were shocked as to their inclusion in the study. The majority of the student-athletes believe that energy drinks did not have any positive impact on performance. One athlete noted, “I don’t like using energy drinks because I feel it speeds up my heart. I don’t like that feeling. But if it works for other people, they say, go for it.” Most of the student-athletes provided accounts of their use of energy drinks and elevated breathing, simulating a high, or speeding up the heart rate in a way that made them feel different before an athletic event. Most of the student-athletes wanted consistency in how they feel when they played their sport and energy drinks altered the way that they felt.

One exception to the rest of the student-athletes would be an athlete that spoke to the benefit of energy drinks. One student-athlete did state that they can be used at certain times to optimize performance.

Energy drinks are like very prevalent in baseball. I mean 100%. I know last fall, before we went to (baseball showcase) . . . a lot of the guys had taken “Bang”; it’s like a super creatine energy drink. Stuff like that. Guys were drinking those like the night before the classic or early in the morning. Try to get a boost to the system and wake it up. A lot of the guys went out and threw really well. They

PR'ed (personal record) on their velocity and stuff like that. I don't know if it was the energy drink or the adrenaline or a combination of both, but energy drinks are definitely something that are used a lot.

Additional research is needed on the long-term impact of energy drinks in athletes and continued understanding of its impact on athletic performance.

While student-athletes did not see the benefits of energy drinks on athletic performance, student-athletes did identify their use and impact on academic performance. Time management was a constant source of contention across student-athletes of all sports and genders. While the use of energy drinks is not widely used for sports, energy drinks were readily discussed when needing to study while exhausted. In many respects, energy drinks were used synonymously with caffeine drinks such as coffee. Athletes were open and clear about this delineation.

Supplements on the other hand are viewed in an inconsistent light across sport and gender. There was variability in regard to supplements and their impact on athletic performance. Most student-athletes utilize supplements in an effort to maintain performance or to recover after workouts. The most commonly used supplements identified were whey powders, pre-workout, and creatinine. However, this was not consistent to one sport nor was it universal. Within the study, student-athletes varied by sport as one runner may use supplements while her teammate does not utilize any substances. Many student-athletes identified their disdain for supplements and believed that the same effects could be achieved by living a healthier lifestyle, either through eating better or getting more rest. There was no definitive pattern to determine which

athletes were pro-supplement or anti-supplement as differences crossed sport and gender. Additional research is needed to determine reasons and rationales as to why student-athletes at all levels vary in terms of supplement usage and what education may be needed to community college student-athletes surrounding supplements.

Third Research Question

The final research question focused on the impact that the field of social work could have on drug education, drug prevention, drug testing and education of student-athletes. Each individual interview concluded by listening to each student-athlete address their specific needs through their own lived experiences. Within this section, the most consistently mentioned issue was the lack of drug testing provided within the community college level of sport. Most of the student-athletes mentioned the lack of drug testing without prompt and spoke about how widespread this knowledge base was within athletics. The lack of drug testing within community colleges falls outside of the purview of social work and is a policy issue for the National Junior College Athletic Association. However, the Preamble of the Code of Ethics within Social Work highlights that social work activities include “administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation” (NASW, 2018). What was interesting were the number of community college student-athletes who stated that drug testing would benefit the sport and the individual. For example, one student-athlete stated,

I feel that community colleges would have no athletes if that resource (drug testing) were provided. Drug tests. And I think that is why it’s impacted

community college athletics so much because students come here knowing that they aren't going to get drug tested. It allows more freedom. I would add more penalizing resources so that it isn't so much of a free for all. Just make sure that the athletes know.

During the interviews, the non-verbal communication of the student-athletes only changed within the interviews during discussion about drug testing, as it was apparent that they were trying to determine the best way to answer. Many were visually seen adjusting their seats or actually stating, "How do I say this" when drug testing was mentioned. Many believed that drug testing would increase motivation and the overall product of community college athletics. However, one student-athlete summed up the beliefs of student-athletes this way,

I wish that we would have had more rules. Even though I don't like rules . . .

