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Subjective Well-Being and Life Satisfaction Among Midlife Former Division III Student- Athletes

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Abstract

Subjective Well-Being and Life Satisfaction Among Midlife Former Division III Student-Athletes

by

David A. Bayer

JD, Marquette University, 1984

BA, Northwestern University, 1981

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2020

Abstract

People in midlife, age 35-50, often reach a state of generativity wherein they feel a need to enhance the well-being of younger generations. Although midlifers enjoy the potential for their highest lifetime levels of subjective well-being (SWB) and contributions to the social good, they also often experience decreased SWB and life satisfaction (LS). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of SWB and LS among a purposively selected group of 10 midlife former National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III collaborative sport student-athletes. Although participants in NCAA Division I athletics have been found to have enhanced quality of life in young adulthood and in midlife, the midlife group of former Division III athletes has rarely been studied. A number of findings and understandings emerged from a thematic analysis of open-ended semistructured interviews conducted with participants. These centered on family-derived SWB being at the root of midlife quality of life; LS and work not being indispensable to SWB; generativity as an essential ingredient of SWB; and the self-determination, coping, and resiliency the participants described in their intercollegiate experiences having transferred positively to midlife. Participants reported their belief that generativity and, thus, SWB increased well-being for society in general. Findings support continued research with an expanded population of midlife former Division III athletes to understand how they transfer and use what they learned in college athletics to enhance quality of life for both themselves and society.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Annette. Without her understanding, her patience, her personal sacrifices, and especially her unconditional love, this project, and my chance to continue to help younger people in our society, would not have been possible.

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I acknowledge friends and colleagues Craig Stenbroten, Pat Cerroni, Dr. Krissy Turner, Rich Clark, Len Raygo, Mark Desjardins Jr., Jim Maurice, my brother Eric, Glen Breeze, and Dr. Brad Hunter for their love, support, and friendship. It was their faith in me and, perhaps, undeserved respect for me that drove me to success; I believe their faith and respect will also drive me to success in the future. My daughters Ariana and Louisa always lent a caring, and sometimes constructively critical ear. I thank my parents, the late Fred and Nancy Bayer, for their staunch support to not give up and to continue with this project even after they fell terminally ill. I thank my pastor, the Reverend Jan Lavake, for her faith and support. Lastly, I must mention my ever unconditionally loving companion, the Pitoxer dog Titus D. Lafontaine. He has served as an ever present motivation to selflessly do my best, just like he always did throughout this project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Scholars have found that midlife is a pivotal period in the life span. It is a time when people face unprecedented changes in opportunity structures, growing responsibility, and the potential for age-related physical and mental health declines (Lachman, Teshale, & Agrigoroaei, 2015; Stone, Schneider, & Broderick, 2017; Stone, Schneider, Krueger, Schwartz, & Deaton, 2018). Subjective well-being (SWB) and life satisfaction (LS) can easily dip in midlife (Cheng, Powdthavee, & Oswald, 2017). These declines pose a social problem because researchers have found that well-being is essential to development across the human life span (Mayordomo, Viguer, Sales, Satores, & Melendez, 2016). Conversely, these researchers have also found that midlife is also the time when people reach life peaks in certain beneficial behaviors and states of being. These behaviors and states, such as generativity, a teaching, mentoring and nurturing of younger generations, have been found by researchers to predict high levels of SWB and LS in midlife (Erikson, 1980, 1982, 1993; Lachman et al., 2015; Slater, 2003).

Midlife, thus, is the time in life when people can be best equipped to exert a higher and more positive social impact than at any other life stage (Erikson 1980, 1982, 1993; Lachman et. al., 2015; Lagodimiere & Strachan, 2015). Yet, midlife is also the time when people can feel most helpless to positively impact society and possibly feel that they may even negatively impact society (Cheng et al., 2017). This paradox--that people experience either their highest highs or lowest lows in midlife both individually

and socially--represents a societal problem that must be understood in meaningful social contexts. It is important to understand how midlifers are tipped towards realizing their enormous potential to positively impact society and away from the stagnating vulnerability and hopelessness also typical of this life stage.

Scholars have also found that earlier life experiences sometimes occur within social contexts that can predict and influence levels of SWB and LS in later life stages such as midlife. Some of these contexts are highly worthy of study. For instance, recent, widely reported scandals in the revenue-producing Division I level of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports have been reported to have led to some public perceptions that all intercollegiate sports have a negative impact on student-athletes' current and later life well-being. Division I student-athletes have been found to experience fan pressures, extra institutional demands, and win-at-all-costs coaching influences (Curry, 1993; NCAA, 2018; Zimbalist, 2017). Yet, research findings also indicate that participation in intercollegiate football and basketball provides experiences that can positively impact quality of life during early adult and middle adult life stages (Rettig & Hu, 2016, Senecal, 2017; Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jeswani, 2014; Warehime, Dinkel, Bjornsen-Ramig, & Blount, 2017). If these higher level, more complex intercollegiate athletic experiences can have a positive impact on the lives of early and middle adult current and former student athletes, it makes sense to consider the impact of lower-level intercollegiate sports where the student athletes are not subject to the aforementioned pressures.

NCAA Division III student-athletes have a different collegiate experience than their higher-level counterparts. They participate in athletics at peak performance levels but, by NCAA regulations, Division III student-athletes are less exposed to the potentially negative influences and stressors present in Division I athletics (Curry, 1993; Griffith & Johnson, 2002; NCAA, 2018). Division III member universities, for instance, are not allowed to award athletic scholarships to students (NCAA, 2018). Students, therefore, perceive no pressure to earn or maintain an awarded athletic scholarship and feel little alumni and fan pressure as well as win-at-all-costs coaching influences (Curry, 1993). Additionally, Division III athletes have been found to be more positively engaged with academic resources on campus than their higher-level counterparts (Williams, Colles, & Allen, 2010). Researchers have also found that Division I athletes are saddled with all the aforementioned stressors and often have felt beholden to their universities to emphasize athletics over academics (Curry, 1993; Williams et al., 2010). More recently, Moller and Sheldon (2019) found that athletic scholarships can undermine athletes' intrinsic motivation by promoting negative external motivation both during participation in the sport in college and potentially for decades.

The number of athletes competing in Division III has also been the highest of any NCAA level for decades (Brown, 2012: NCAA, 2018). Yet, according to my review of the literature, there has been a dearth of research on SWB, LS, and current meanings of former intercollegiate team sports experiences for former midlife Division III athletes. This dearth has resulted in a critical research gap. The phenomenon of midlife former

Division III team sport athletes' lived experiences with regard to SWB and LS is, thus, important to understand.

In this chapter, I present a brief summary of the main literature relevant to defining the gap in research concerning midlife SWB and LS for those who were once Division III team sport athletes. The constructivist research paradigm that was employed in this study is discussed along with an introduction of the study's qualitative methodology and phenomenological design. I also present the research questions. There is then an introduction to self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and psychological concepts such as coping, resiliency, and collaboration and teamwork. I go on to explain how I recruited a sample from the target population to interview. Then, I explain how the data collected from the sample was transcribed and thematically organized to provide an understanding of the targeted phenomena. I provide definitions in the next section of this chapter. Words and terms that are not commonplace are contextually defined. Following these definitions, I outline the assumptions needed for meaningful study of the research questions. This leads into a discussion of the scope and delimitations, or purposeful limitations necessary to conduct the research. I also discuss the study's limitations and the steps I took to limit their impact on the findings. Finally, I clarify the social significance of this study, in particular how the results of this study could help scholars, practitioners, and other professionals to better understand pathways to increasing SWB and LS and reducing stress for those in midlife.

Background

There is widespread agreement among scholars that midlife is a pivotal period with regard to its members' SWB, LS, and potential to positively impact society in general. Paradoxically, some researchers have found that midlife is often a time where there is a decline in SWB while, alternatively, there is general agreement that midlife can also be the time where individuals reach peaks in SWB, LS and socially beneficial behaviors (Cheng et al., 2017; Erikson, 1980, 1982, 1993; Lachman et al., 2015; Slater, 2003).Many scholars have studied SWB and LS in earlier life stages during and following high-profile NCAA Division I or Olympic-type student-athlete experiences (see Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle, Karlis, & Rothschild-Checroune, 2014; Lachman et al., 2015; Stults-Kohlemainen et al., 2013). There has, nonetheless, been a dearth of research concerning SWB and LS among midlifers who participated at the lower profile and less confounded Division III levels of intercollegiate, collaborative team sports. Researchers are in agreement, however, that Division III sports experiences, particularly in team-sports, could be different than experiences at higher levels and contextually important to midlife experiences of SWB and LS (Curry, 1993; Rettig & Hu, 2016; Robst & Kiel, 2000; Senecal, 2017; Stults-Kolehmainen, Gilson, & Abolt, 2013; Warehime et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2010). Yet, a gap in understanding these phenomena remains for this socially impactful population.

Midlife Paradox

People in the midlife ages of 35 to 50 often experience a decrease in their levels of SWB and LS due to the unprecedented changes and challenges they must negotiate as they age (Cheng et al., 2017; Lachman et al., 2015). Conversely, Lachman et al. (2015) and Lagimodiere and Strachan (2015) noted that midlife is the time in which individuals can experience life peaks in personal and socially beneficial behaviors. These behaviors include leadership, coping, resiliency, self-efficacy, and generativity.

Context of Former NCAA Division III Intercollegiate Team-Sport Experiences in Midlife

Intercollegiate collaborative sports experiences have been shown to be excellent tools for developing socially beneficial skills and values for active players. They have also been shown to be a source of positive life skills and experiences for former student athletes in later life stages (Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle, Karlis, & Rothschild-Checroune, 2014; Lachman et al., 2015; Stults-Kohlemainen et al., 2013). Collaborative team-sport experiences, such as those involving football, basketball, soccer, hockey, baseball and softball, and lacrosse, have helped many intercollegiate student athletes develop life skills that assist them in balancing an increased number of life roles that continue into later life (Lachman et al., 2015). The skills developed in intercollegiate team sports include better time management, goal setting, mentoring, collaborative skills, acceptance of diversity, and socially altruistic behaviors.. These skills and behaviors have

been found to have a positive impact on later life SWB and LS up to 5 years postmatriculation (Sauer, Desmond, & Heintzleman, 2013). These skills are consistent with SDT, which focuses on needs for intrinsic motivation, goal setting, and relatedness (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2016).

The vast majority of these studies, however, have focused on populations who experienced high-level NCAA Division I collegiate sports or other elite sports contexts such as Olympic competition (Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois et al., 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle et al., 2014; Lachman et al., 2015; Stults-Kohlemainen et al., 2013). Although Division I intercollegiate student athletes have positive experiences, these high-profile athletes often suffer regular exposure to unrealistic fan pressure, institutional demands, a perceived need to earn awarded athletic scholarships, and win-at-all costs coaching influences (Curry, 1993). Division I student-athletes can, therefore, can fall prey to some negative effects. They may have low engagement with campus academic services and, thus, potentially lower grades, and less integration of nonathletic factors and benefits into their everyday lives. These experiences can also lead to higher stress levels for current and past former Division I student-athletes, leading to lower SWB, LS, and productivity and enhanced tendencies to abuse alcohol and other substances (Griffith & Johnson, 2002; Milroy, Orsini, Wyrick, Fearnow-Kearney, & Kelly, 2014; Williams et al., 2010). The experiences stand in contrast to those of their Division III student-athlete counterparts (Curry, 1993; Milroy et al., 2014; NCAA, 2018).

NCAA Division III level sports participants are unique. Like Division I and II student-athletes, they operate at peak performance levels. Division III student-athletes are the most numerous of any NCAA level of student-athlete. Unlike Division I student-athletes, they do not produce significant revenue for their colleges and universities (Curry, 1993). Division III student athletes, thus, experience fewer extrinsic stressors and expectations like win- or lose-at-all-costs coaching and administrative, alumni, and fan expectations that can serve as a form of great stress for their Division I and II counterparts Curry,1993; Milroy et al., 2014). They do not carry the expectations of other higher visibility student-athletes who have been awarded athletic scholarships. Division III athletic experiences are in this way less stressful than those at higher levels of competition. They compete for the love of the game in a setting conducive to the development of beneficial life lessons and skills and less conducive to stress (Curry, 1993; Williams et al., 2010). The meanings of these former sports experiences may, therefore, provide a context or backdrop for the socially impactful midlife experiences of SWB and LS.

Problem Statement

Scholars have confirmed a decrease in midlife SWB and LS in recent years (Cheng et al., 2017; Lachman et al., 2015; Zimbalist, 2017). Because SWB and LS are among the main indicators of quality of life for people worldwide (Cheng et al., 2017). This decrease alone represents a serious social problem. The severity of the problem is underscored by studies that have shown that midlifers also have the highest potential for

those at any life stage to reach life peaks in such things as leadership, self-efficacy, generativity, and other positive societal contributions (Lachman et al., 2015; Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015). A better understanding of SWB and LS at midlife may clarify the midlife potential for generativity, a phenomenon beneficial to both upcoming generations as well as those in midlife.

Problems relating to the phenomena of lived experiences are also related to contextual backdrops or *horizons*. Horizons are what allow members of a group to attribute meaning to their lived experiences (Bevan, 2019, Giorgi, 1997). Numerous scholars have found that experiences in collaborative intercollegiate sports in particular, such as football, basketball, soccer, hockey, volleyball, lacrosse, and baseball or softball, have led to the development of socially beneficial skills across adolescent and early adult age groups (Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle, Karlis, & Rothschild-Checroune, 2014; Lachman et al., 2015; Stults-Kohlemainen et al., 2013). Few researchers have focused on the impact of prior sports participation on the midlife age group (Curry, 1993; Moller & Sheldon, 2019; Williams et al., 2010). and there remains a dearth of research on midlife SWB and LS for those who have lower profile yet potentially more positive intercollegiate sports experiences such as at the NCAA Division III level of team-sport. Research conducted with former Division III collaborative sport athletes may help fill an important gap in the understanding of the lived experiences of midlife SWB and LS.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and develop an understanding of the lived experiences of SWB and LS among a purposively selected group of midlife former NCAA Division III student-athletes in collaborative sports. I selected the constructivist philosophy of reality as a framework to provide these former student-athletes, now at the socially important stage of midlife, the opportunity to describe their current lived experiences. The participants described their lived experiences of SWB and LS against the context of what it currently means to them to have once been Division III team sport athletes.

The intended outcome of this research was to contribute to the understanding of the quality of life for the large midlife population of former Division III team-sport athletes. The findings of the study should help scholars, professionals, and practitioners to discover and better understand pathways to increasing SWB and LS and reducing stress for those in the pivotal and impactful life stage of midlife. The findings should help to enhance understanding of the meanings and values at the root of intercollegiate sports experiences as potentially positive social influences during midlife.

Research Questions

I sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do former Division III athletes now in middle age experience subjective well-being?

2. How do former Division III athletes now in middle age experience life satisfaction?

3. What does it mean to former Division III athletes now in middle age to have been a young intercollegiate team sport student-athlete?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The primary focus of this research study was to explore the phenomena of the lived experiences of SWB and LS from the perspectives and meanings developed by participants now navigating through the challenges of the pivotal midlife period. To imbue the study with the potential to lead to positive social change in that regard, I moved the contextual focus beyond the previously examined context of prior NCAA Division I sports experiences. The contextual backdrop for exploring and understanding these midlife phenomena was to have been a former participant in the most heavily populated level of NCAA team-sports participation in college; Division III. This level of intercollegiate sports competition is, as noted, free from the stressors resulting from the award of athletic scholarships. Division III student-athletes are less subject to external stressors such as win at all costs coaching influences, administrative pressure to produce revenue through performance on the field or court, and other negative influences such as alumni and fan pressure than found at the Division I and II levels (Curry, 1993, Williams et al., 2010). Here the specific focus was on midlife former student athletes' descriptions of SWB and LS as understood through their current sense of self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and sense of living a successful, productive, and happy life. Intrinsic

motivation, in fact, has been found to be the exclusive form of motivation for during Division III student-athlete experiences (Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013). All these concepts are hallmarks of SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2016). The connections in this study framework involving alignment of phenomena, theory, questions, and data acquisition and analysis are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. For introductory purposes, however, I note that SDT and its related concepts served as an ideal theoretical lens for examining and understanding the phenomena, and answering the research questions in this study.

Student-athletes' perceptions of success in the team-sports context have been based on and align with SDT. Their subjective perceptions of their coaches and other teammates' ability to provide them with the things they needed to develop intrinsic perceptions of self-efficacy, confidence, and success have become their basis for SWB and LS (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009, Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013). It follows, therefore, that SDT also aligns with the research methodology best suited and necessary to gain understandings sought through the research questions; qualitative methodology.

SWB, LS, and their foundational dependence on SDT for midlife Division III collaborative student-athletes are also, by definition, human, subjective, and intrinsic lived-experiences. Everyone has different needs for success and interprets these needs differently. These are things that cannot be seen by an external researcher and cannot be measured against a single standard. Study of SDT-based phenomena in this study had to start, therefore, with exploration and understanding the lived experiences of phenomena

rather than explanation through measurement of something tangible (Creswell, 2014). The phenomena in this study were not yet well understood. Thus, not only did SDT align with the qualitative methodology anticipated for this study, it aligned with the phenomenological interviewing design of the study.