Like, I mean, drug tests. I think that a lot of girls like to do drugs but at the end of the day don't like to use drugs. I had someone tell me that if they were forced to not do it, they would be happier and would have gone a lot further, if that makes sense. I think that the need to want to be popular, the need to want to fit in would have just overcome all of those things when they came to college.

While drug testing was not a focus of this study, the findings of this study need additional research. Social workers provide a voice to those who are oppressed and advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves (NASW, 2018). Additional research on a larger scale could provide clarification on the need for social work to further engage with student-athletes at a multitude of levels, both micro and macro.

Another major theme that came out of this section was the conflict of student-athletes between fitting in socially and optimal athletic performance. Athletes know that the use of drugs and alcohol is detrimental to their athletic performance, but the need to be a part of the team/college environment and seen as one of the team is a conflicting factor for them. Previous research has shown that increased reported drinking in team sports is caused by socialization and bonding factors of drinking with teammates (Brenner & Swanik, 2007). Additional research is needed on community college student-athletes, but a starting point for any prevention work created needs to focus on the social aspect of college and the role that drugs and alcohol play in acceptance.

Another consistent theme found in this section is the lack of consistent drug and alcohol prevention information provided to students and student-athletes at the high school and collegiate level.

A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society.

Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living" (NASW, 2018).

Research has shown that student-athletes are an at-risk population for increased substance use and dangerous levels of drinking (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Mastroleo et al., 2018), particularly when student-athletes believe that teammates approve of the behavior (Seitz et al., 2014). Collegiate student-athletes are frequently recruited nationwide and frequently attend college by themselves. There is a general assumption that students and student-athletes in high school are being educated about the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

The findings of this study paint a different picture. In four of the interviews, the student-athletes identified completion of the DARE program in middle school as the only form of drug and alcohol prevention they received in school (which actually took place in middle school). The rest of the student-athletes identified a high school health class, which was an elective at most of the schools, as the only other drug and alcohol prevention that they received. While the education was inconsistent; overwhelmingly, the student-athletes spoke about the abstinence-focused education or the scare tactics that were used regarding drugs and alcohol. One student-athlete noted,

I don't really remember like anything specific when it comes to drugs and alcohol. I remember like before prom that some kids would dress up in black and they wouldn't talk to anybody the whole day. It was like saying like this is what it will be like if you drink and drive after prom. Somebody would die, you wouldn't be there. And that's what they were trying to prove to us, which was kind of weird, but they do it every prom.

Most student-athletes spoke about not using drugs and alcohol at all which they viewed as naïve and ineffective. The field of social work can view a client as an individual, a family, a group, an organization, or a community (NASW, 2018). While additional research is needed to look at prevention and educational efforts of substance use from high school and transitioning to college, social work can also strive to assist communities and organizations to be responsive to the needs of their constituents, in this case student-athletes (NASW, 2018). Gill (2009) directly calls for social work to work with the myriad

of needs of student-athletes. If nothing else, the small findings from this study provide additional support for Gill's notion.

The next two identified themes, self-motivation and student-athletes transitioning to college, represent specific needs of community college student-athletes. Qualitative research provides an opportunity for the respondent's voice to be heard, while the field of social work focuses on meeting the client where they are at (NASW, 2018). These findings provide valuable insight into the needs of community college student-athletes and provide social workers and educators with an opportunity to understand where the community college student-athlete is and start the process of building necessary interventions and resources to help them succeed. When asked about what type of education they needed at the community college level, at least 10 of the student-athletes discussed self-motivation, understanding drugs long-term impact on athletic performance, and teaching about consumption in moderation. Nearly all of the student-athletes claimed to have witnessed the impact of drugs, and particularly alcohol, on athletic performance. Experience in this respect was a great teacher. However, more prevention education could be focused on how alcohol and other drugs impact individual sports and individual positions. As one athlete stated,

I definitely would say the effects of drugs and alcohol on your body and performance. That's what I would say but mostly in high school, it's here are the drug groups, marijuana, alcohol, and steroids. They tell you what they are and then don't do them. They don't tell you really how they will impact you. . . .

Particularly alcohol because the student-athletes in college are a little older and

may be of drinking age. I really think for athletes that it should show you the effect that your binge drinking, going out to parties, how are you going to feel in the morning at practice. How is it going to affect you at the meet? With marijuana, it immediately affects your lungs which what you need when you are playing sports.

The idea of transitioning to adulthood, coined “adulting” by the student-athletes, and drinking in moderation was a constantly repeated theme from the student-athletes. The vast majority of student-athletes identified that they view consumption of alcohol as impacting on performance but also one that falls as normal for college students. Many discussed the timing of consumption but did not understand the science or reasons behind it. One student-athlete identified that they did not know that alcohol would dehydrate muscles and could lead to increased risk of injury. When coupled with the lack of consistent education at the high school level surrounding the impact of drugs and alcohol on the body, college students, especially community college student-athletes, are placed into a difficult position. More prevention programming focused on understanding drugs impact on the athlete and education surrounding moderation could be beneficial to this specific population.

Another consistent theme that the vast majority of the student-athletes experienced was the difficulty transitioning to the community college environment. Colleges, including community colleges, recruit student-athletes nationwide. However, community colleges lack housing and the supports and resources that come with residence hall living. This was reflected by numerous community college student-athletes

discussing the difficult time that they had transitioning to college. Most highlighted the lack of parental accountability, the first time away from home, and the lack of structure as important influences to their struggles. This could also lead to an increased feeling of loneliness and desire to fit in at whatever cost. Community colleges and non-residential 4-year universities may want to consider additional research on the needs of these student-athletes and provide resources at the beginning of the term to help these student-athletes be successful

While student-athletes discussed drug and alcohol prevention, they were also asked what other resources were needed outside of this area. Many of the athletes discussed the need for sport performance equipment and locations, such as field houses and batting cages, that the student-athlete had access to. In addition to athletic facilities, seven of the student-athletes discussed the need for increased access to caring individuals who would listen and understand their unique circumstances. Counselors, sports psychologists, and caring individuals were the most commonly discussed resources that was needed for community college student-athletes. Several student-athletes discussed how sports impacts the individual's mind, or "getting inside your head." They desire to have more therapeutic resources that are confidential and understanding of the needs of student-athletes. Their quotes directly line up with Gill's (2009, 2014) research and the need for social work to further get involved with the student-athlete population.

Summary

Within this study, three primary research questions were asked that focused on community college student-athletes perception of drugs and alcohol, how these drugs are

impacting athletic performance, and how social work could support community college student-athletes. The findings from the interviews show varying perspectives in how community college student-athletes perceive different categories of drugs that do not follow sport or gender and are impacted by role-modeled behavior. Alcohol, energy drinks, and tobacco were all seen as impacting athletic performance, while supplements and alcohol were all seen as having a positive impact on athletic performance. Finally, community college student-athletes identified several areas that could benefit from social work intervention, including programming focused on moderated drinking, focusing on the environment of the community college, and helping student-athletes transition to college. While this study sheds light on the community college student-athlete, additional research and education is needed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

My primary purpose in this study was to hear the voice of the community college student-athletes, their perceptions on drugs and alcohol, and their current needs both athletically and academically. Rather than surveying the community college student-athletes about their own substance use, I conducted this qualitative research study to understand how student-athletes perceive drugs and alcohol. By understanding how student-athletes view drugs and alcohol, effective prevention and intervention programming could be developed to target these perceptions. In this research project, I highlighted the tremendous variability that community college student-athletes have when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Whether it was inconsistent education on drugs and alcohol in high school, sport-related differences when it comes to use and acceptance of different drugs, and a fundamental lack of knowledge of how drugs and alcohol affect the student-athlete both short and long terms, through this research study, I add to the research knowledge of collegiate student athletes and provides opportunities for additional research.