The central concepts of SDT involve things that cannot be seen or sensed externally to the person (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). SDT and related concepts are subjective and human. They consist of the individual members of a group's reflections, thoughts and feelings. These things were, therefore, described verbally by the participants in this study so they could be made known to me and others. As yet, no researchers had collected these descriptions for the phenomena of interest in this study. SDT aligned with and enhanced the direction and framework for the phenomenological descriptions. SDT appears to have enabled participants to provide the relevant descriptions and verbal data required to answer the research questions in this study. SDT also specifically aligns, therefore, with the phenomenological questioning design I used in this study.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative methodology and phenomenological interview design were an excellent way to gain descriptions and understandings of the phenomena of the shared lived experiences of SWB and LS for former NCAA Division III team-sport athletes. Researchers have long established qualitative methodology as the preferred way to study lived human phenomena that are framed by existing literature but not yet well-researched or understood (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2014, Moustakas, 1994). Things not yet

understood cannot be reliably and validly measured or tested, so quantitative research was not appropriate in this research project (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A qualitative phenomenological research design is best for capturing descriptions necessary for development of the understandings of lived experiences and phenomena. Further, the individual or shared lived experiences of the participants in this study were ones that cannot be observed. Participants could only describe their feelings and beliefs concerning SWB and LS as former Division III team-sport athletes for them to be known. Thus, a phenomenological interview design consisting of an interview that collected verbal data and built on semi-structured and open-ended interview questions was not only the best form of research this study, it was a necessity in this study (Marshall & Rossman,1980). In a qualitative phenomenological research design, the researcher serves as a human data collection and analysis instrument. I served in that capacity here. I contacted several individuals I thought could purposively identify suitable potential participants for my study. They facilitated distribution of my letter of introduction to a number of potential participants. Twelve such participants responded to me that they were interested in becoming part of the study. I conducted phenomenological interviews with each after they had read and responded that they understood the Informed Consent forms that I had emailed them. The verbal data collected from the participants in individual interviews was audio-taped and transcribed by me. I then used thematic analysis to organize and interpret the descriptive data. This led to findings and understandings that may be directly applied in socially positive ways and lead to future studies.

Definitions

Constructivism: A general school of thought in psychology that recognizes many realities that are constructed by individuals from their personal experiences and perceptions (Raskin, 2002). This school of thought stands in opposition to the one single ultimate truth assumed in positivist thought (Raskin, 2002). Constructivism involves inductive creation of theories rather than deductive testing of theories and therefore usually involves the use of qualitative methodology to understand phenomena (Creeswell, 2014; Raskin, 2002).

Generativity: One of two main characteristics of midlife, in which people develop and fulfill a perceived responsibility to help, nurture, and pass on helpful information to the younger generations. In so doing, they increase their own SWB and LS (Erikson, 1980, 1982, 1993; Lachman et al., 2015; Slater, 2003). The alternative characteristic in midlife is stagnation, in which people feel they are helpless to make a positive impact on society(Erikson, 1980, 1982, 1993; Slater, 2003).

Life satisfaction (LS): The happiness that that exists both when an individual makes his or her own cognitive judgments of life as a whole and when an individual examines and thinks critically about the socially based engagement he or she values in life (Seligman, 2011; Veenhoven, 1996).

Midlife: In this study, midlife refers to the period of life encompassing Erikson's (1980/1982/1993) later early adulthood (ages 35 through 39) stage. Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, Lyyra, and Kokko (2016) also found that people develop parental and other social role

identities in early middle adulthood (ages 40 through 50) where people can fully reach and engage in a state of generativity (see also Slater, 2003).

National Collegiate Athletic Association, Division III: A level of intercollegiate athletic participation where member colleges and universities (by NCAA rule) are not allowed to award potential student-athletes athletic scholarships (NCAA, 2018). Furthermore, players are generally freer from alumni and fan demands, pressure to generate income for the institution, and win-at-all costs coaching influences than student-athletes at higher NCAA levels of participation (Curry, 1993; Rettig & Hu, 2016; Robst & Kiel, 2000; Senecal, 2017; Sturm, Feltz, & Gilson, 2011; Warehime et al., 2017).

Self-determination theory (SDT): A popular psychological theory centered on the desire of human beings to satisfy their needs for autonomy, the solving of social problems, and relatedness through intrinsic motivation, goal setting, active coping, resiliency, and similar skills (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2016).

Subjective well-being (SWB): A person's cognitive and personal evaluations of his or her physical, mental health, and happiness. A further component of SWB involves a persons' satisfaction with his or her own effectiveness in contributing to society positively as a social being (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2002: Diener & Tay, 2015).

Thematic analysis: A step-by-step process of taking specific categories of descriptive information and gradually regrouping them into broader, more meaningful themes, often by use of repeated words, phrases, and answers to qualitative

phenomenological interview questions (Creswell, 2014; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018; Gallagher, Nordberg, & Gallagher, 2017).

Assumptions

Certain assumptions were necessary to provide for quality, dependability and trustworthiness in this study. First, it was assumed that having played NCAA Division III team-sports could have a meaningful impact on the SWB and LS for those in midlife. It was necessary to make this assumption given the context of this study. While former Division I student athletes have been studied extensively and have been found to have had positive experiences lasting well beyond matriculation from college and departure from collegiate sports, there has been a dearth of research into former stedent athletes from the Division III level. This represented a lack of understanding of midlife experiences of SWB and LS against the backdrop of former Division III intercollegiate team-sport participation. Many researchers, while focusing on Division I athletics, recommended extending studies to under-researched Division III sports experiences (Rettig & Hu, 2016; Senecal, 2017; Warehime, Dinkel, Bjornsen-Ramig, & Blunt; 2017). It was critical to begin to close this gap as Division III athletes undergo less complex and potentially less stressful experiences than their Division I counterparts which could, therefore, lead to even more beneficial later life experiences with regard to SWB and LS. This is one thing that led to determining the appropriate research questions for this study.

A second assumption that needed to be made for this study was that Division III team-sports experiences could lead to different understandings of midlife SWB and LS

than those gained in the studies of former Division I athletes. As a part of this assumption, it was more specifically assumed that former Division III team-sport athletes could be affected more positively in midlife by their athletic experiences than their former Division I and II counterparts due to exposure to less stress as summarized earlier.

It finally was assumed that constructivism is a valid school of scientific and psychological thinking. SWB and LS are subjective, intrinsically perceived phenomena for anyone, including those in the specific, under-researched population of interest in this study. This aligned with the human focus of the phenomena in this study. Constructivism is the bedrock of the qualitative methodology and phenomenological design necessary to collect the descriptive data upon which understandings of these phenomena for midlife, former Division III team sport athletes could be developed (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Scope and Delimitations

In my research, I focused specifically on midlifers who participated full-time in NCAA Division III team-sports. As mentioned, it is known that midlife is the time for generativity and the capacity and ability to foster well-being across society more substantially than in any other life stage (Lachman, et al., 2015: Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015). Alternatively, it is also a time of new challenges and potential stagnation, when many people can experience a dip in SWB and LS (Cheng et al., 2017). Therefore, due to the pivotal, potentially impactful, but challenging nature of midlife, and midlifers' higher potential to foster social change, only midlife individuals were chosen as participants.

Researchers have found that even higher-exposure, revenue producing former NCAA Division I student-athlete and other former elite amateur athlete experiences have predicted better SWB and LS both during these experiences and in later life stages (Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois et al., 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle et al., 2014; Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013). SWB and LS are building blocks of the exclusively midlife state of generativity, but researchers have dedicated little attention to potential midlife connections of former Division III team sports experiences and SWB and LS. Thus, only midlife participants who were also student-athletes at the lower-profile and less complex yet more populated Division III team-sports level were chosen as participants in this study.

A further delimitation was that these former midlife student-athletes must have participated in a Division III team-sport that required collaborative skills and teamwork on the field, court, or rink to achieve success. In this study the participants had participated in football, basketball, softball, and/or soccer. Barczak, Lassk, & Mulki (2010) and Beniscelli (2014) have noted that collaborative environments and team-oriented contexts have increasingly become the places where work important to society is successfully conducted.

I also delimited my study population to midlife former Division III team-sport participants who did not go on to coach at intercollegiate, other high levels, or play professional sports. They participated in their sport full-time through at least two years of college and graduated from college. I provided for these delimitations so that irrelevant

factors could not color or confound any understandings of the phenomena gained through this study. To further protect against confounds such as ambiguity, the sample size was limited to ten to fifteen participants only (Watt, 2007). I more specifically explained how larger samples could have negatively impacted the credibility, dependability, transferability, and accuracy of findings and understandings developed from my qualitative, phenomenological interviews in Chapter Three--Methodology.

Qualitative findings are not generalizable over entire populations, however, they can be transferable to other contexts and to later studies. The delimitations leading to the purposeful selection of the sample in this study were designed to lead to the least potentially confounded data possible so that the findings can be applied to the substantial target population in a positive way, through further study and, in part, in a practical and immediate sense.

Limitations

Limitations were also present in my research as in any study since it was and is impossible to control for all potential confounds in scientific studies. I still identified those that I could and compensated for them as much as possible. Researcher bias and worldview are always a potential limitation in qualitative studies due to the researcher's role as data collection and analysis intrument. This methodology also carries limitations in ensuring dependability due to these factors.

Regional Limitations in Sample Selection

I was required to study midlife former Division III team sport athletes who mainly though not exclusively attended middle-sized Midwest universities. This could have led to a potential problem with transferability and the representativeness of the sample, even given its purposive selection. Nonetheless, I was able to interview both men and women who competed in several collaborative sports. This and other techniques that I used to overcome this limitation as much possible are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Potential Researcher Bias

In any qualitative research, my biases and worldviews as a data collection and analysis instrument had the potential to skew results. For instance, I anticipated that midlife former Division III team-sport student athletes would describe positive experiences with SWB and LS in their day to day lives. I suspected these descriptions would stand out against the backdrop of positive meanings that they would attribute to having been this type of student-athlete. Therefore, I did all I could to ensure that truthful and dependable understandings would be the only sort of findings produced in this study. I was transparent and engaged in reflexivity throughout the study by journaling and keeping any potential bias visible and bracketed off from collection and analysis of the data. I have gone into detail in Chapter Three about how I utilized reflexivity, journaling, peer review, and member checking to ensure that only participants' subjective descriptions and interpretations of the phenomena in this study served as the basis for dependable understandings of the phenomena of interest.

Significance

This research project has led to increased understanding of the experiences of SWB and LS for midlife former NCAA Division III collaborative sport student-athletes in day-to-day life. These understandings are significant in that they will enable expansion of socially impactful and scholarly knowledge. The findings and understandings of this study may help society by starting to fill the current research gap with regard to quality of life for the group of midlife individuals who also participated in Division III team-sports in college. It was socially significant to try to begin to fill this gap for several reasons.

Midlifers often experience a drop in SWB and LS. Yet at the same time they have the potential to reach lifetime highs in SWB and LS from and through such socially beneficial behavior as generativity. Midlife SWB and LS, in turn, also increase SWB and LS for younger generations and enable midlifers to provide better care for those in later life. This paradoxical problem is, therefore, something important to understand and solve not only for the benefit of midlifers, but also for those in other life stages who have interaction with midlifers.

Scholars have found the phenomena lived SWB and LS to be positive when enhanced by skills and values developed in team-sport contexts. Yet, little is known or understood about how 35-50 year old former Division III team-sport student athletes might interpret the meaning of their sports experiences and how they contemporaneously experience the phenomena of SWB and LS in day to day life. As noted, Division III sports participation is less likely to include the variety of potentially negative and

confounding stressors than those of their high-profile Division I counterparts and represent a relatively more pure student-athlete experience. Gaining understanding of the SWB and LS for former Division III team-sport student athletes has expanded understandings of this specific population's SWB and LS as well as the population's potential to make contributions to society as a whole. I hope that the results of this study will help to correct misconceptions of intercollegiate athletics and will enhance knowledge and understandings of the value of collaborative intercollegiate sports experiences as potentially positive influence in midlife. The results of this study could now help scholars, practitioners, and other professionals to better understand and hopefully go on to discover improved pathways to increasing SWB, LS, and reducing stress for those in midlife.

Summary

In this chapter I outlined the topic as an important social problem in midlife; the paradox of the potential for either lifetime highs or low SWB and LS and how this has influenced behavior. I described how this social problem was studied to understand how those midlifers who were specifically once lower profile Division III student-athletes might be able to feel higher SWB and LS; a positive implication for both themselves and society as a whole.

I described how higher level intercollegiate student- athlete experiences predicted higher SWB and LS in later life but that NCAA Division III athletic experiences were different and may lead to different, even more beneficial social change than their

counterparts in higher levels of competition. This finding has potential implications not only for the participants but perhaps for people at different life stages that the study population comes into contact with. I also briefly outlined the extant literature relevant to and framing the gap in research on SWB and LS for midlife former Division III collaborative sport athletes which was explored in this study. The overarching research questions built from these factors and phenomenon were listed. I further discussed how a qualitative phenomenological research design was an excellent way to address them.

I introduced and briefly explained howSDT and its related concepts: coping, resiliency and collaboration, was a useful and meaningful theoretical framework for conducting the study. I also briefly touched on how it was necessary to understand the phenomena through this theoretical lens in order to gain the sought after understandings of the phenomena of interest.

I listed words and terms that I used in the study that might be subject to alternative meanings and provided the definitions for them that would be applied in this study. I outlined the assumptions of qualitative research essential to this study, and I followed this up with a discussion of the scope of the study and why certain delimitations or purposive limitations provided for more dependable, transferable findings. I described the limitations in this study that I could not control for. I explained how there were a variety of methods I used to minimize the effects of these limitations. I finished by concisely describing the benefits that both the participant population and society can now enjoy based on the understandings gained by the research. I described what SWB and LS

mean socially and individually and why it is important to discover and understand experiences favorable to their development.

In the next chapter, I have provided an exhaustive review of all scholarly literature that was relevant to framing the gap in this study. I also explain how the phenomena in this gap were best understood. I explain how I searched for the literature and how one can be assured my search was comprehensive. Finally, I outlined and synthesized all of the relevant literature to the study. I did this in such a way that it is clear how literature collectively demonstrated that SWB and LS for former NCAA Division III team-sport student-athletes were phenomena not yet well-understood, but that should be well-understood.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Physical and emotional well-being have long been considered essential to healthy human development across the life span (Mayordomo et al., 2016). Researchers have identified middle adulthood, the period when individuals are 40 to 59 years old, as a pivotal life stage (Erikson, 1993; Slater, 2003). Other researchers noted that middle age is a time where individuals encounter changes in employment and professional and social responsibilities, as well as potential declines in physical health (Lachman et al., 2015: Stone et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2018). These changes have represented challenges for midlifers.

Scholars have conducted cross-sectional and longitudinal research that has revealed many midlifers have difficulty with these challenges and that life qualities such as SWB often drop in middle adulthood (Cheng et al., 2017). In contrast, Lachman et al. (2015) found that midlifers often observe life peaks in SWB, LS, and socially beneficial behaviors. These behaviors included such things as leadership, coping, self-efficacy, generativity, and other positive societal contributions (Lachman et al., 2015; Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015). These findings attest that not only is middle adulthood socially important, it is a paradoxical life stage. Understanding the lived phenomena associated with this paradox is important because LS and SWB are among the primary indicators of quality of life globally (Diener & Tay, 2015).

Some scholars who have studied SWB and LS focused on earlier life experiences and found negative social impacts. For instance, Schulenberg et al. (2015) demonstrated that excessive alcohol and cannabis use in youth and adolescence predicted lower SWB in middle adulthood. Alternatively, scholars have found youth and adolescent sports experiences often take the form of character-building privileges and provide transferable life skills and values to the participants (Camire, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008). Other researchers have focused on social support and health behaviors that can be developed in elite, high-profile sports settings like NCAA Division I athletic programs and the Olympics. These researchers revealed some positive predictive effects on the early and middle adult life stages that follow that level of athletic activity (Rettig & Hu, 2016, Senecal, 2017; Siedlecki et al., 2014; Warehime et al., 2017).

Additionally, scholars studying these high-level intercollegiate, collaborative sport experiences have found them to be effective tools for the development of socially beneficial skills and values in late adolescence and the beginnings of early adulthood. These skills include such things as ways to manage stress; balance life roles; and increase SWB, LS, and productivity (Brown et al. 2015; Debois et al., 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Denny & Steiner 2009; Gravelle et al., 2014; Sauer, Desmond & Heintzelman, 2013). Nevertheless, athletes at these levels have been shown to sometimes suffer from additional pressures compared to lower-profile intercollegiate athletes, such as those who

compete at the NCAA Division III level (Curry, 1993; Rettig & Hu, 2016; Robst & Kiel, 2000; Senecal 2017; Sturm et al., 2011; Warehime et al., 2017).

Although Rettig and Hu (2016), Senecal (2017), and Warehime et al. (2017) focused their research on NCAA Division I athletes, they identified Division III athletic experiences in collaborative sports as an underresearched phenomenon. They suggested additional study that would lead to a greater understanding of the athletic experiences of former Division III athletes, particularly those who participated in collaborative and contact sports. Senecal argued for an examination of the ways in which the lived experiences of these athletes could provide a potential "social catharsis" (p. 14) following a college sports career. Senecal further noted that these experiences may help former student athletes to develop a "sense of solidarity with co-workers, peers, managers, and their community, family and friends" (p. 14). Warehime et al. reasoned that such research would be important as they identified Division III student-athlete experiences as potentially positive predictors of peoples' ability to negotiate social issues and develop SWB and LS through transitional and later life stages. Warehime et al. said such a study would include a better understanding of the positive navigation of life during the paradoxical stage of midlife.

In this chapter, I describe the strategy I used for searching both seminal and recent scholarly literature for studies on the problem of low SWB and LS in midlife. I also describe how I found literature that revealed the positive SWB, LS, and socially beneficial behavior that have been observed in midlife. I go on to describe the search

parameters and results that concerned how intercollegiate collaborative sports experiences have benefitted those in life stages prior to middle adulthood and how these experiences might go on to impact midlife SWB, LS, and socially beneficial behaviors. A description and review of the search terms, phrases and databases I used in my search are included.

Next, I present the theoretical lens through which I considered the experiences of midlife SWB and LS and the meaning of intercollegiate team sports participation for midlifers. Using these theories helped me to clarify the research gap I discovered in the literature: There has been very little research focused on those who participated in team sports at the NCAA Division III level and how they engage with the changes and challenges of midlife. The theories discussed include the needs-based theory of SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018: Ryan & Deci, 2000), coping (Alsentali & Anshel, 2015; Kerdijk, van der Kamp, & Polman, 2016; Martinent & Nicolas, 2016), and resiliency (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009; Gowan, Kirk, & Sloan, 2014). The concepts in these theories (i.e., self-determination, coping, and resiliency) have been found to lead to higher SWB and LS for several age groups (Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle, Karlis, & Rothschild-Checroune, 2014; Lachman et al., 2015; Stults-Kohlemainen et al., 2013).

I then present a discussion and synthesis of the literature pertaining to the philosophies, concepts, and research methodology and design that were central to my study. I discuss how the use of qualitative methodology and a phenomenological design

is consistent with a constructivist view of psychology. In addition, I discuss how researchers have found this form of study to be appropriate for exploring and understanding the phenomena of interest in this study. This discussion encompasses generativity, well-being, LS, social productivity, and the development of these attributes just prior to and into middle adulthood. Thus, this study will expand the knowledge base foundational to understanding and further study of SWB and LS across the life stages.

Next, I discuss and synthesize the literature on the phenomena of SWB and LS for present and former intercollegiate team-sport athletes. In this discussion I describe what is known about these things, the controversies surrounding intercollegiate sports, what topics remain to be studied, and why the development of new understandings within the topic of this study are important to society. I also use the literature related to these phenomena to outline the research gap in the literature that led me to develop the following research questions:

1. How do former Division III athletes now in middle age experience SWB?
2. How do former Division III athletes now in middle age experience LS?
3. What does it mean to former Division III athletes now in middle age to have been a young intercollegiate student athlete?

I finish this chapter with a summary of the major themes in the literature. I review what is known and what still needs to be known about former intercollegiate student athletes across the life span. I discuss how the present study addressed the gap in the knowledge regarding SWB and LS of former low-profile Division III team-sport athletes.

I then introduce the link between the literature and the qualitative methodology and phenomenological research design discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

The nature of the topic dictates the literature search strategy (Galvan, 2014; Stadtlander, 2015). The search for literature in this study required the use of databases that included large numbers of peer-reviewed articles on psychological and sociological topics. I used the online libraries of Walden University, Monmouth University, and Grand Canyon University as well as the electronic online resources of Google Scholar and the American Psychological Association to access the PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, SocINDEX and ProQuest Central databases. I collected and indexed relevant articles from each database using the search terms below until the sources were exhausted and began to repeat.

I began my search for relevant literature with the following key words, terms, and phrases: higher education, university or college sports or athletics, later life, adult, life satisfaction or happiness, and perceptions. Results from this initial search led to searches that included the following terms: self-determination theory; after college, university, or higher education; and coping or resiliency. I added the terms life stage, adult, social, and impact or affect. As the results began to build, I found that I should include the words and terms: middle adulthood and characteristics, generativity, and importance. This search resulted in further useful and relevant literature, which in turn led me to new searches using these terms: subjective well-being, midlife, middle adulthood, job,

profession, productivity, experiences, and former intercollegiate student athletes. I eventually added the term social impact or change. I connected these terms in many different but logical ways by using Boolean operators and searched all forms of the root words by using the asterisk function available in the databases. As I pursued the terms related to the primary topic, they led to new sources of information and additional search terms. I conducted searches involving all of these terms and combinations thereof until results began to repeat, and no new potentially relevant terms presented themselves in the literature that had been found.

Theoretical Foundation for the Study

I primarily used SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2016) as the foundation through which to search for literature and the proper methodology for the study. The concepts of autonomy, relatedness, intrinsic motivation, and the identification and satisfaction of needs for mastery and competence are hallmarks of SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2016). SDT has previously been found to be a good theoretical lens through which to examine the phenomenon of the meaning and impact of having been a Division III collaborative sport student athlete in early young adulthood (DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Kaluzna-Wielobob, 2017; Readdy, Raabe, & Harding, 2014; Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013). Given that background, while SDT remained my main theoretical lens in this study, it was logical to search for other sports-related concepts that could impact SWB and LS for current and former lower profile student athletes.

Coping and resilience are theoretical factors that seem to fall within or extend SDT especially in team-sport contexts. Aghazadeh and Kyei (2009), Kerdijk et al. (2016), Litwic-Kaminska (2016), and Martinent and Nicolas (2016) found coping and resiliency skills to be positive and useful in postsports life for early young adults as well as the lives of then current athletes. These researchers found that coping skills and increased resilience were needed by student athletes to successfully maintain SWB and LS in athletic, academic, and other social contexts. They found coping and resilience to become particularly well developed and nurtured in intercollegiate, collaborative sport contexts. Skills such as collaboration and teamwork were also revealed to become well developed in intercollegiate sports contexts (Barczak, Lassk, & Mulki, 2010; Beniscelli, 2014).

Barczak et al. (2010) and Beniscelli (2014) found that collaborative or team related factors have been useful for the examination of SWB and life satisfaction in constructivist views of psychology and life. They noted that working in teams seems to be the way things get done today in business, education, and other problem-solving and performance-centered environments. The problem continues to be how these theories might apply to and affect lived experiences and realities for those in midlife who possess Division III team sports experiences.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT, as developed first by Ryan and Deci (2000, 2016), is based on the identification and satisfaction of one's needs relating to learning, mastery of tasks, and

attaining SWB and LS. Intrinsic motivation is central to SDT as it is effective in meeting needs for success as they relate to individuals (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2016). As all social groups are comprised of individuals who are either motivated or amotivated towards worthwhile social goals and behaviors, SDT is also a precursor to collective and social good (DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Kaluzna-Wielobob, 2017; Readdy et al., 2014; Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013). An extrinsic reward can sometimes be pleasant in a particular moment of goal achievement, such as a conference championship, for members of a sports team. Stults-Kolehmainen et al. (2013) noted that while extrinsic motivation can sometimes serve a function at the high-profile NCAA Division I team sport level, the good of the team and its members is also highly dependent on intrinsic motivation. Conversely, the study by Moller and Sheldon (2019) included results that athletic scholarships as awarded at Division I and II colleges can also have an undermining effect on athletes and former athletes during the time of participation and for decades thereafter. According to Stults-Kolehmainen et al. (2013), lower-level Division III programs are entirely dependent on the intrinsic motivation of team members. Researchers further found that an extrinsic reward does not become valuable for any team or its individual members until they internalize the concept of the reward (Kaluzna-Wielobob, 2017; Readdy et al., 2014). Kaluzna-Wielobob (2017) noted that it is through this concept that SDT reinforces the social and moral value of sports.

In further breaking down SDT and its relationship to sports and athletics, the importance of SDT appears to be related to goal-setting and value development such as

work ethic, altruism, other helping behaviors, and social support within a collaborative context (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007; Chen, et al., 2017; Fuller, 2014). Chatzisarantis and Hagger (2007) also noted that the frequency of participation on the field or court does not contribute to this value development; simply experiencing the team environment has led to the development of these life values. These values, in turn, lead to higher SWB and LS (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007; Chen, Wu, Lin, & Ye, 2017). The moral quality of sports has helped to bridge the gap between scholarship and intercollegiate sports (Fuller, 2014). Division III collaborative sports appear to be a healthy context in which to benefit from SDT and develop a sense of how SDT works (Curry, 1993; Griffith & Johnson, 2002; Robst & Kiel, 2000; Williams, et al., 2010). Nonetheless, there does not appear to have been a substantiated attempt to understand the midlife period as a bridge from earlier to later life as experienced and facilitated by midlifers who have participated in intercollegiate collaborative sports particularly at the Division III level.

Other researchers have determined that some effective team sport coaches have identified and met their players' needs for success through SDT with an emphasis on relatedness in a social and family oriented team environment (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009, Chiu, Mahat, Marzukza, & Hua, 2014; Gearity, 2012, Schroeder, 2010). They found this sort of environment tends to foster coping and resilience in the face of stressful challenges. Other researchers have noted that the team sport environment is often marked by a sense of playfulness and social support as mastery of both life and sports skills is practiced and developed (Magnuson & Barnett, 2013). Division III team sports appear to

be a rich environment in which coaches can succeed in meeting their players' needs. The job of Division III coaches is considered one of helping to develop good young men and women rather than to win at all costs (Curry, 2003; Robst & Kiel, 2000; Sturm, et al., 2011).

SDT has been found to lead to the development of life skills, relatedness, self-efficacy, competence intrinsic motivation, and the fulfillment of other needs that increase levels of SWB and LS (Diener, 2013; Hagler, 2016; Kallay, 2015; Lightsey, et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2016; Sherman, Randall, & Kauanui, 2016). Experiences of positive SWB and life satisfaction were in turn found by these scholars to predict higher levels of productivity, problem solving, and achievement in any societal role. Such roles included family membership or leadership, social beneficence, being a member of the workforce, the delivery of professional services. Diener (2013) also noted SDT related benefits lead to happiness and that happy workers perform better.

Happiness

In addition to a predictive relationship with work productivity, Diener (2013) found that happiness is associated with SWB, LS, and, therefore, social beneficence and positive social change. Other researchers found that through SWB and LS, happiness is often a component of generativity (Lachman et al., 2015). Lachman et al. (2015) extended Diener's research by noting that younger people are happier and, therefore, more confident and productive when midlifers engage them in generativity. The overall effect is that society changes positively and benefits through things like happiness

brought on by midlifers enjoying the high levels of SWB inherent through the practice of generativity.

Lachman et al. (2015) further noted those in midlife often find themselves caring for adults in old age as well as those in younger age groups. These researchers went on to note that generative and happy midlifers help older adults maintain higher levels of happiness, SWB, and LS. They noted that this, in turn, could lead to continuing productivity for those in old age.

Things like Division III collaborative sports experiences that could lead midlifers to engage in generativity are, therefore, socially important. These experiences could positively impact SWB and life satisfaction not only for midlifers, but for those in the life stages that precede and follow midlife (Diener, 2013; Hahn, Frese, Binnewies, & Schmitt, 2012; Jones, 2006). Jones (2006) even found that life satisfaction and its inherent happiness predicts successful job performance better than job satisfaction predicts job performance.

Active or Approach Coping

In **s**ports contexts, when adversity is naturally encountered, teammates have typically been found to help one another to cope with negative experiences and anxiety (Kerdijk, et al., 2016; Martinent & Nicolas, 2016). Mental toughness and resiliency have been said to be part of active or approach coping because this concept involves an individual dealing with anxiety as a challenge to seek and overcome rather than a situation to avoid (Kerdijk et al., 2016; Martinent & Nicolas, 2016). Some scholars have

shown that active coping and mental toughness are learned out of necessity in a competitive collaborative sports environment (Alsentali & Anshel, 2015; Collins & NcNamara, 2012; Cowden, Fuller, & Anshel, 2014; Hanton, Neil, Mellalieu, & Fletcher, 2008; Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007).

The concept of active or approach coping has been found to be consistent with the development of healthy coping in other high-stress environments. For instance, police officers in Japan have been found to develop positive and healthy coping mechanisms with the help of fellow officers (Tanaka, Okuno, & Yamaguchi, 2013). This has also been the case with professions in which an immersive athletic identity is present. Elite ballet dancers have accepted help and camaraderie offered by their peers both during their careers and transitions to retirement to overcome anxiety and stress (Willard & Lavallee, 2016). These scholars have noted that group or team members have tended to push each other and hold each other accountable for their individual and collaborative roles. This in turn leads to a perception of control among team members. This perception of control has helped in the development of active coping mechanisms for both student-athletes and former student-athletes in the immediate aftermath of their intercollegiate sports careers (Alsentali & Anshel, 2015; Collins & NcNamara, 2012; Cowden et al., 2014; Hanton et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2007).

Several scholars have also reported that coping strategies seem to include the concept of resilience, much as SWB and LS seem to proceed hand in hand (Gowan, et al., 2014; Litwic-Kaminska, 2016; Serbu, 1997). These scholars discovered that this

connection appeared to be based on positive emotions that can be well developed in the context of collaborative sports. Resilience is, thus, an important concept to apply to the study of the midlife experiences of former Division III collaborative sport student-athletes. Still, the concept of resiliency seems yet to have been applied to further understand the phenomenon of the lived experiences of SWB and LS for this group of midlifers. Coping and resiliency both are clearly among the needs that must be met for successful application of SDT.

Resilience

Researchers have demonstrated resilience to be a prerequisite, needs based skill that sports coaches must help players develop for the players to succeed both on the field or court and in life (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009). Aghazadeh and Kyei (2009) noted that the needs based nature of resiliency aligns it with SDT. Litwic-Kaminska (2016) found that resilience is a positive response stage similar to active coping. He found that resilience is fostered by social support, positivity, and subsequent skills mastery that are developed in intercollegiate team sports contexts. Cowden et al. (2014) tied these concepts together when they established that coaches and athletes used the anxiety and stress that are an integral part competition and skills mastery as justification for the development of resilience. They found that this, in turn, led to SWB and higher life satisfaction for student-athletes. Mayordomo et al. (2016) went on to note that constructs such as resilience predict well-being as people develop and mature through the life span.

This literature led one to consider how transferable sports-derived resilience might be to later life contexts.

Besides the link to SDT and its application to competitive environments, Mayordomo et al. (2016) found resilience to be a necessary antecedent for productive adaptation to the changes and challenges that people encounter, particularly as they approach and occupy midlife. Gowan et al. (2014) noticed resilience to be a concept strongly related not just to active coping but to SDT and positive SWB and life satisfaction. Gowan et al. reported that resilience can lead to greater performance and preparedness for such extreme stressors as natural disasters. This all tends to suggest that study of the development and transferability of resilience as a pathway to later life SWB and LS is a social necessity.

Collaborative Culture in Intercollegiate Sports Contexts

Student athletes have felt regret during and after competitions or sport seasons (Robbins, Madrigal, & Stanley, 2015). Robbins et al. (2015) noted that if the source of regret can be openly identified and a solution developed with the help of the team, the regret can be positive and motivating. Scholars have found that at least in the immediate transition from early young adulthood to maturity, the most important thing former student-athletes may take with them are the SDT-based needs of relatedness and an adaptive social support system. This transforms regret into a positive experience (Schrack-Walters, O'Donnell, & Wardlow, 2009). Schrack-Walters et al. (2009) also

found that in collaborative team sports, the gender of the players does not seem to make a difference in this positive phenomenon.

Other scholars (Barczak, et al., 2010; Beniscelli, et al., 2014) have noted that collaborative teams are becoming the standard for how to get things done in society today. They found that team and collaborative constructs are effective ways for making a positive social impact in most real-world contexts, particularly in business and service industry settings. Tanguay, Camp, Endres, and Torres (2012) discovered that current employers look for and are impressed when the resumes of recent graduates reveal those graduates had participated in an intercollegiate collaborative team sport. Barczak et al. (2010) and Beniscelli et al. (2014) found that intercollegiate sports are a good place to learn individual role fulfillment and the group skills needed to productively contribute to the common social good. SDT and its inherent concepts, therefore, appear to provide a good framework for seeking an understanding of SWB and LS for former Division III team-sport student athletes who have reached the socially impactful life stage of midlife.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The authors of literature concerning Erikson's (1993) late-early and early-middle adulthood have collectively defined generative midlife to include individuals 35-50 years of age (Fadjukoff et al., 2016; Gruhn, Gilet, Studer, & Vief, 2011; Kaluzna-Wielobob, 2016; Manukyan, Golovey, & Stritihitskaya, 2015; Sneed, Whitbourne, Schwartz, & Huang, 2011; Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008). Lachman et al. (2015), Stone et al. (2017), and Stone et al. (2018) found midlife to be socially problematic as it is a period

associated with low SWB and high stress. Yet, they also noted that midlife is the time that people can positively impact their own lives as well as the lives of those in younger and older societal groups, largely through development of generativity, and experience lifetime highs in SWB (Erikson, 1993; Slater, 2013).

Midlife, therefore, is a pivotal time and life stage to understand from the perspective of midlifers. Yet there is little information regarding the midlife meanings of prior intercollegiate sports experiences which have been beneficial for people in younger life stages (Brown et al. 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois et al. 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle et al., 2014; Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013, Sauer et al., 2013). Scholars have found that the philosophy underlying this notion is that those in midlife learn parenting and other adult roles as they fall into the category of either generativity or stagnation (Erikson, 1993; Fadjukoff, et. al., 2016; Havinghurst, in Newman & Newman, 2010; Manukyan, et. al. 2015; Slater, 2003). It appears that scholars have yet to study midlife SWB and LS from the contextual perspective of those who participated in the least complicated, yet largest population of present and former NCAA team-sports athletes; those from NCAA Division III (Curry, 1993; NCAA, 2018).