Interpretation of the Findings

This research study did not focus on consumption of drugs and alcohol by community college student-athletes. Between the qualitative nature of the study and the lack of focus on personal usage, comparisons between NCAA student-athletes and community college student-athletes should not be attempted. However, there were other areas in which I added to the knowledge base of collegiate student-athletes. First,

previous research shows that student-athletes face six unique challenges that general college students do not: (a) Balancing academics and athletics; (b) the unique status of being an athlete; (c) managing athletic success and failure; (d) minimizing or avoiding injury; (e) terminating their athletic career; and, (f) weight issues (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006). Within the interviews, each of these specific subject areas was mentioned collectively between all of the student-athletes. However, one additional stressor was mentioned by 11 of the 13 community college student-athletes: transitioning to the community college with little structure. Many of the student-athletes mentioned stress during their first academic year, but it was more than academics. Personal independence, lack of community at the college, separation from other student-athletes, and “fending for themselves” all added additional stress during the first year. Although community colleges are viewed as commuter colleges, community college student-athletes are recruited from all around the United States, with two of the interviewees of this study hailing from Canada and the southeastern United States. Additional research is needed for the collegiate student-athlete, regardless of NCAA or NJCAA, regarding the transition to college, particularly when the college is viewed as a commuter college without dormitory living.

Previous research on substance use rates of high school students finds that student-athletes are frequently using at higher rates than the general student body (Hildebrand et al., 2001; Wetherill & Fromme, 2007). Through this research study, I add to the literature regarding the inconsistent nature of education surrounding drugs and alcohol at the high school level. Consistently, many of the student-athletes at the

community college identified either a lack of drug and alcohol education, abstinence-based education including the use of scare tactics to keep kids from using, or the reliance on middle school prevention programming, such as DARE, as the only form of prevention education being used. Although no prevention or intervention programming is 100% effective at eliminating anything, additional research is needed on prevention programming at the local, state, and national levels and how to best maximize the positive benefits of the programming. Social work as a field could also begin the discussion regarding the use of prevention models and their effectiveness for students transitioning on to college, whether NCAA or NJCAA.

Perhaps the most important findings of this research study were the honest statements of how community college student-athletes perceive different drugs and alcohol as well as what the student-athletes believed was needed moving forward to support them. Regarding alcohol, community college student-athletes spoke repeatedly about alcohol's negative influence on performance, its positive influence on team bonding (depending on the sport), its accepted use by the rest of the student body, and the need for interventions that are focused on drinking in moderation and targeting binge drinking. Many of these findings were consistent with previous research, particularly the binge drinking of student-athletes and drinking rates of the non-athletic student body (Martens, Dams-O'Connor, & Beck, 2006; Wahesh et al., 2013; Wechsler et al., 2002). However, where this research adds to the research is the notion that student-athletes should be viewed as adults and be taught how to drink in moderation. An opportunity

exists for programming that is focused on teaching responsible alcohol use and moderated drinking.

This research also provides insight into the changing nature of marijuana and its perception within the United States. Although research exists outlining the harmful effects of marijuana on sport performance (Hall & Degenhardt, 2009; Renaud & Cormier, 1986; Wadsworth et al., 2006), this information is not understood or being provided to student-athletes at the community college level. In fact, community college student-athletes viewed marijuana as a positive and are using stories from high profile sport athletes as to the positive benefits of marijuana usage. Due to the lack of drug testing at community colleges, no potential negative ramifications exist for these student-athletes to lie or be dishonest about their perceptions. After concluding the data collection for this study, the National Football League announced that they would be researching the use of marijuana for pain relief (Benjamin, 2019). More research is needed for both the positive and negative effects of marijuana use, particularly in the long-term effects, on athletes. Without this education and corresponding intervention efforts, student-athletes will continue to listen to anecdotal stories of high-profile athletes or to experienced collegiate student-athletes without relying on facts.