Stagnation and Generativity

For those in middle adulthood, stagnation refers to a lack of self-perceived purpose, low SWB, and a feeling of inability to help others (Erikson, 1993; Slater, 2003). Slater (2013) noted that stagnation is sometimes akin to a feeling of helplessness. Cheng, et al. (2015) recently concluded a longitudinal study that confirmed a midlife drop in

qualities such as SWB and LS. These phenomena have been found to be major indicators of quality of life globally (Diener & Tay, 2015). Erikson (1993) and Slater (2003) noted that the antithesis of stagnation, generativity, is the only alternate way to characterize peoples' state of life in midlife.

Generativity has been described as a state in midlife in which people develop a need to fulfill a perceived responsibility to help, nurture, and pass on helpful information to younger generations (Slater, 2003). These things primarily involve ways to improve SWB and LS for the younger people (Lachman, et al. 2015). Scholars note these helping behaviors include such things as leadership, coping and resilience, self-confidence and efficacy, and beneficial community contributions (Lachman, et al., 2015). According to Lachman et al. (2015) and Zelinski, Murphy, and Jenkins (2008), those in midlife can play a central role in the lives of people in other life stages. Midlifers can help to bridge gaps between middle adulthood and other generations. Through engaging in generativity, midlifers contribute to the well-being of those in younger life stages at home, work, and society (Lachman, et al., 2015; Zelinski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008). Lachman et al. (2015) and Zelinski (2008) noted that engagement in generativity increases midlife SWB in a reciprocal fashion.

The paradoxical clash between stagnation and generativity has represented a significant social problem for many in midlife. An understanding of how those in midlife have overcome the midlife dip in SWB and LS could lead to a better understanding of

how midlifers can tap into their potential to develop the inextricably related states of SWB and LS for those in other life stages.

Youth and Intercollegiate Collaborative Sports Participation

Some research on midlife SWB has focused on how youth and adolescent life experiences can have a negative impact on midlife SWB. For instance, Schulenberg, et al. (2015) demonstrated that excessive alcohol and cannabis use in adolescence predicted lower midlife SWB. At the same time, positive experiences in youth and adolescence have been shown to be transferable and predictive of higher SWB in later life stages. As an example, secondary school athletic experiences have been demonstrated to contain transferable character-building activities that have helped to establish SWB and LS in early adulthood (Camire, et al., 2012; Holt, et al., 2008; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011). Intercollegiate collaborative team sports have also been found to be excellent contexts for the development of positive life skills and values that are foundational for generativity, and, thus, SWB and LS also (Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois et al., 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle, et al., 2014; Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013). Collaborative team-sport experiences, such as those involving football, basketball, soccer, hockey, and baseball have helped many intercollegiate student athletes develop life skills that assist in balancing an increased number of life roles (Lachman et al., 2015). Lachman et al. (2015) found that balancing multiple roles in family and societal contexts are a major source of stress and a challenge for some in midlife.

Constructivist School of Psychology

Understanding the lived experiences and realities of a particular group involves research rooted in the constructivist school of psychology. The constructivist school of psychology recognizes many personal truths or realities, not a single, ultimate truth, and involves the use of inductive theory (Raskin, 2002). Raskin (2002) noted that in this school of psychology, realities are constructed by the members of the population through their lived experiences and perceptions. SWB and LS are two such constructed realities.

Qualitative Methodology and Phenomenological Design

The effects of Division III intercollegiate sports experiences have not been explored or understood in context of the realities of everyday stress, SWB, LS, purpose, and generativity for those in midlife. Warehime et al. (2017) specifically suggested further research into the experiences of Division III level team sport athletes and the meaning that they attach to these previous experiences in later life stages. Senecal (2017) and Kucharska and Klopot (2016) also suggested studying the meaning and effects of past intercollegiate team or contact sports experiences in later-life stages. These researchers recommended a research method that is effective when little is understood about a lived phenomenon. According to Chenail (2011), Creswell (2014), and Moustakas (1994), such studies require qualitative methodology.

In the present study, since the phenomenon is not yet well understood, there is not yet a firm theory or hypotheses to be measured quantitatively (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). I, therefore, collected data that helped to fill this gap in understanding

as a researcher cannot measure human behavior unless he or she first understands it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Understanding the SWB, LS, and current meaning of a Division III team sport student-athlete experience for the participants in this study was accomplished through qualitative methodology and a phenomenological research design. I developed the interview framework for my study based on this design. This framework allowed participating midlife, former Division III collaborative sport student athletes to identify and describe their everyday realities when it comes to SWB, LS, and what it means to them to have been a former Division III student athlete. To find out about and understand phenomena like these, a researcher must ask members of the population sample about their thoughts, feelings, and actions within the framework of their lived experiences and realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1980).

Phenomenological design has been shown to be particularly effective when SWB and LS are the phenomena being explored in a purposeful sample. One example is a study focused on understanding of the SWB of women in Iranian society (Dalvandi, Rohani, Mossallenejad, & Hezamzadeh, 2015). Nunnerly et al. (2013) successfully employed this methodology and design in their study of the lived experiences of people who had had spinal surgery and were reintegrating into their communities. Wadey, Clark, Podlog, and McCullough (2013) learned the perceptions of coaches regarding stress and adjustment for athletes returning to their teams following injury using this design.

Phenomenological design has been used to gain understandings of the lived experiences, SWB, and LS of young adults who were participating in intercollegiate

sports (Gravelle, et al. 2014; Navarro, 2014, 2015; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Potuto & O'Hanlon 2008; Monda, et al., 2015). This design was also used to gain similar understandings of SWB and LS among young adult former Division I intercollegiate elite athletes (Brown, et al. 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, et al., 2015; and other Torregrosa, Ramis, Pallares, Azocar, & Selva, 2015). These studies suggested that qualitative method and phenomenological design would be effective for understanding experiences of SWB and LS for former intercollegiate student athletes in other life stages.

Previous Qualitative Phenomenological Studies on the Research Topic

Qualitative phenomenological researchers have examined both then current adolescent and young adult intercollegiate collaborative sport student athletes as well as recently matriculated former intercollegiate athletes (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, et. al., 2015; Gravelle, et al., 2014; Navarro, 2014, 2015: Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Monda, et al., 2015; Potuto & O'Hanlon 2008; Varca, Shaffer, & Saunders, 1984). By asking open-ended questions and listening to the answers, these researchers turned a lack of understanding of the personal and social lived phenomena and realities of these people into a relatively comprehensive understanding. These researchers all concluded that these student athletes and recent student athletes used their student-athlete experiences to enjoy higher SWB and LS than their nonathlete counterparts. Brown et al. (2015) and Torregrosa et al. (2015) reached the same conclusions for other types of former elite amateur athletes such as Olympic athletes.

These understandings have been used to inductively create testable theories and hypotheses. There has been statistical confirmation of the qualitative understandings discussed above for this younger population in a number of ways, though these studies often involved the use of surveys to glean information similar to what is gained through semistructured phenomenological interviews (Comeaux, Snyder, & Taustine, 2014; Denny & Steiner, 2009; Gearity, 2012; Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, & Samdahl, 1987; Sauer, et al., 2013; Sturm, et al., 2011; Surujlal, van Zyl, & Nolan, 2013; Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013; Tanguay, et al., 2012).

As so little is known about whether the effects of intercollegiate collaborative sports experiences such as higher levels of SWB, LS, role fulfillment and altruistic behaviors continue beyond early young adulthood into midlife, I employed a qualitative phenomenological method and design in this study. Given that those in midlife have tremendous potential for contributing to more significant social benefits than those in any other life stage, it is important to understand if and how their college sports experiences may continue to be assimilated and used by those in midlife.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Late early adult and midlife stages have been characterized by certain forms of identity development such as parental identity (Fadjukoff, et al., 2016). More importantly, midlife is the age of generativity versus stagnation or positive versus negative life outlooks, which have a substantial bearing on SWB, LS, and social helping behaviors across life stages (1993; Fadjukoff, et al., 2010; Gruhn, et al., 2011; Newman

& Newman, 2010; Manukyan**,** et al., 2015; Slater, 2003). Erikson,1993), Hagler (2016), Manukyan, et al. (2015), Fadjukoff, et al. (2015), and Slater (2003), when taken collectively, suggest that the age at which social role identity, psychological maturity, and the positive helping concept of generativity become most highly developed is during the midlife period of the ages 35-50.

The social skills, life lessons, and values inherent in intercollegiate athletics have been shown to positively impact SWB, LS, coping, and resilience for adolescent and former adolescent intercollegiate athletes (Calvo, et al., 2010; Camire, et al., 2011; Holt, et al., 2008; Turnidge, et al., 2014). These same positive impacts have been found for current and former intercollegiate collaborative sport athletes in transition from college through the earliest stages of adulthood (Brown, et al. 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, et. al., 2015; Gravelle, et al., 2014; Monda, et al., 2015; Navarro, 2014, 2015, Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Potuto & O'Hanlon 2008; Torregrosa, et al., 2015; Varca, et al., 1984). Becauase these studies mostly sought understanding of SWB, LS, coping, resilience, productivity, and family and team leadership, the researchers utilized a qualitative research methodology as as I did in my study. Still, researchers have not yet sought a full understanding of the SWB and LS against the backdrop of the meaning of prior sports experiences of middle adult former Division III collaborative student athletes.

The Effects of Team Sports on Student Athletes

Positive impacts on adolescent and young adult student athletes have been recognized in the form of preparedness and expectations for what is to come in collegiate

experiences for first-term freshman football players (Gravelle, et al., 2014; Monda, et al., 2015). These researchers indicated that the benefits were found to be the result of collaboration and support from more experienced teammates. This relationship was also noted in studies by Navarro (2014, 2015). Through qualitative phenomenological studies, Navarro determined there was value in the collaborative and supportive efforts of teammates and coaches in the younger athletes' selections of majors and careers. Navarro (2014) further found that participation in collaborative sports led to positive teamwork and time-management skills that promoted later life SWB, LS, and socially beneficial behaviors. With regard to lower-profile collegiate team sport experiences, Murdock, Strear, Jenkins-Guarnieri, and Henderson (2016) noted impacts similar to those recognized by Navarro. The Navarro (2014, 2015) and Murdock et al. (2016) findings were consistent with the seminal findings of Varca et al. (1984). Varca et al. (1984) reported that simple team membership can contribute to collaborative and satisfying multiple role and time management skills.

Banwell and Kerr (2016) and Schroeder (2010) have revealed in studies that some intercollegiate team-sport coaches have perceived their roles to include ensuring the personal development of their athletes for life following college. In this sense, the coach is also a team member. He or she is the leader of the team but is still part of the team; not above the team. The coach was seen to learn and accept nurturing along with his or her players as well as serving as a sort of parent and teacher (Banwell & Kerr, 2016; Schroeder, 2010). A study by Gearity (2012) supported the notion that being able to

perceive the coach in this way was more highly valued by the student athletes than win-loss records. This team emphasis also established the development of collaborative skills and intrinsic motivation in the players that they later used to support younger teammates (Beniscelli, 2014; DeFreese, et al., 2013; Kerdijk, et al., 2016; Readdy et al., 2014).

Chatisizirantis et al. (2007) and Chiu, Nahat, Marzuki, and Hua (2014) found that some goals and values that help establish SWB are related to being a dedicated teammate. They found the benefits of intercollegiate team sports experiences have little to do with playing time. Chiu et al. noted that collaborative, team environments are more motivational than individual sports contexts. These conclusions have been acknowledged to have contributed to SWB and LS of student athletes in contrast with the perceptions of some academics and other members of the public (DeFreese, et al., 2013; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2008).

To follow up on the latter point, Potuto and O'Hanlon (2008) found that intercollegiate football players held the same perceptions of their sports participation as did the ancient Greeks discussed by Hyland (2008). Hyland recalled the ancient Greeks' belief that sports added to a positive life-changing *educational* experience. The student athletes in the Potuto and O'Hanlon (2008) study believed that intercollegiate football enhanced their overall collegiate experiences. They believed the little social exposure they gave up was more than made up for by the life skills and values they developed as both students and athletes. Gayles and Hu (2009) found the same in their qualitative study of intercollegiate team sport athletes.

Potuto and O'Hanlon (2008) and Gayles and Hu (2009) asserted that academics and scholarship have continued to be the main reasons for attending college or university for most student athletes. It is important to note that these and other scholars have found intercollegiate student athletes have tended to earn similar or better grades than their nonathletic counterparts at all levels of competition (Gayles & Hu, 2009, Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2008; Robst & Kiel, 2000, Williams, et al., 2010). Further, collaborative team sport student athletes, in spite of onerous time commitments when compared with nonathlete fellow students, were found to participate in community service activities just as often as other students (Gayles, Rockenbach, & Davis, 2012).

Comeaux et al. (2014) noted that engagement with and acceptance of diversity and the advantages application of diversity can bring in a collaborative culture are well fostered in intercollegiate collaborative sports environments. They discovered positive social affect became well developed in these contexts. Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, and Bosselut (2011) had earlier performed research that yielded similar findings in that individual satisfaction and internal motivation led to increased levels of team or group satisfaction and that these effects were reciprocal among teammates.

Other researchers have added to the understanding that a variety of social skills are developed in intercollegiate team sport contexts. For instance, Magnuson and Barnett (2013) noted an increased sense of playfulness among individuals in collaborative sports contexts. Gull and Rana (2013), and Lawlor-Row and Pfieri (2006) found that the immediate forgiveness of self in collaborative sports environments was a necessity to

maintain performance and led to greater acceptance, SWB, and LS both within and following time in these environments.

The Effects of Team Sports on Adult Former Student Athletes During Early Life Transitions

Other researchers have focused on the relationships between intercollegiate sports experiences and young adult former student athletes transitioning from college to work or career, family, and nonsport-related social interactions. In large part, the authors of these studies found that these sports experiences aligned with a positive affect on SWB and LS for that population. Tanguay et al. (2012) found that young adults transitioning from college and intercollegiate sports had positive feelings about their intercollegiate sports experiences. They further found that prospective employers have viewed college sports participation as positive factor when it was mentioned in resumes. Former Division I basketball players reported successful and satisfying transitions into the workforce immediately beyond college sports (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015). The former basketball players credited their sports experiences for these positive transitions. Other studies expanded on these understandings.

Sauer et al. (2013) found that former intercollegiate athletes, up to five years post-matriculation, were both better at mentoring other young people and better at accepting mentoring from others than their former nonintercollegiate-athlete counterparts. Sauer et al. (2013) found these former athletes had higher emotional intelligence, and that these

former student athletes typically earned higher starting salaries than former classmates who had not participated in intercollegiate sports.

The findings above are consistent with an earlier landmark study on transitional and exit experiences from collegiate sports. Kleiber, et al. (1987) found the skills developed in intercollegiate sports helped to enable positive transitions to young adult life unless the exit from sports was a result of a serious emotional or traumatic physical experience. It is important to note that Kleiber et al. (1987) did not extend their research into a focus on former intercollegiate student athletes in middle adulthood.

Tamminen et al., (2013), Collins and McNamara (2012), Dias and Fonseca (2012), Denny and Steiner (2009), and Hanton et al., (2008) noted that anxiety and stress seem to be naturally embedded in competitive intercollegiate collaborative-sports environments. They noted that these challenges helped to motivate athletes to develop coping and resilience related skills. These skills were found to contribute to a generally higher SWB and LS in both transitional and early adult contexts. Tamminen et al. (2013) specifically noted that adversity can lead to growth in self-efficacy, positive social perspectives, and an increase in the desire to help others. Cowden et al. (2014) referred to this form of human development as the "mental toughness" many competitive athletes develop during sports activities (p. 663). Few researchers, despite all the understandings and findings gleaned from the literature reviewed, have examined the meanings of former intercollegiate collaborative-sport experiences in midlife. It does not appear that there has

been a significant effort to understand experiences of SWB, LS, and the meaning of having been a Division III collaborative-sport-athlete for those in midlife.

Importance of National Collegiate Athletic Association Division III Level Athletics

NCAA Division III sports participants are unique. While these student athletes often participate at elite performance levels, they do not experience the additional pressures that can plague the lived experiences and realities of Division I athletes (Curry, 1993; Moller & Sheldon, 2019; Robst & Kiel, 2000; Sturm, et al., 2011). These pressures include such things as perceiving the need to merit a continuing scholarship, and interference from over-expectant boosters and fans, alumni, school administrations, and coaches whose jobs are dependent on win-loss records (Curry, 1993; Moller & Sheldon, 2019; NCAA, 2018). Conversely. the NCAA has never allowed athletic scholarships to be awarded to students at the nonrevenue-producing, lower-profile Division III level of competition (Brown, 2012, Curry, 1993; NCAA, 2018). Division III contains the largest population of athletes among all NCAA levels; over 175,000 student athletes participating in sports at 451 member institutions during the 2017-2018 academic year. The number of former matriculated Division III athletes has grown exponentially from graduation through midlife and will likely continue to do so (Curry, 1993; Brown, 2012; NCAA, 2018).

Division III collaborative sport experiences have also been shown to lead to the development of the necessary skills to increase the integration of athletic and nonathletic life goals (Griffith & Johnson, 2002). These athletes were noted to have engaged more

freely with academic support and nonathletic resources on campus than athletes competing in higher divisions of NCAA competition (Williams, et al., 2010).

Further, intercollegiate athletes at all levels are perceived by some members of the public to drink alcohol heavily due to the increased life demands that can be placed on them in the collegiate environment (Milroy et al., 2014). Milroy et al. (2014) found, however, that while Division III and Division I student-athletes consume alcohol at similar rates and have similarly high athletic identities, Division III athletes report more reasons not to drink alcohol than their higher level counterparts. The Division III student-athletes reported these reasons to be chiefly that alcohol use would interfere with their schoolwork and their responsibilities to their teammates. These Division III student athletes were also found to have earned grade point averages as high as or higher than their nonathlete counterparts and have consistently enjoyed higher graduation rates than their nonathlete counterparts (Robst & Kiel, 2000).

Finally, researchers have found that while Division I athletes entertain a negative extrinsic element within their motivational arsenal (Moller & Sheldon, 2019), Division III athletes were found to be completely intrinsically motivated to reach their athletic and life goals (Stults-Kolehmainen et al., 2013). Even so, most studies on topics related to the phenomena in this study have focused on Division I sports programs. A focus on Division III sports experiences and the SWB and LS of former Division III collaborative sports athletes could shed new light understanding of midlife SWB and LS for all former intercollegiate collaborative sport athletes and other midlifers.

The Problem of Inaccurately Perceived Value of Intercollegiate Collaborative Sports Experiences

Other factors to consider in this study were social issues that might have led to some negative perceptions by certain members of the public of participation in intercollegiate collaborative sports. Gayles and Hu (2009) noted that some members of society maintain negative perceptions of sports participation as a threat to a positive overall college experience. They observed that such people primarily focused on high-profile Division I sports programs. Recent problems covered by the news media include the child sexual-abuse perpetrated by Jerry Sandusky at Penn State and multiple incidents of sexual abuse of young female gymnasts by former Michigan State and U.S. gymnastics team physician Larry Nasser. These acts are outrageous and rightly induce emotion and public outcry.

This is a social problem because studies such as those by Potuto and O'Hanlon (2008), Gayles and Hu (2009), and Gayles et al. (2012) found that overall negative perceptions of intercollegiate athletics even at the Division I level are misplaced. They found this to be particularly so when student athletes were engaged with campus academic resources. The student athletes in these studies reported that their collegiate experiences were enhanced by their sports participation to an extent that more than offset the stressors of having had less time for study.

Other researchers have further addressed the midlife physical and mental health of former collegiate athletes who had engaged in contact sports such as football (Sorenson,

S., Romno, R., Scholefield, R., Martin, B., Gordon, J., Azen, S. …Salem, G., 2016; Meehan, W., Taylor, A., Berkner, P., Sandstrom, N., Peluso, M., Kurtz, M., … Mannix, R., 2016). Negative joint health and concussive effects have rarely been found in midlife former athletes, and psychological well-being has been found to be high in this group (Meehan, et al., 2016; Sorenson, et al., 2014). Meehan et al. (2016) also found a dearth of subconcussive health risks for former Division III contact sport athletes.

Social Importance of the Topic

Mayordomo et al. (2016) noted the importance of SWB to human development across the life cycle. As noted earlier, generative midlife spans Erikson's (1993) late early adulthood, and early middle adulthood, from ages 35-50 and has often been considered a period of high stress and low SWB (Lachman, et al., 2015; Stone, et al., 2017; Stone, et al., 2018). Those in midlife tend to have families and established trades or professions but can encounter difficulty in balancing new and multiple life roles important to a smooth-running and productive society (Lachman, et al., 2015). Paradoxically, midlife is also the peak time in life for leadership, coping, self-efficacy, generativity, and other socially beneficial behaviors (Lachman, et al., 2015; Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015). Given the findings that stress and low SWB and LS can block this beneficent behavior, midlife presents a critical crossroads for society.

Collaborative team sports experiences appear to help build SWB, LS and socially beneficial behavior for participants. The benefits of these experiences have also proven transferable to those in other life stages such as adolescence and young adulthood. These

include, primarily, youth and secondary school sports experiences (Camire et al., 2012; Holt, et al., 2008; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011) and intercollegiate collaborative sport experiences (Brown et al. 2015; Debois et al., 2015; Defreese & Smith, 2013; Denny & Steiner 2009; Gravelle et al., 2014; Sauer et al., 2013). Yet, no available research has determined how and to what extent these experiences might affect socially significant realities of SWB and LS for those in midlife.

Kucharska and Klopot (2013) conducted a limited study into the lived realities and experiences of middle adult former Polish fencers. They found that members of this population felt multidirectional tensions on things such as self-confidence, responsibility, persistence, and diligence. These things were found to impact their success in family leadership, material situations, health, and general SWB. These midlife former elite and Olympic fencers generally were effective as family leaders and perceived themselves as such, but this population was also prone to get lost in the new realities and multiple roles of life after sport at the socially critical midlife stage (Kucharska & Klopot, 2013). Kucharska and Klopot did not gain an understanding of how or why the effects of these former fencers' sports experiences worked as they did or took the directions they observed.

Lagimodiere and Strachan (2015) studied midlife former ice hockey and rugby players in a qualitative, phenomenological study. Their findings were similar to those of Kucharska and Klopot (2013) and they strongly suggested that psychological and sociological scholars and practitioners should continually research midlife former

athletes. Lagimodiere and Strachan (2015) reasoned that such continuing studies are necessary because life, intercollegiate, and other sports contexts continually change. They suggested that studies such as the one here would be necessary to stay abreast of the emergent understandings of those in midlife as they developed coping and other positive social skills from their sports experiences.

Senecal (2017) took the Lagimodiere and Strachan (2015) study a step further. Senecal added an observation regarding the importance of understanding how midlife-former-intercollegiate athletes might transfer positive social and collaborative skills from their collegiate sports activities to their later positions in society. Senecal listed such things as trust, sacrifice, role fulfillment, and honesty in the workplace and across life as socially important to examine. Caudill and Long (2010) reported midlife male former intercollegiate collaborative sport athletes often become good business managers and enjoy high initial incomes. These researchers pointed out that while this life observation was yet to be fully understood, it was important to understand. They noted this observation to be consistent with the notion that many skills developed through intercollegiate-collaborative-sports experiences are transferrable to midlife SWB, LS, and thus, midlife social, family, work, and professional contexts.

Summary

The Erikson (1980, 1982, 1993) and Havinghurst (in Newman & Newman, 2010) theories on life stages and human development have been well researched. While those in midlife have been found to often experience a dip in SWB and LS, researchers have also

revealed that midlifers possess a special, lifetime-high potential to bring about positive social change (Erikson, 1980,1982,1993; Slater, 2003). Erikson and Slater referred to the fulfillment of this potential as generativity. The benefits of generativity come in the form of positive, practical advice and things such as mentoring to younger age groups. Midlifers also increase their own SWB and LS through generativity. Many who have studied this topic have arrived at understandings that intercollegiate collaborative sports experiences, particularly at the NCAA Division III level, could be highly positive, both personally and socially. Nonetheless, it does not appear that scholars have conducted studies that focus on understanding the experiences of people in which the two concepts of midlife and Division III team-sport experiences are brought together. It was not known how these former athletes experience SWB, LS, and what Division III sports experiences meant to them in midlife.

As noted, Division III athletes comprise the largest population within all of the levels of NCAA intercollegiate sports participants. In the 2017-2018 academic year over 175,000 student athletes competed in some type of Division III intercollegiate athletic program (NCAA, 2018). The number of former Division III collaborative sport student athletes naturally grows exponentially into the life stages beyond those sports experiences with every passing year. Therefore, the number of these individuals in society is substantial, particularly in middle age, a factor that renders their potential as agents of social change even more important to understand. Yet they are also the most under researched group of former NCAA athletes (Rettig & Hu, 2016; Senecal, 2017;

Warehime et al., 2017). Understanding the phenomena of how the members of this group experience SWB, LS, and the meaning they now attach to their student-athlete experiences should provide a start to helping them better fulfill their potential to help others and enact positive social change. Such an understanding could also improve and correct the low perceived value of intercollegiate collaborative sports experiences held by some members of the public.

In Chapter Three, I outline and describe the research methodology and design that I used to answer the research questions for my sample of participants. I review the problem statement, and the phenomena of interest in this study. This leads to a comprehensive discussion of the exploratory and constructivist nature of qualitative, phenomenologic research (Creswell, 2014: Van Mannen, 2014). I discuss how the qualitative, phenomenological research used in many of the studies that outlined the research gap in this study was required to begin to fill that gap here.

A comprehensive explanation of the purposive selection of the 12 sample participants from the population of interest, the nature of the semi-structured interviews of the participants, and the type of data I collected are introduced in Chapter Three. I discuss how I coded the interview data and what I did to thematically interpret and analyze the data. I then discuss how I triangulated my interpretations of the data by reflexivity, member checking, and use of a research journal. This ensured that the data and interpretations would lead to credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable understandings

I conclude Chapter Three with a discussion of the ethical considerations of my selection of the human participants in this study. I describe how beneficence will outweigh any possible maleficence in my collection of the data. I further outline how I protected the anonymity and well-being of the study participants as well as how I planned to handle and store data consistently with their dignity and protection of their rights. I will also explain that Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was confirmed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of SWB and LS for former NCAA Division III collaborative-sport student athletes now in midlife. The goal was to collect descriptions and definitions concerning how these individuals perceive and ascribe meaning to these lived experiences. By gathering and then thematically organizing this data, I obtained a better understanding of SWB and LS for this group of people.

The literature review demonstrated a gap in the understanding of SWB and LS in former college athletes in midlife that the results of this study have begun to fill. Scholars, practitioners, and professionals have previously understood little about these specific phenomena, based on a review of the literature. Yet, it is essential to understand them for a number of reasons. First, longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have shown that SWB and LS often dip in middle age (Cheng et. al., 2015). That is a social problem because it has also been found that midlifers can observe life peaks in generativity and other socially beneficial behaviors (Erikson, 1980, 1982,1993; Slater, 2003). These beneficial behaviors are rooted in factors such as SWB and LS (Lachman et al., 2015). Scholars such as Lachman et al. (2015) and Slater (2003) have found that middle agers who have practiced these socially beneficial constructs raised their own SWB and levels of LS. Additionally, beneficial midlife behaviors contemporaneously raised the SWB and

LS of people living in life stages both before and after midlife (Lachman et al., 2015; Slater, 2003).

Second, SWB and LS have both come under intense study in other target age groups who either were participating or had formerly participated in higher-profile levels of intercollegiate sports. Adolescents and early young adults participating in Division I football have been found to experience higher levels of SWB and LS in their collegiate environments (Brown et al., 2015; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gravelle, Karlis, & Rothschild-Checroune, 2014; Lachman et al., 2015; Stults-Kohlemainen et al., 2013). Scholars have shown that these phenomena are impacted through support from coaches and teammates and that they aid planning for later life (Banwell & Kerr, 2016; Navarro, 2014/2015; Schroeder, 2010).They also have found that these individuals benefitted from the collaborative and time-management skills that the players had to learn in team environments (DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Murdock et al., 2016; Navarro, 2014/2015; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2008).

Other researchers have found that young adult former Division I student-athletes transitioning out of college and intercollegiate sports often possess high mentoring ability, ability to receive mentoring, initial salaries, productivity and, thus, higher SWB and LS (Rettig & Hu, 2016; Sauer et al., 2013; Senecal, 2017; Warehime et al., 2017). However, in reviewing the literature, I found no substantial study that contributed to an understanding of how midlife former team-sport athletes from the lower profile NCAA

Division III team-sport programs experience SWB and LS. Further, no study appeared to reveal the meanings midlifers ascribe currently to their past intercollegiate sports experiences.

Scholars such as Chenail (2011), Creswell (2014), Van Manen (1990, 2014), and Moustakas (1994) concluded that qualitative methodology and some type of phenomenological design constitute the research tradition best suited to explore phenomena that are not yet well understood. The results of this qualitative phenomenological study contributed to filling the knowledge void targeted in this study and furthered understanding of quality of life for middle-age adults. The results increased knowledge concerning the value of lower-profile intercollegiate collaborative sports experiences as pathways to increased SWB and LS in midlife. This increased understanding of these phenomena should lead to more socially helping behaviors less stress, and a better quality of life in midlife.

In this chapter, I restate the main research questions of the study and describe how they align with the phenomena that were the focus of this study. I also describe how study of SWB and LS required and aligned with a qualitative, phenomenological research tradition. There is a brief discussion of how I served as the research instrument in the study and how I accounted for any bias I may have brought to the study through bracketing and reflexivity. I describe the specifics of the study methodology and design in relation to how they aligned with exploring and understanding the phenomena. The

population and purposive sampling strategy I used are discussed and justified, both as to specific demographics and the number of participants in the study sample.

I also explain the data collection and analysis process I used in the study. I present the open-ended questions that made up the semistructured nature or framework of the interviews. I discuss how the use of semistructured questions led to elaboration by the participants. This discussion includes how the verbal responses obtained from the participants yielded descriptions and definitions of how the participants experienced SWB and LS in midlife. In addition, I describe how I conducted the phenomenological study and how phenomenological data led to an understanding of the meanings of SWB and LS by the participants.

Next, I discuss how providing verbal data enabled participants to define and describe personal experiences and the underlying meanings of these experiences. I then describe how my use of bracketing and reflexivity worked to help eliminate any confounding bias on my part in the findings. I explain how open-ended, nonleading questions were a part of this research process. In addition, I discuss how member checking and peer review were used to further establish content validity and dependability. This part of the chapter also includes discussion of how procedures for grouping and analyzing study findings helped to ensure that I drew correct interpretations to answer the research questions. Following this discussion, I explain how I recruited the research sample. Specifically, I discuss how the participants and I engaged one another in the study and how long the study took. This discussion is accompanied by a description

of back-up recruitment plans and how any follow-up member checking was used to clarify the participants' meanings of any data they provided.

At the next point in the discussion, I review the data analysis I conducted in this study. All data consisted of verbal units obtained from phenomenological interviews that were tape-recorded and transcribed. I explain how I coded the data by topic and themes once collected and how I continued to categorize data from specific to broader groups. I explain how eight themes emerged from the data which allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the descriptions, definitions, and meanings associated with the study phenomena and research questions.

In the next section of this chapter, I describe the procedures used to establish credibility (or internal validity), transferability (or external validity), dependability, and my confirmability or objectivity as the data collection and analysis instrument. This section includes a more detailed discussion of member checking and how it assured accurate interpretations of what was meant by the verbal data provided. Peer review is briefly discussed in conjunction with the explanation of the pilot study I conducted before conducting the main study. I also more specifically discuss how reflexivity and bracketing prevented any bias or worldviews on my part or from coloring the results.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical concerns and the solutions I employed to address them in this study. I describe how my initial attempts at recruiting participants through college athletic and alumni departments failed due to their inability to soften their roles as privacy gatekeepers. I discuss how I, nonetheless, had success at

collecting my sample. I contacted people I know who I believed would likely know potential study participants with the right demographic qualifications. I describe how they facilitated distribution of my Letters of Invitation to these people. I describe how when 12 potential participants indicated to me that they were each interested in the study that I provided them with the Informed Consent Form as approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I explain how they all agreed to participate and that they understood the Informed Consents. I show how this process protected participant identities, even from me, until participants consented to participate in the study. I then outline how I continued to maintain their anonymity. I explain how I have secured and will continue to secure the data physically until it is to be destroyed. I explain how I have prevented any identifiable connection data may have to any particular participant in this study.

I describe my informed consent document and process. I explain how the informed consent process protected potential participants from any undue coercion to participate and from factors that could have led to reluctance to withdraw from the study should they have been so inclined. The population of midlife former Division III team-sport student-athletes who graduated from college and did not go on to either coach collegiate sports of play professional sports could not be considered an at risk or vulnerable population (American Psychological Association, 2002). There was no power differential between the participants and myself, and there were no conflicts of interest. Nonetheless, I discuss the precautions I took to prevent any potential distress as well as

provisions for counseling or treatment of participants should any unusual or unforeseen problems have arisen.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions that served as the foundation for the design of this qualitative study are as follows:

1. How do former Division III team-sport athletes now in middle age experience subjective well-being?
2. How do former Division III team-sport athletes now in middle age experience life satisfaction?
3. What does it mean to former Division III team-sport athletes now in middle age to have been a young intercollegiate student athlete?

I originally conceived of this study as a quantitative one in which I would use Likert surveys with participants to gain some measure of their LS. My intention was to use these as dependent or outcome variables with having played intercollegiate team-sports in college or not having played intercollegiate sports as independent or outcome variables. I intended to compare the outcome scores using some type of multiple regressions or analysis of covariates (ANCOVA) to predict the impact of NCAA Division intercollegiate team-sport experiences on later life SWB and LS.

As I began to review seminal sources such as Yuksel and Yildrium (2015), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), and Lincoln and Guba (1985), several problems with using quantitative methodology in this study became apparent. It turned out there was only one

predictor variable with two values, yes and no. The administration of a Likert survey would have only produced nonparametric, ordinal results unsuitable for statistical comparison. Clearly, there would also have been an almost unlimited number of covariates that could confound any statistical results of the study.

Survey research could have provided measurement of things including a participant's attitudes, values, opinions and beliefs, only if understood in context (Roberts, 2012, p. 114). At the beginning of my study, however, these things were not well understood for midlife former Division III team-sport student athletes. They could not, therefore, have been quantitatively tested or measured; it became clear these personal realities and phenomenon first needed to be qualitatively understood (Creswell, 2014; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

SWB and LS were the lived experiences of phenomena in a specific context in this study; midlife for former Division III intercollegiate team-sport athletes. The study of these lived phenomena met the assumptions of qualitative design (Creswell, 2014). This factor was supported in the literature review, which revealed a dearth of research on these phenomena for this particular population. There are no hypotheses or theories to begin the study; these would be required to employ a quantitative method but not a qualitative study such as used here (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The phenomena have been qualitatively studied in other target age groups who participated in higher levels of former intercollegiate competition (e.g. Murdock, et al., 2016; Senecal, 2017; Warehime,

et al., 2017). A basis for a qualitative study of the SWB and LS of this population in this context became apparent.