This study also provides additional insight into the use of supplements and energy drinks at the collegiate level. This research highlights that many community college student-athletes are leery of supplements and are only using them as a way to maintain weight or provide a quicker turn around after workouts. However, many of the student-athletes lacked knowledge about supplements, relying more on experienced teammates to

determine use. Educational initiatives could be developed specifically educating community college student-athletes about supplements, including what they are, what they do, and long-term ramifications for use. Regarding energy drinks, research states that energy drinks are frequently used by athletes as a way to maintain weight and high energy levels (Ballard et al., 2015). Although these two notions were mentioned by student-athletes, it also highlights that energy drinks are viewed by many student-athletes as negative toward athletic performance as it makes the athletes feel “jittery” or have a high heart rate. This study also identifies that the community college student-athlete views energy drinks as more of a study aid as opposed to an athletic aid. Additional research is needed regarding the interplay of the community college student-athlete between the athlete and the student.

Finally, additional insight and education regarding community college student-athletes is needed. In this study, I have identified that community college student-athletes have unique stressors and needs that some NCAA student-athletes may or may not experience. An opportunity exists for social work to work with community college student-athletes and tailor programming that meets their unique needs. Additional research is also needed when comparing collegiate student-athletes at all levels and at all sports. This study opens the door to understanding the community college student-athlete. However, there remains a large amount of information that remains unknown about this population.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, limitations existed within this research study that must be taken into account. First and foremost, this research study was a qualitative research study. The information provided was not meant to be transferrable or generalizable to all community college student-athletes. In this project, I began to paint a picture of the reality of community college student-athletes at one particular community college located in the midwestern United States. Additional research would be needed to make the findings transferrable nationwide. The fact that I conducted face-to-face interviews on perceptions of drugs and alcohol may be a limitation of the study. Did the student-athletes tell their truth, or did they try to answer the question to meet the needs of the researcher? Although measures were put into place to ensure that this did not happen, it is a potential limitation.

Another potential limitation of this study could be selection bias. Although the volunteer rate of participation was high for some sports within the research study (80% agreed to participate for one sport), other sports had a much lower rate of agreement to participate. There also was a recognizable difference in volunteer rates between female sports and male sports. Both of these differences could potentially lead to a selection bias. Also, the fact that two coaches did not respond to me for the initial research request may be a selection bias that needs to be considered.

Recommendations

For this qualitative research study, the primary objective was realized in that the voice of the community college student-athlete was heard. However, additional research

is needed on this population because, in the current study, I only interviewed 13 of 65,000 community college student-athletes represented nationwide. The first requirement is to gather more research regarding the experiences, needs, and substance use trends of community college student-athletes from a representative sample. Once research on higher numbers of community college student-athletes have been achieved, quantitative studies should be conducted comparing community college student-athletes to each division of the NCAA, paying particular attention to the requirement of mandatory intervention and drug screening.

Established literature may need to be broadened to provide a greater understanding of the student-athlete. The term *collegiate student-athlete* is a vague term as there is significant variability in the division, sport, living situation, resources, and expectations depending on the level being played. For instance, is the experience of student-athletes the same for a Division 1 NCAA student-athlete living in a dormitory with study tables and access to a sports psychologist, a Division 2 NCAA student-athlete attending a branch campus with no on-campus living, and the community college student-athlete with no on-campus housing and no mandatory study tables? Perhaps the only similarities that these student-athletes have is the sport in which they play. Understanding these differences require additional research so that tailored interventions can meet the specific needs of the student-athlete and where they are located. For research moving forward, community college student-athletes should be a part of any research and specific categories need to be recognized to ensure that student-athletes are receiving the resources they need. When categories are too broad, assumptions and

generalities are perpetuated that may not be reflective of the actual lived experience of student-athletes.