Instead of beginning with hypotheses and theory, my study has ended with the potential to add to a basis for developing hypotheses and grounded theory (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The goal of this study was to reveal descriptive data that could lead to broader meanings, processes, and understandings upon which knowledge relating to the greater population from which the sample was drawn could be established. The central phenomena of this study were the SWB and LS of midlifers against the backdrop or horizon of the meanings they have now ascribed to having experienced intercollegiate collaborative sports as a participant on an NCAA Division III level team. These perceptions were determined by the lived experiences and constructed realities of the participants (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Moustakas, 1994). An understanding of these things has been based on how the participants assimilated, defined and described those experiences as well as the meanings they have ascribed to certain life experiences. By definition, SWB and LS of the members of a group are based on the internalized perceptions of each member of a group; they are subjective and constructed in the social context in which the group members or participants have found themselves (Creswell, 2014; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Therefore, these phenomena are rooted in what has been referred to as the constructivist paradigm. This further supported the rationale for using not only a qualitative method, but a phenomenological interview design.

Constructivism is based on the notion that there is no one reality external to individuals but rather that each person creates inidvidual realities in their social contexts and environments (Crotty, 1998; Raskin, 2002). Peoples' perceptions of their lived experiences are, therefore, constructed realities. People then use and interpret these realities to establish meaning in the events and activities they experience on an ongoing basis as well as for their behavior in society (Crotty, 1998). It is upon these meanings that people experience different levels of SWB and LS. As everyone constructs their reality in an emic sense (an insider's point of view) it is essential to obtain verbal descriptions of what participants are experiencing, meaning, thinking and feeling in order to understand phenomena as they live them (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Mayordomo et al. (2016) noted that one's sense of well-being or SWB is essential to growth and development across the entire lifespan. That these phenomena are not yet known or understood with regard to an important and large social group--those in middle age who also collectively share Division III collaborative-sport student-athlete experiences--made this study socially valuable.

It was also important to note that as SWB and LS are based on the perceptions and life experiences of people and the meanings they attach to them because this study involved human science. Van Manen (1990, 2014) distinguished natural science from human science in that the former seeks to explain something in the environment while human scientists seek to understand the human thing they are studying. Explanations can be developed after that, however, that which is not understood cannot be measured

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Van Manen noted the study of some aspect of human life is "based in description, interpretations, and self-reflective or critical analysis" (Maxfield & Noll, 2017, p. 48). As noted earlier, such things involve realities, interpretations and meanings. Thus, Van Manen's notion of human study supported the use of qualitative methods and a phenomenological design in this study.

Van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994) in particular noted that when the concepts or components of a little understood phenomenon cannot be sensed or observed in some way, phenomenological design should be incorporated into the qualitative methodology. Verbal data as derived from semistructured phenonomenological interviewing constitutes one of the few ways to know and understand the perceptions of the lived experiences of a target population, their realities, and the meanings underlying these realities. Another bonus to this research design is that the interviewer is the research instrument. Verbal data could be collected via qualitative designs such as narrative inquiry, grounded theory, or focus groups (Creswell, 2014). In phenomenological interviewing, however, after setting any bias aside, the researcher can prompt the participant to provide further explanations or descriptions important to understanding the phenomena or not yet touched upon in the interview (Creswell, 2014; Van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). He or she can also ensure that the interview and collection of data remains on topic and relevant. In the other qualitative designs mentioned, the researcher cannot even maintain this modicum of control. In this studythe topic, context, and research problems were all known, just not yet understood well at the beginning of the

study. Further, the aim of this study was not to generalize results over entire populations including other midlife former Division III intercollegiate team-sport athletes. While understandings and meanings emerged from the verbal data, it was necessary that they did so within the framework designed for the particular study phenomena and context to be relevant. Thus, phenomenological interviewing came to be the qualitative research design for this study. It was the only form of verbal data collection that could be used to explore unseen phenomena in which I could keep the information flow relevant and on point without social desirability confounds entering into the picture.

Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher, I served as the primary research instrument in this study for both collecting and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam 1988). I was a participant in the research in the sense that through verbal, semistructured interviews, I collected verbalizations of the subjective feelings, thoughts, and meanings of the research participants as they described them in the setting of their lived experiences. It was necessary to ask semistructured, open-ended questions of the participants to prompt them to describe particular lived experiences, construct realities, and identify the emic meanings they ascribed to their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Moustakas, 1994). These questions focused on the phenomena of SWB, LS, and the meaning of prior team-athletic experiences that were yet to be understood, and that were not observable. The data collected was purely descriptive (Creswell, 2014). As such, it had not yet been in a form to be empirically measured (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). The data, with the sought-after understandings gleaned from my study only now can help to meet the assumptions for future qualitative or quantitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Van Manen (1990) and Marshall and Rossman (1980) have made it clear that human research involves understanding rather than explaining; it involves things as they are subjectively interpreted through participants feelings, thoughts, and behavior. In this study, experiences and meanings were especially important and were subjective. Thus, the aforementioned interview procedures were used to collect descriptive data. It was necessary for participants to tell me the things one needed to know to develop an understanding of very real, but unseen human phenomena I sought. Participants also may not have been aware of or have known their feelings and thoughts and meanings concerning specific phenomena in a way such that they could articulate them in a questionnaire or some finite instrument (Marshall and Rossman, 1980). Therefore, it was necessary for me to go to the participants, either in person, through a real-time interface such as Skype or my cell phone in order to ask them to provide descriptive data that answered the research questions. I then inductively developed an understanding of the experiences of SWB and life satisfaction for these midlife former student athletes. At the same time, I gained an understanding of the meanings the participants have currently attributed to their past experiences as student athletes in team-sports at the Division III level. It was necessary for me to code all this descriptive data and then thematically sort

it; first from smaller and more specific groups into eight larger thematic collections (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994).

The possibility that that biases and worldviews of researchers may color data and suggest answers to even open-ended questions always exists in conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). I limited the data collected in this study and its analysis to the subjective descriptions and interpretations of the participants, free from external influences or my own subjectivity. I did several things to protect against bias both in data collection and analysis.

First, I made my personal biases known. I believed that having been members of a Division III an intercollegiate collaborative sports team likely would have a beneficial effect on persons' well-being, life satisfaction, and productivity at any age. I believed these things would increase their contributions to social change and the overall good of society. I have believed that in the vast majority of cases, these types of sports have taught people important, socially oriented life lessons and values positive to them and society overall. I did not, however, know this and it was quite possible an objective, phenomenologic interview process would show something else entirely. Therefore, I openly revealed these feelings and beliefs before I started my research. In this way I was able to maintain complete transparency in this study. This allowed me to easily bracket my biases,and worldview away from my data collection and analysis to avoid biased or confounded findings and to help peers ensure I was being reflexive (Watt, 2007). Watt (2007) refers to this practice as reflexivity.

Reflexivity also had the effect of enhancing the effectiveness triangulation in data collection and analysis that I employed. The components of triangulation I used included such things as member checking, a peer reviewed pilot study, and the use of multiple theoretical lenses such as SDT, coping, resiliency, and collaboration theory (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Watt, 2007). The bracketing and reflexivity I used also had the effect of enabling this triangulation through methods that assured dependability and validity of results (Jamison, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, my practice of reflexivity ensured the success of triangulation and vice versa. I made sure no questions of any kind or any body language in the face to face interview suggested any particular answers and that I kept all this devoid of any of the biases or personal thoughts and feelings I had earlier identified to myself and my committee. To do this, I stayed engaged with my personal research journal, list of semistructured questions, and active listening. I stayed conscious of allowing the participants to take the interview where they wished, within the bounds of the topic and research questions.

Second, I did not have any personal or professional relationships with the participants I interviewed. Participants were interviewed privately. None of the participants, nor anyone but me knew who else chose to participate, including those assisting in recruitment Further, no one will ever know. No known power relationship issues existed that would cause participants' answers to be colored by social desirability factors or some sense of what I might want them to say (Creswell, 2014). The participants had nothing at stake in providing information to me either, including

personal or financial inducements. Questions were open-ended, and there was no pressure on participants to answer in any particular way. The only additional questions any participant was asked were in the nature of follow-up or clarification questions to ensure a full understanding of a participant's reality. The topic of participants' perceptions of well-being, life satisfaction, and the meanings ascribed to their former experiences as student athletes was not so stress inducing or so uncomfortable that the benefits of the study would not outweigh any potential detriments. Any impact of participation was neutral or beneficial not only to society but potentially to the participants (American Psychological Association, APA, 2002). The participants understood the intended beneficial purpose and nature of the study and that they could withdraw at any time with no adverse consequences. They no longer had any affiliation with the institutions at which they participated as Division III team-sport athletes and my contact with them did not establish any. I did not have a conflict of interest or any possible personal gain based on any particular responses, findings, or understandings that could have been or were established in this study. In the next section, there is a discussion of the scholarly aspects of the qualitative method I used to collect and analyze the data in this study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The purposively selected study population was made up of those in the midlife period, ages 35-50. These ages encompass the latter part of Erikson's (1993) early adulthood (ages 21- 39) and the early part of middle adulthood (ages 40-59) (Slater,

2003). According to Fadjukoff et al. (2016), the ages 35-40 encompass late early adulthood and are important because it is during that time that individuals develop parental identities. This is something Fadjukoff found could be crucial to the development of generativity. Generativity is a state in which midlifers feel a responsibility to impart helping knowledge on younger people. It is the state that can positively characterize earlier midlife in particular as a time of high SWB, LS, and socially beneficial behaviors (Gruhn, et al., 2011; Kaluzna-Wielobob, 2017, Lachman, et al., 2015; Zelinski, et al., 2008).

The other important, purposive demographic of the study population was that the midlifers had substantial experience with collaborative, or more socially oriented sports environments at the NCAA Division III level. These include the sports of football, basketball, softball, and soccer. These sports require large amounts of reliance upon, and collaborative work with, teammates on the field or court. This demographic is important because the questions in this study concerned socially-centered or influenced phenomena. Also, as noted in the literature review, the Division III level of sports participation, while often involving elite sports performance, involves experiences much freer from the stressors and expectations that athletes at higher levels often encounter (Curry, 1993; NCAA, 2018). The sample was, therefore, purposively selected to include individuals who were as free as possible from potential confounds that could skew findings and understandings.

The driving idea behind qualitative, phenomenological sample recruitment is to purposefully select the participants and sites that will be best for helping the researcher understand the phenomenon and questions he or she seeks to understand and answer (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). While this is not a quantitative study, the sample was chosen to be purposively homogenous in the aforementioned demographic characteristics. This was done so participants shared the characteristics required by the research questions and phenomena of interest (Yuksel & Yildrium, 2015). In furtherance of selecting a sample that was most free from potential confounds when providing answers and verbal data in the phenomenological interviews, I selected only those who had substantial exposure to these intercollegiate athletic environments (at least two years of full-time participation in the program). I purposively selected only those potential participants who matriculated from their university, did not remain in a head coaching position for a secondary school, for a team-sport intercollegiate sports environment as a professional full-time coach, or move on to a career in professional sports.

I ensured potential participants would possess the research criteria by asking those who facilitatred the distribution of my letters of invitation to participate in the study to only chose those they felt met the criteria. The letters and later the Informed Consents described the criteria and demographics needed to particiapte. I further double checked these requrements with the interested potential participants when I scheduled their interviews with them.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (1994) suggested that a discussion with participants as to the setting for phenomenological interviewing or other qualitative designs consist of four elements. The first involved the site for the interviews. This was mutually determined by the participant and me once they agreed to take part in the study. Interview sites were based on where participants both remained anonymous and could be most comfortable in providing full and honest answers to the open-ended and follow-up interview questions. This involved my personal cell phone in a private room at my residence, by Skype in one case, and a private room in a public library which was desired and suggested by one other participant. Second, the justification for the sampling strategy was discussed above. Third, the events participants described were those that addressed the phenomena and experiences I am seeking to understand through the study; the lived experiences of middle age SWB and LS against the backdrop of the meanings the midlife participants now attach to their previous experiences as young intercollegiate team-sport athletes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana listed the last element of the discussion as the process or the evolving nature of the events undertaken by the actors in the interview setting.

I began as suggested with a loosely structured set of questions relevant to the phenomenon and research questions. I recorded the interviews on my personal Dictopro X100 and transcribed them personally and privately. Follow-up questions were suggested during the interview and enabled me to develop a full understanding of the meanings intended by the participants and to interpret the participants' answers accurately. These

questions kept participants on track if they began to stray too far off the topic or focus of the phenomena and experiences of interest. This is one of the advantages of phenomenological interviewing. This was essentially a field study. I controlled the flow of information, prevented concentration on irrelevant data, and promped more fully detailed information with clarification and follow-up questions to ensure a full and accurate understanding of the meanings participants ascribed to the experiences they were describing, free from any outside opinions or biases. (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

The athletic departments of two medium-sized, Midwest NCAA Division III member universities had advised that they have computer databases that include the dates of birth, sports participation information, years of participation in what sport, and graduation information for their former student-athletes. They informally agreed that they would send introductory letters authored by me and approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board to qualified individuals that described the nature and purpose of the study. For several reasons, however, officials from each university later indicated that they would be unable to participate during the time the Walden University IRB was completing their review of my study. As a result, I turned to a number of people whom I suspected would know of any number of potential participants with the demographics I required. Four individuals ultimately agreed and facilitated the distribution of my Letter of Invitation to qualified individuals. The Walden University IRB approved the use of this selection procedure as well as their participant pool but no potential participants

responded to the invitation in the participant pool. The approval number for this study issued by the Walden IRB is 04-11-19-0668979.

As noted above, the letters of invitation indicated that in order to participate in my study, potential participants must have, in addition to being in the right age group and within the student athlete specifications, not have gone on to professional full-time head coaching at a secondary school, an intercollegiate sport coaching position, or have participated in professional sports. Potential participants were invited to reply to me if they were interested after receiving their letter of invitation. If they responded in this fashion, I then provide them with an Informed Consent Form. I double-checked that they met all the demographic criteria and qualifications in my initial contact with them if they indicated they understood the informed consent form. Both participants and those who initially facilitated the invites were reminded to refrain from employing any coercion or influence to participate in my study. They were also instructed to avoid sending a letter to anyone with whom they have a power differential or primarily professional relationship as potential participants.

Chenail (2011), Creswell (2010, 2014), and Moustakas (1994) have noted that since understanding is the finding sought in qualitative research that the results are not generalizable to an entire population. That is why smaller samples are used in qualitative research. In phenomenological studies, Creswell and Moustakas recommend a sample size of around 10 participants. Selecting 12 participants, therefore, ensured a sufficient sample was still present at the end of data collection allowing for attrition of participants

through the data gathering process. Ulimately, the first two respndants were selected as the two participanst in a pilot study.Watt (2007) and Nagata and Jingo (1950) noted that in a qualitative study, increasing the sample size can, in fact, inhibit the ability to understand phenomena and increase verbal ambiguity; they reported that a point of diminishing returns is easy to reach with too many participants. Charmaz (2006) emphasized the idea of saturation. Saturation has its roots in grounded theory. According to Chenail, Creswell, and Moustakas, 10 has been found to be the touchstone of saturation for phenomenological research; it is the point where gathering fresh data "no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties" (Charmaz, in Creswell, 2014, p. 189).

Instrumentation

As a qualitative researcher I served as a human data collection and analysis instrument in this qualitative phenomenological study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1988). I collected data from the participants by asking questions that focused upon phenomena of the study and they answered with verbal responses and descriptions. I elicited this data through a series of semistructured, non-leading, open-ended interview questions designed to encourage participants to provide detailed and rich descriptions of their lived experiences and their meanings. This is common in phenomenological interviews such as in this study where I could not observe the phenomena of interest (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992: Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998). I employed reflexivity from the beginning of the study as my potential biases were important not only at the time of data analysis but also

while collecting the data. My questions enabled participants to construct their realities central to the phenomena being studied, however, descriptions and meanings strictly remained those of the participants (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The semistructured interview model helped to ensure I bracketed off my own experiences, biases, and values (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). It also helped to keep me on guard to ensure follow-up questions did not lead participants towards any answers other than those that reflected their own realities and interpretations.

I produced a series of semistructured questions which follow in the next section. This was necessary since qualitative, phenomenological research questions originate from the phenomena and the research questions that are the focus of the study (Creswell, 2014). Unless a replication study is being undertaken, these questions are always new and unique. Thus, my semistructured questions were punctuated by follow-up questions that emerged as necessary during the interview process to further expand the data and to fully understand the meanings participants ascribed to the information they were providing. The semistructured interview questions were sufficient for several reasons. They were peer reviewed by the dissertation committee. They represented a sufficient framework to answer the research questions, especially since I had control over the line of questioning as it was impacted by emergent information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). I took each interview as far as needed to establish an understanding of the phenomenon. I achieved saturation similarly to how it was reached in the literature review. There was an iterative question and answer process during each interview until

the participant could not think of anything more to say about the lived phenomena. Thus, I continued the interviews until the realities of the lived experiences of SWB and LS and their meanings were described as comprehensively as each participant could (Giorgi, 2009: Moustakas, 1994) Also, as the data collection instrument, I was able to detect when participants had exhausted their supply of relevant information. Participants knew that the entire interview was being digitally recorded and would be transcribed. I made sure they knew that their identities would and will be be protected by a numerical code. They knew that I would and will have that information securely stored until it is destroyed five years beyond publication of the study according to APA standards and Walden University rules (American Psychological Association, 2002). I made the participants aware that I would be checking with them during and after the interviews to ensure that I had interpreted the meanings and intentions of the data they provided accurately and completely (member checking). I explained to them that I would advise them of the results of the study once it was completed and approved for publication.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I collected the data by asking questions of each of the participants, individually by Skype, telephone, and a private room in the public library as suggested by one participant. After a short initial phone contact to set up logistics, confirmation of existing demographic information as well as gender, employment, and family status was obtained. A substantive interview of approximately one to two hours was then conducted and it was digitally recorded and transcribed anonymously by me. Participants exited the main

interview with member checking and debriefing. They were asked if they had anything to add or if they wanted to change any answers or any of the data they provided.