Additional research is also needed on the influence of high-level sports athletes and the impact that it is having on amateur athletics with regard to drug use and its relation to athletic performance. Regardless of the truth of the stories or urban legends, this research highlights that drugs such as tobacco (dip) has been engrained into the sport of baseball with early onset of use caused by mimicking of older players on the team and professional athletes. Although this is an example of one drug, what influence is marijuana use having on amateur athletics when professional athletes admit to using to deal with pain?

The field of social work has always had both a micro and macro focus built into the field. One area that this study calls for more involvement from social work would be the macro level of practice. Within this study, one note is the lack of consistent drug and alcohol prevention and knowledge that student-athletes achieve at the high school level. A general assumption may be that all students receive education surrounding drug and alcohol, but the timing, method, and effectiveness of this programming as student's transition on to college would be an interesting study. With additional knowledge on the alignment of prevention and intervention efforts between high school and college, social work could have an influence by bringing large institutions at a local, state, or national level together to ensure that all students are receiving consistent information that is building knowledge and working to deal with drug and alcohol use at the collegiate level. Although this could be far reaching, this study echoes the words of previous researchers

stressing the need for the field of social work to engage with and work with student-athletes in both a micro and macro focus (Gill, 2009; Teasley & Gill, 2014). In this study, I add to the literature by giving voice to the community college student-athlete and the many stressors and needs that they have.

Implications

The social change implications for this research study could be beneficial at a multitude of levels. First and foremost, the voice of the community college student-athlete has begun to be heard and their unique lived experiences can assist researchers in developing programming tailored to meet their needs. Although additional research is required, one of the major themes of this study is to connect the effects of drug and alcohol use back to athletic performance that is personal to the sport and potentially the position for the student-athlete. By using this research to develop programming tailored to student-athletes across all levels, the specific impact on individual student-athletes could be profound.

One of the most important aspects of qualitative research is providing a voice to those individuals who may have previously been ignored. This research provided community college student-athletes an opportunity to detail their unique lived experiences. One of the important themes that came out of the project was the difficulty that many community college student-athletes had during their first year. The sudden independence, difficulty transitioning to adulthood, and the lack of parental reinforcement saw many community college student-athletes struggle during their first year. Although additional research is still needed, an opportunity for 4-year commuter colleges and

community colleges exists to provide more resources up front to students who believe that they could use the additional supports.

Another organizational social change opportunity surrounds the lack of continuity in drug and alcohol prevention efforts between middle school, high school, and college. There was tremendous variability between the student-athletes and the knowledge that they had transitioning to the community college. The field of social work requires work at both the micro and macro levels of society. One social change possibility would be a macro level analysis of drug and alcohol prevention across school districts and the corresponding efforts at colleges. Perhaps one of the best ways to tackle the ongoing use of alcohol and drugs at colleges would be to analyze and develop a large-scale prevention effort tailored to the students.

Perhaps one of the most important areas of social change that this study highlights is the ability to challenge others' perception of student-athletes. It is easy to stereotype and assume about student-athletes. Student-athletes are painfully aware of these perceptions. Student-athletes are a unique population with feelings and problems. Individuals and society itself could learn to challenge our own biases by listening to the words of one student-athlete:

Ummm, people to listen to me instead of judging me. You know in my personal life outside of basketball. I am very versatile. As an athlete right now, I don't feel that the faculty and coaches understand me as a player or as a student off the court. I can really say that they don't know me well enough. They know me as a basketball player on the court. . . . I just wish that there were more people to listen

and try to understand . . . Especially as being a basketball player here. I have a big heart. I just really wish people would listen and try to get to know a person because I feel like that will make the relationship stronger and you will get a better understanding of the player and help that person.

The field of social work is in a tremendous position to assist and support student-athletes nationwide. Social work as a profession has already been challenged to increase their services to student-athletes and provide necessary interventions when problems are identified (Gill, 2009; Teasley & Gill, 2014). This study adds to the growing literature for the need for social work to listen and understand the unique needs of student-athletes and begin to develop tailored interventions to help student-athletes thrive.