Bevan (2014) recently formulated a phenomenological interview approach for interviewing based on Husserl's (1970) seminal concepts. The method involves exploring how each person has his or her natural attitude or way of engaging what is consciously perceived of as the reality of a "lifeworld" (Bevan, 2014, p. 136). Bevan noted this conscious lifeworld contains objects or experiences that must be viewed and interpreted just as a given individual perceives them and describes their meanings. People do this in many different ways. Bevan notes that this process always occurs against the backdrop of a horizon which equates with the context of the experiences. The personal biography of the participant then stands out against that context to give meaning to the experiences. Those natural attitudes of experiences in the lifeworld are what Giorgi (1997) maintains are the very phenomena under investigation in phenomenological research. Giorgi notes these phenomena involve specific situations and actions, not general opinions.

According to Bevan (2014), the interviewer's first focus, therefore, is on this context. Bevan notes that the focus then falls upon capturing and understanding experiences within the context; these are the phenomena of the study. Bevan noted that things including emotions, ideas, and memories are all experienced differently by individuals from different perspectives. The questions concerning experiences in particular contexts involve even more descriptive data Bevan, and Giorgi (1997) emphasize that what they call phenomenological reduction or epoche' must be employed

from the beginning of and throughout interviews. They explained that this means the complete focus of the interview must be on the person being interviewed and their engagement with their lifeworld context. All researcher experience and bias was bracketed off, and reflexivity was employed as Bevan and Giorgi suggested. This required active listening. All of this allowed me to be flexible when the time came for additional open-ended follow-up questions that emerged from the interviews. Such questions are usually necessary for a complete understanding of the phenomena as described by any given participant. Bevan noted, however, that when staying within this structure, there is an allowance for continued reflexivity, more focus on the participant, and hence, increased validity of the data.

Bevan (2014) noted that the final part of a phenomenological interview consists of clarifying the phenomena. By this, Bevan meant that nothing can be taken for granted. In Bevan's example, nurses he was interviewing referred to "concern" for their patients in a satellite kidney unit (Bevan, 2014, p. 141). Bevan followed this reference by the nurse participants with questions concerning what was meant by "concern." Based on the answers, Bevan then asked each nurse what he or she did when concerned for a patient. Bevan noted that this not only provided for clear individual variances in meanings based on valid individual perceptions of phenomenon but was a stable form of clarification for recognizing those things that are invariant among a sample group.

I followed the advice of Bevan (2014) and Giorgi (1997) in its entirety. It was upon this foundation that I developed the following semi-structured framework of qualitative, phenomenological interview questions that I used with the participants:

- Tell me about approaching (and living in) middle age as a former Division III intercollegiate student athlete.
- Please describe your transition from college and sports and how you came to be involved in your current occupation and position in family and society.
- Please tell me how you define "well-being" in everyday life?
- Tell me about how you experience well-being on a typical day.
- Please tell me how you define "life satisfaction" in everyday life.
- Describe to me how you experience life satisfaction during a typical day.
- What does it currently mean to you to have been a Division III team-sport student athlete in college?
- Describe how your present life experiences of well-being and life satisfaction would be different if you had not been a Division III student athlete in college.

Data Analysis Plan

The interview questions were constructed and worded so that they identified the phenomena and research question they were seeking to explore. The realities, meanings, and the verbal data units describing them varied from person to person. I ensured that these data or meaning units consisted only of participants' personal perceptions, realities, and meanings through these semistructured questions and asking clarifying questions

only within the framework of their answers (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The questions were structured so that they related specifically to the lived experiences of SWB, lived experiences of LS, and finally middle age meanings of former Division III intercollegiate team-sport experiences. They were then asked to discuss these meanings within each of the separate contexts of SWB and LS today. Therefore, the questions themselves identified and provided the initial way to sort the data units.

First, I aligned the data under the phenomenon it related to. I then thematically and gradually sorted data from numerous groups of smaller and more specific units to fewer and more meaningful, broad, and concise categories. Ultimately, eight groups of data points remained that have helped lead to an understanding of the shared realities and phenomena within the population that the sample represents (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 1998).

Coding of the data into these evolving thematic groupings was accomplished though the theoretical lenses of this study. These theoretical foundations include SDT (Lumpkin and Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2016), and the related concepts of happiness (Diener, 2013), active or approach coping (Kerdijk, et. al., 2016: Martinent & Nicolas, 2016), resilience (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009: Litwic-Kaminska, 2016), and collaborative culture (Barczak, et al., 2009; Beniscelli, 2014; Robbins, Madrigal, & Stanley, 2015; Schrack-Walters, et al., 2009; Tanguay, et. al., 2012). The names of these theories offered further help in coding the data units as did some of the familiar phrases associated with each. For instance, data related to SDT included phrases such as intrinsic

motivation, autonomy, relatedness, and meeting or satisfaction of needs (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). I then used these terms to inductively create themes and help group and sort data in ways that allowed for understandings that could later be expanded or measured in a subsequent study.

Potential participants who did not meet the required demographics and qualifications for the study were not chosen to be part of the sample. I stressed complete honesty and the necessity for truthful answers and data from the selection process throughout the study. Participants' personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions described as truthfully as possible are the hallmarks of phenomenological interviewing. This said, I have even included discrepant data from individuals in the results and did not delete it at the conclusion of this study. There was follow up with them the same as with all other participants. In this way, I ensured full and complete understanding of each participant's intended meanings in the verbal data units provided. Full anonymity was and will be enjoyed by all participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability are at the root of trustworthiness; the indicator of quality and accuracy of data collection and analysis in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2014; Jamison, 2011; Yuksel & Yildrium, 2015). These are different than the indicators of trustworthiness in quantitative research, according to Szanto (2006) and Van Manen (1990), because the psychosocial facts that are the point of

focus in much qualitative research are different from the physical facts of nature that are based on a single external reality.

Jamison (2011) noted that the overarching principle of all these components of trustworthiness is triangulation. He noted there are several types. Method triangulation which uses two or three methods in a single study is unwieldy and generally too expensive for dissertation research both in the temporal and fiscal sense. However, Jamison and the other scholars mentioned in this subsection stated that what they refer to as data triangulation, multiple-theory triangulation, and multiple-respondent triangulation do apply to qualitative research, particularly with phenomenological design. I did journal information during the interviews to help trianulate data collected from the phenomenological interviews.

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility refers to the internal validity of the study. This involves whether the data or meaning units accurately depict the intended descriptions and meanings of the participants that provide the data (Creswell, 2014). In this study, credibility was established though member checking. I reviewed major points or potentially confusing data developed from the interviews with each participant and asked him or her if my interpretations were consistent with their intended meanings (Creswell, 2014). Participants mostly confirmed, but also corrected, or clarified their descriptions and meanings. This was important for me to do as these are the bases for all the understandings gained in the study. Credibility is also like internal validity. I established

credibility through encouraging rich and detailed descriptions, another hallmark of phenomenological interviewing (Creswell, 2014). For the findings to be valid, they must be derived only from the descriptions, interpretations, and meanings participants ascribe to their realities and lived experiences. This process became longer than I anticipated, but it was also less difficult because I encouraged these rich and detailed descriptions by the participants.

Confirmability

Credibility is closely related to confirmability (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) and Moustakas (1994) again emphasized that the interviewer's biases, values, and worldviews cannot color either the answers and information provided by participants or the findings and understandings derived from this data. I engaged in reflexivity in this study by both identifying and bracketing out my beliefs that the midlifers in this study would describe positive effects from their past athletic experiences upon their current SWB and LS. I also bracketed out my own past and present experiences. I was an impartial and objective human data collection and analysis instrument because I made these processes as transparent as possible through reflexivity for both myself and my committee; the peer reviewers

This transparency not only made member checking and thick description more effective, but it also made my use of several different theoretical lenses, peer review, and journaling a more effective means of triangulation (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). In this same vein, I comprehensively documented and journaled all of the

steps and procedures used to collect, code, and analyze the data. I ensured that these steps remained consistent and aligned throughout the study (Green, Willis, Hughes, Small, Welch, Gibbs, & Daly, 2007). All of this allowed me, and will allow participants, scholars, and other researchers to have confidence in the accuracy of my findings.

Dependability

Dependability also has a place in this discussion. Dependability represents the qualitative equivalent of quantitative reliability. Gibbs (2007) described dependability in the sense that a researcher undertakes a study consistently with the approach employed by other researchers in similar sorts of studies; provided analysis begins to occur concurrently with the collection of the data, is transparent and ends with an actual generation of themes and not just categories (Greene, et al., 2007). Phenomenological interviewing and its inherent strategy of asking open-ended, nonleading, semistructured questions is now well established as the seminal qualitative design for exploring and understanding human phenomena that cannot be simply observed (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990, 2014).

Phenomenological interviewing continues to be proven as a sound, reliable and dependable design today. For instance, Skinner-Osei and Stepteau-Watson (2018) used phenomenological interviewing and a narrow to broad thematic analysis process to interpret and arrive at beneficial understandings of the experiences of African-American fathers. These were men who had been incarcerated and were being reintegrated into their families and the community. Earlier, Gallagher et al. (2017) used phenomenological

interviews with military veterans who had run afoul of the law following discharge and were placed in Veterans Treatment Courts. In both cases, new and basic understandings of the lived experiences of those in the sample groups were found to be consistent and dependable through consistency of the phenomenological, thematic approach in data collection and analysis.

The understandings and structure of the phenomena and research problems in those studies parallel the ones in this study. The researchers sought and obtained a reliable understanding of the realities, lived experiences, and their meanings for current members of one homogenous group who had shared certain common past experiences. The data analysis plan for this study was, therefore, well established, reliable and dependable. Others could use it in further studies and obtain similarly dependable findings (Creswell, 2014: Moustakas, 1994).

Transferability

Transferability is sometimes brought up when discussing qualitative research. It has been compared to external validity in quantitative studies (Gibbs, 2007). Skinner-Osei et al. (2018) and Gallagher et al. (2017) demonstrated that thematic analysis of data is a method that is indeed transferable to studies such as this one. This is especially true when things like reflexivity, thick description, member checking and peer review are applied while collecting and analyzing data from a population sample with key common present and past lived experiences.

It is important, however, that this transferability in qualitative research is understood to apply only to the phenomenological and thematic procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. Qualitative research findings are not generalizable over entire populations based on the small size of qualitative sample groups. Qualitative results are useful for understanding specific phenomena and experiences involving specific people and contexts, precisely because they are *not* generalizable to other populations and contexts (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). As such, the qualitative phenomenological method and design as well as thematic analysis that were employed in this study have been found to be transferable to other similarly structured studies and are, therefore, externally valid for use in this study. Further, it can be concluded that the data and analysis obtained via my study are valid to help future researchers induct theories and hypotheses in further quantitative studies as well as to serve as a basis for further qualitative studies and professional practice.

Ethical Procedures

Before recruitment of a sample and the collection of any data several ethical protections were in place. Neither individuals assisting in recruiting nor participants had any monetary or other interest in any particular findings or results. They were made fully aware of the research methodology, design, and protocols. They all will receive a summary of the research findings and results and, if requested, a copy of the full dissertation upon acceptance of this dissertation for publication.

Application and acceptance of the research plan and protocols was obtained from and with the help of the Walden University IRB. The introductory letter to the participants introduced the nature of the study and the purpose of the study to the potential participants. This letter was followed by a detailed Informed Consent Form to participants in the study for those who indicated interest after receipt of their invitation. It outlined all the potential participants' rights and privileges for engaging in the study as well as the potential benefits and detriments concerning participation in the study. All interested participants were agreeable to participating in the study but were invited to contact me, my chairperson, or the Walden Research Participation Advocate if they had questions about the study. Each participant was provided with contact information as well, all pursuant to section 8.02 of the APA code (American Psychological Association, 2002). This procedure served as a safeguard for confidentiality from the very inception of the study. Until I was contacted with by a participant interested in participating even I had no knowledge of potential participants. Once interest was expressed by a potential participant, only I possessed information concerning their interest in participating in my study, and I coded participants numerically for purposes of transcription, journaling, and reporting data and findings. Those facilitating invites to potential participants were told not to reveal the identity of anyone invited to participate in my study. Thus, confidentiality in the recruiting process was maintained to the farthest extent possible in accordance with sections 4 and 8 of the APA code (American Psychological Association, 2002).

From recruitment through the conclusion of the study, including the secure maintenance of the data until its destruction five years past the publication of the study, the general principles (A. though E.) of the APA code have been and will be followed (American Psychological Association, 2002). Throughout the study I engaged in only in beneficence and no maleficence towards any involved participant. I had no personal or professional relationship with any participant other than as a researcher and did not personally know any of them previous to the study. I had no trouble in maintaining my responsibility of trust and fidelity to the participants' best interests. I collected, analyzed, and reported the research findings with accuracy, honesty, objectivity, and truthfulness. I ensured this by practicing reflexivity throughout the study (Creswell, 2014). I treated all participants equally, with fairness, justice and respect. I explained to participants why they were purposively chosen to be invited to participate in the study (American Psychological Association, 2002). These conditions prevailed throughout the duration of the study. Participants were afforded the dignity and respect of being made aware of the results of the study at its conclusion and were debriefed after their interviews. Finally, as this was not an experimental study, there were no ethical concerns regarding manipulation of the participants in any way.

I further afforded participants input as to deciding if they wanted to participate in an electronic interview environment or to suggest, on their own, a private location where their interview or interviews could be conducted in the most comfortable fashion for them. I told them that if they became aware of the identity of another study participant,

they must not reveal his or her identity nor discuss the research in any way with those people or anyone else. This was done to enable participants to be more comfortable through the interview process and to enable them to be as comprehensive and detailed in their answers and comments as possible.

Participants did not receive any monetary or other consideration for participation in the study and were advised prior to the study that none would be forthcoming. I had no personal relationship with any participant other than as an interviewer asking open-ended and nonleading questions once the study began. There was no power imbalance between me and any participant as we even shared some similar demographics. There was no conflict of interest since I had no professional or personal relationship with any participant aside from participation in the study as a researcher. Therefore, I ensured that no participant should have felt coerced to agree to participate in the study or continue participating should they have experienced any adverse effects or discomfort, or for any reason, in accordance with section 8.02 of the APA code (American Psychological Association, 2002). I also asked and was assured by each participant had psychological help available and accessible to them in their locales if needed. While doubtful any severe discomfort or adverse effect would have been experienced by participants during interviews, participants were informed of the possibility in the Informed Consent Form. I advised them that it was possible the interview could stir some bad memories or bring to mind uncomfortable experiences for the participants. I also told them that alternatively, the interview could lead to some positive reflection and pleasant memories.

In addition to the foregoing, the potential participants' Informed Consent Forms included an explanation of the purpose of the study, its duration, protocols, and procedures. I made the participants aware that they could decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, even after participation had begun. There were no foreseeable consequences to them if they declined to participate since I had no personal or professional relationship with them. Their former universities had no interest whether someone participated or not and had and will have no knowledge that they participated were even invited to participate in this study. Potential participants were advised of the social benefits that could result from the study.

Participants provided consent to have their interviews taped and transcribed via the Informed Consent Form, under section 8.03 of the APA code (American Psychological Association, 2002). I advised participants regarding the the recording and transcription procedures I employed and that their identities would and will be protected in this process by a numbering code or pseudonyms. Ultimately, I chose to identify them by a number. I told them that only I would and will have access to this information, and that data would be kept under lock and key in my office and completely destroyed five years from the end of the study according to the APA code (American Psychological Association, 2002). Data has never and will never be stored online or electronically on my computer to avoid any potential hacking issues. The participants were advised that the only time I would share data other than in the anonymous publication of results would be with fellow psychologists or professionals in accordance with section 8.14 of the APA

code (American Psychological Association, 2002). I stated that this would be only for verification and peer review purposes to ensure accuracy in interpreting results and this procedure would continue to maintain each participant's confidentiality.

The data and findings that were revealed in the results section of the study have been stated in such a way as to eliminate discussion of circumstances so unique or unusual that they could identify the individual providing the verbal data. I also engaged in member checking and debriefing at the end of interviews not only to ensure the overall trustworthiness of data but to maintain the participants' dignities. This also assured that I have correctly and accurately discerned descriptions, interpretations, and meanings provided by the participants pursuant to section 8.08 of the APA code (American Psychological Association, 2002). This was not only an ethical obligation but an obligation to my fellow professionals, and society.