Conclusion

Up to this point, the research term *collegiate student-athlete* has been missing 65,000 athletes. Community college student-athletes are a unique population who have been neglected in the research. These student-athletes are striving to achieve lifelong goals, achieve academic degrees, and continue to better themselves. In my research, I have showcased that these student-athletes have additional stressors and lived experiences that are unique and could potentially benefit from social work intervention. A tremendous amount can be learned from community college student-athletes. In this study, I have strived to open the door to a new population.

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Appendix A: Script for Recruitment of Student-Athletes

Good afternoon and thank you Coach _____ for allowing me a few minutes of your practice time. My name is Kevin Berg and I am an Academic Counselor here at Tri-C. However, just like all of you, I am also a student. I am currently enrolled in a doctoral program at Walden University. I am looking to conduct a research study in which I interview community college student-athletes on their views and perceptions of different types of drugs and alcohol. Please understand that this study is not going to ask you any questions about any personal substance use. Instead, this study will ask you how you perceive different substances and their impact on your sport. The main goal of this research study is to begin to understand the unique needs and views of community college student-athletes. The findings of this research will help administrators, coaches, practitioners, social workers, and future researchers to develop interventions and programming that are designed to help community college student-athletes be successful and achieve their goals.

Each interview will be conducted one-on-one with myself and will be audio recorded. Your confidentiality is of utmost importance. Coaches, administrators, or professors will not have access to the audio-recording of the interview or any information that is collected from you as a student-athlete. All interviews will be transcribed by this researcher helping to secure your confidentiality. The interviews and any transcriptions will be kept on a personal laptop in a locked file. I have with me today copies of the Consent for Participation. If you are interested in participating, simply complete this form and return it to me. You may return it to me now, or you may send it to me by email

within the next 7 days. I will contact you to setup an interview time within the next couple of weeks. Anyone interested in participating in this research study will receive a \$30 gift card as a thank you for your participation.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Script prior to interview: Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed today. You have read through the consent form and signed it. First, I want to give you the opportunity to ask any questions before we get started. Remember, this interview is confidential and will not be shared with any individual, including administration or your coach. I will be audio-taping the interview via the laptop and I will be hand-writing notes during the interview as a part of data collection.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Now that all of your questions have been answered, let's go ahead and get started.

Start audio-recording

This is interview number 1 (corresponding to interview number). Thank you so much for participating. Let's jump right in and get started.

Q #1: Tell me about (Sport). What is it that you love about it?

Q #2: During your time playing high school (Sport), tell me about the education that you received about drugs and alcohol. What specific information were student-athletes provided with?

Q #3: Now that you are a community college student-athlete, how do you perceive drinking alcohol within the (Sport) community?

Q #4: What about marijuana? How do you perceive it?

Q #5: How do you view pain killers, such as prescription opiates, in (sport)? Or heroin?

Follow-up to question: Do you believe that use of alcohol, marijuana, or opiates is currently impacting (sport)? Why or why not?

Q #6: What is your perception of energy drinks in baseball? And over-the-counter supplements?

Q #7: Are there any other drugs that you would like to discuss, such as tobacco, methamphetamine, or stimulants, that are impacting your sport?

Follow-up to question: In your opinion, which category of drugs is having the biggest impact on your sport? Explain your answer

Q #8: In your expert opinion, what kinds of trainings or education on drugs and alcohol do you believe student-athletes need at the high school level? Same question but at the community college level to help them be successful? Try to be as specific as possible.

Q #9: Thank you so much for your time. We are almost done. What resources do you feel would be beneficial to you as a community college student-athlete?

Q #10: Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for your time. Your knowledge and expertise in this area is critical to this research project being successful. Now that the interview is complete, I will be transcribing the interview verbatim. Once completed, I will send you an email of the completed transcription to ensure accuracy. If you would like me to make any changes to the transcription, please don't hesitate to ask. Here is the \$30 gift card to pre-arranged site (i.e., Amazon) that was promised to you for your participation.

Stop recording at this time.