Summary

I described the qualitative method and phenomenological design of the data collection and analysis I used in this study. This method and design were chosen as they represented the best form of research for exploring and understanding phenomena that are not well understood. Lived experiences of SWB and LS for those in midlife who were formerly NCAA Division III team-sport student athletes and the meaning of that participation had not be substantially researched or understood. These factors were also responsible for the formation of the research questions in this study. Purposive sampling was used because of the need in this study to focus on a population with specific

demographics in specific contexts. I discussed how qualitative saturation was achieved with a sample of 12 participants as well as how and why they were selected through purposive sampling.

I reviewed the fact that as a qualitative researcher, I served as the data collection and analysis instrument for this study. I went on to discuss how bracketed off my biases and worldviews and how I used semi-structured open-ended questions with the sample participants to gain the understandings that began to answer the research questions. I listed these semi-structured questions to show how they elicited the data needed to address the research questions. There was a discussion of how I recorded the data, the thematic analysis used to interpret the data, and how from the very beginning of the study the privacy and confidentiality of the participants was protected. I described the informed consent process and what was contained in that process. I also discussed how the rights and dignity of the participants respected from the beginning of the research through completion and will continue to be. I noted how the recorded data was and will be maintained under lock and key in my office for five years from the end of the study and then completely destroyed.

I discussed how credibility, dependability, and confirmability were established, thus ensuring that the research was trustworthy and the data were accurately recorded and interpreted. This included a description of member checking, journaling, multiple theories, peer review, and thick description, as well as the ways I triangulated the data and my findings.

Lastly, I discussed the ethical concerns and procedures I used to ensure that these concerns were addressed. I touched on the IRB procedures and approvals I obtained. I discussed how confidentiality was a critical concern from recruitment of participants through the aftermath of the study and beyond and how I preserved it in this study. I discussed how the study was introduced to the potential participants. I described the Informed Consent Form and process, and the contents of the form. I noted how informed consent advised participants of rights and expectations such as interview protocol and length. The informed consent advised how there would be no incentive for anyone to participate other than to potentially recognize things that could be used to increase SWB and LS.

I also noted how the informed consent provided there were no penalties for declining to participate or withdrawing from the study, the latter of which I notified participants they could do at any time. I noted that there was no power imbalance in the interviews. I also noted that I had no relationship with the participants either personally or professionally and did not know them prior to the study. I reviewed the fact that I had no conflict of interest in the study.

Chapter Four focuses mainly on the data collected its analysis, and how this led to resultant understandings of the phenomena of interest and answers to the research questions for the participating samples. I begin Chapter Four with a brief review of the purpose of the research questions in relation to the phenomena and introduced the organization of the rest of the chapter. I review the settings for the research and how they

did or did not affect the participants' answers. I review in greater detail how the demographics of the participants were particularly relevant to understand the phenomena examined in the study.

I describethe procedures I used in collecting the data in exacting detail In Chapter Four. I go on to discuss the thematic analysis of the data I employed. I describe how I coded the data, and how I then moved inductively from the coded units to the main categories and themes. I discuss what these themes were and use some of the data I collected, including quotations, to illustrate the importance these themes had in my study. This discussion includes how participant interviews were thematically grouped, interpreted and led to the findings in the study. I also describe the methods I used to collect the data and how I used them to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and analysis. This discussion covers the implementation of the strategies to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

I finish by presenting the results and findings of the study, organized by the research questions and the themes gleaned from the participants' answers. I use the data, including quotations where appropriate, to explain and support the findings. Finally, I describe the affect of any data and findings that are discrepant to the main themes and understandings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

I designed this qualitative phenomenological interview study to explore and develop understandings of the phenomena of SWB and LS for a group of midlife individuals who had been full-time members of an NCAA Division III collaborative sport team. The midlife period, which occurs between the ages of 35 to 50, is a particularly important one in society. Midlife is the exclusive life-stage during which individuals can enjoy a period of generativity where they choose to help people particularly of a younger age develop a higher sense of well being, LS, and productivity (Erikson, 1993; Lachman et. al., 2015; Lagodimiere & Strachan, 2015). As a result, former student athlete midlifers may experience the highest SWB of their lives (see Erikson, 1993; Lachman et. al., 2015; Lagodimiere & Strachan, 2015). Paradoxically, midlife has also been the time where people have been found to experience a low point in SWB and LS, which is known as stagnation (Cheng et al., 2017; Erikson,1993).

Former participation in higher level intercollegiate team-sports, such as in NCAA Division I, has been found to help tip midlifers toward generativity and away from stagnation (Rettig & Hu, 2016, Senecal, 2017; Siedlecki et al. 2014; Warehime et al., 2017). Nonetheless, this type of sports participation has been perceived negatively by some members of society (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Such negative perceptions have heightened, particularly in light of the several high-profile scandals in Division I sports that have been reported by news outlets within the past few years (Delia, 2019; Zimbalist,

2017). Delia (2019) spoke of how even fans of some Division I teams have struggled to cope with identity crises following the report of academic and other scandals within a given university's athletic programs. Zimbalist (2017) reported evidence that the entirety of intercollegiate athletics is now at a societal crossroads. Zimbalist stated that intercollegiate sports may now be at the point where the NCAA has to chose to keep them part of an education as they have always been, or for them to be commercial, quasiprofessional endeavor as some college admnistrations and coaches suggest. Particularly when this issue is combined with the paucity of studies on participants in lower-level NCAA Division III collaborative sports, researchers face an important social problem without the knowledge and information needed to solve the problem. Present and former Division III athletes have been exposed to far less confounds and distractions than their DI counterparts including financial stressors to perform; win-at-all-costs coaching influences; maintenance of athletic scholarships; and pressures from fans, alumni, and university administrations (Curry, 1993; NCAA, 2018). Former Division III student team-sport athletes' potential for generativity and higher SWB and LS could, therefore, be greater than that for their higher-profile counterparts and inform those higher level expreinces. Yet, these phenomena had yet to be understood well, based on my review of the literature.

Thus, there was and is a need to better understand the large midlife population of former Division III team-sport athletes, their SWB and LS, and what their former athletic experiences mean to them. These former athletes have a particularly strong opportunity to

develop a state of generativity. Midlifers can develop the highest levels of SWB and LS in their lives and also potentially build the SWB and LS of other generations such as young potential Division III student-athletes. Findings from this investigation may, thus, yield insight that is beneficial to society.

I hope the findings of my study will help scholars, professionals, and practitioners to develop understandings that tip this midlife group of former Division III athletes towards generativity and thus increased SWB, LS, stress reduction, and a better quality of life. This research may also be of use to mentors, coaches, parents, and others responsible for the well-being of those young people to positively guide young people approaching college age and entering college. Finally, I hope that the findings of this study increase understanding of the meanings and values rooted in these intercollegiate sports experiences as potentially positive social influences in midlife.

I conducted this study to answer the following research questions:

1. How do former Division III athletes now in middle age experience subjective well-being?
2. How do former Division III athletes now in middle age experience life satisfaction?
3. What does it mean to former Division III athletes now in middle age to have been young intercollegiate student-athlete?

I conducted phenomenological, open ended, semistructured interviews with a sample of 10 midlife former Division III athletes now in the 35-50 age group, who participated in

intercollegiate football, basketball, softball, or soccer. I interviewed two of the 12 total participants in a pilot study conducted prior to the main study.

I conducted this pilot study for the purpose of determining whether the semistructured questions I intended to ask study participants questions would elicit relevant descriptions needed to reach the sought after understandings. The pilot study was further designed to test clarifying and follow-up questions to ensure they were not leading or suggestive. More discussion of the pilot study follows. In the chapter, I also describe the setting of the main study and the demographic characteristics possessed by the participants. I describe my methods for data collection, my analysis of the data, and how I determined the data and my analysis of the data were trustworthy. The chapter also includes a thorough reporting of the results of the data analysis.

Pilot Study

I selected two of 12 study participants with whom to conduct the pilot study. Participant 1A was 35 years old and was involved in an upwardly mobile job as a financial executive in a small manufacturing firm. He was married with four young children. He had played 4 years of Division III football at a medium-sized Midwest college. Participant 2A was 37 years old and was involved in middle management at a law enforcement agency in a medium-sized Upper Midwest community. Participant 2A also was married with four children and had played 4 years of Division III football in a medium-sized Midwest university.

I devised a series of eight questions that could be supplemented with follow-up or clarification questions in the interviews as necessary. In this way I could fully understand the descriptions the participants would be providing with regard to the relevant phenomena and their experiences. The eight main semistructured interview questions were as follows:

1. Tell me about approaching and living in middle age as a former Division III intercollegiate student athlete.
2. Please describe your transition from college and sports and how you came to be involved in your current occupation and position in family and society.
3. Please tell me how you define the term 'well-being" (SWB) in everyday life.
4. Tell me about how you experience well-being on a typical day.
5. Please tell me how you define the term "life satisfaction" (LS) in everyday life.
6. Describe for me how you experience life satisfaction during a typical day.
7. What does it currently mean to you to have been a Division III team-sort student athlete in college?
8. Describe how your present life experiences of well-being and life satisfaction would be different if you had not been a Division III student athlete in college.

The interviews were audio-recorded and stored in my Dictopro X100 digital voice recorder. During these interviews I journaled major and relevant points by hand into a separate notebook. I used this for later comparison when I transcribed the interviews on

my personal computer. This helped me ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected and the process used to collect it. The recordings are in the Dictopro software drive under lock and key in my home office. The transcripts and journal entries aligned factually in all major aspects. This assured that my interpretations, which I double checked with participants during and after the interviews, were complete and consistent with the meanings the participants intended to convey.

I then thematically analyzed the data I collected. Originally, the descriptions elicited by the pilot participants from the interviews produced about 50 data subthemes. I then condensed these themes into around 10 broader thematic units. Overlap still appeared in terms of the key meanings included in the themes so the process was again repeated. Six broad yet distinct themes eventually emerged from the data collected in the pilot study. Further distillation of themes appeared impossible at this point.

The first main theme that emerged from the data was that a high functioning interactive and loving, immediate family led to high SWB and vice versa. The participants noted that simply being with their family and engaging in team-like collaborative relationships with them was the most important factor in maintaining SWB. They both indicated that their employment could be very stressful. They reported striving to make it more meaningful and more efficient to enable them to devote more time and energy to their families. While work was important for both participants, they both described work as a means to the end of a happy, well family and, therefore, their SWB.

They did not view their employment environment as an extension of family or family team.

Participants 1A and 2A viewed LS as something that bolstered and contributed positively to their family experiences and SWB. They did not, however, view LS as important as SWB to what they viewed as a good quality of life for themselves or their families. They did not feel SWB contributed to LS reciprocally, and individually reported that some forms of LS could have a negative impact on SWB. These included too much self-indulgence in things such as food and alcohol, and being outcome motivated as opposed to intrinsically or process motivated. They stated that working out and maintaining physical wellness was part of a good foundation for SWB and family wellness. They reported that working out enabled them to set good example to their family "team". They reported this also enabled them to be more mentally "present" to help provide for their families' needs in both a physical and temporal sense.

The pilot participants emphasized that they derived SWB from performing their perceived roles as team leaders in society and in the family. They reported that when they fulfilled these responsibilities they felt well and happy. They equated their families with teams, and equated teams with a sense of love, collaboration, support, coping, and resiliency. They believed these things served as powerful underpinnings for SWB. They indicated that while they do not often consciously think of or reflect on their Division III student athlete experiences that many of the lessons they learned through these experiences are now ingrained in them. For instance, both cited time management skills

learned as student athletes as important in their current daily lives. Another life lesson they reported was the sense of camaraderie that they learned how to develop within their intercollegiate football experiences. They both mentioned the notion of personal sacrifice for achievement of something bigger than themselves as a positive they carried with them from their college days to the present.

Interestingly, the pilot participants indicated that they believed they were living a version of their Division III student athlete experiences today. They reported doing so, however, in different ways. Both emphasized setting realistic goals for themselves and their families, but in terms of the process of reaching these goals some differences emerged. Participant 1A indicated that he overtly did think of some of the factors he learned in Division III sports as he navigated towards SWB and his goals in business and at home. Participant 2A said that while at the end of a day he might reflect on some of his collegiate student athlete experiences, they were now mainly internalized into him as a matter of automatic habit.

Finally, neither participant described feeling superior to anyone because of their experiences and accomplishments in college. They did report that they perceived a responsibility to engage in teaching, mentoring and engaging in altruistic activities towards younger and other societal groups such as the elderly. They reported that engaging in this sort of generative activity boosted their SWB.

All the themes in this study were emergent from the data collected and my analysis of that data. I anticipated some of the results I gleaned from the pilot study while

I had not anticipated others. Participants 1A and 2A both reported that they were almost entirely driven towards their goals and SWB by family positives and their presence in the family. They reported that SWB and LS had less to do with the development of a team environment at work than at home within their family. SWB was perceived by both as more important to quality of life than LS. I did not anticipate that teamwork at the place of employment would be deemphasized by participants. This finding, along with the detailed descriptions participants provided during the interviews, member checking, triangulation through means of reflexive journaling, and my dissertation committees' peer review of my questions, data and analysis led me to the conclusion that my questions were not leading or subjective.

I further concluded that I had framed my questions to be effective in finding data relevant to the research questions and purpose of the study. The findings in the pilot study confirmed that qualitative semistructured interview questions and thematic analysis were the appropriate means of data collection for the main portion of my study. There were no observations from the pilot study to indicate the instrumentation and strategy for data collection and analysis should be modified or changed in any way prior to application in my main study.

Setting

I performed my main study with 10 adults ages 3547. The further participation criteria were that they had attended and matriculated from an NCAA Division III member university and had been a fulltime member of a collaborative intercollegiate sports team

for at least 2 years. I defined such teams as being in the sports of football, basketball, baseball or softball, soccer, volleyball, field or ice hockey, or lacrosse. No participant had gone on to any form of paid coaching at the level of head coach of a high school sport or greater. Eight of the 10 semistructured interviews were conducted via telephone as participants revealed they stated they did not possess the requisite knowledge to use software such as Skype or Facebook Messenger. One interview was conducted via Skype and one was conducted in a private room at a public library at the request of the participant. I audio-recorded all interviews onto my personal Dictopro X100 digital voice recorder. The interview transcripts have been retained on the drive within that device. Only I have access to this data and it has been kept under lock and key in my home except for when I needed to use it privately to transcribe the interviews into writing. The interviews were conducted on dates and times selected by the participants when they could speak privately and were not rushed by outside distractions. I conducted the interviews between July 11, 2019 and August 26, 2019. Further, the participants were all professionally and gainfully employed at the time of their interview. Participants reported that they were not under the influence of any personal, employment, or business-related stressors or trauma that might have impacted the truthfulness and accuracy of their answers or the descriptive data they provided.

I conducted the interviews from my private office at my home with the exception of the face-to-face interview conducted at the public library. This physical setting remained free of noise and other distractions. It was, thus, an appropriate place for me to

comprehensively and effectively process the perceptions and descriptions provided by the participants concerning their lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings relevant to SWB, LS, and meanings they presently attribute to having been a young Division III team-sport student athlete. While conducting the interviews, I made notes in a journal and member checked these with the participants during and after the interviews to ensure that I was interpreting the meanings of the data participants presented accurately and consistently with their intentions. I later triangulated the journal with the transcripts of the interviews to ensure consistency and I found all data and interpretations to be consistent. I have retained these journal notes as well as all transcripts and the Dictopro under lock and key in my home office.

Demographics

I contacted individuals I thought could recommend potential study participants for my study. Several people agreed to distribute of my letter of introduction to individuals they presumed met my study's participation requirements. The individuals I asked for help in this regard were not involved in any sort of close, professional, or business relationship with me. Further, the individuals I approached were instructed that potential participants should not have close business or profession connections with them. Twelve potential participants responded to me via email and I then sent Informed Consent Forms to them. The participants were situated throughout the United States at the time of the interviews. Most were from the Midwest but there were also participants living on the East Coast and in the Southwest Region of the United States. As noted, all participants

were 35-47 years old at the time of their interview and had not gone on to play professional sports, or professionally coached in a team-sport at the level of secondary school head school coach or higher. Table 1 provides the demographic information for the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Degree	Family status	Occupation	College sport
1	M	36	PhD	Married, 2 children	Physical therapy	Football
2	F	47	BEd	Married, 2 children	K12 teacher	Soccer
3	M	35	BS	Married, no children	Business mgmt.	Football
4	M	36	BS	Married, 4 children	Business technology	Football
5	M	35	BS	Married, 2 children	Mgmt., consulting	Football
6	M	39	BS	Married, no children	Product development	Football
7	M	36	BS	Married, 3 children	Sales manager	Football
8	M	35	BEd	Married, no children	Cost mgmt.	Football
9	F	35	BEd	Married, no children	K12 teacher	Basketball, softball
10	F	36	MBA	Married, 2 children	Director, sales, mktg.	Basketball

Note. Mgmt. = management; Mktg. = marketing.

Data Collection

Each of the 10 participants in this study participated individually in one semistructured, phenomenological interview. I used eight general questions as reviewed above to guide the data collection. I took journal notes as I conducted the interviews and reviewed these with participants after the interviews as a member checking procedure. I asked clarifying and follow up questions during the course of each interview as well.

Each interview took 1-2 hours. I recorded the interviews on my Dictopro X100 digital recording device and transcribed each interview into a word document which are stored in a locked desk in my private home office. Data collection lasted approximately 1 ½ months. Nothing arose that required me to alter the data collection plan described in Chapter 3. All participants were promised a copy of the summary of the results of the study and three of the participants requested a full copy of my dissertation once complete. I indicated these would be provided.

Data Analysis

I began my analysis with member checking of the data and then by comparing the transcripts and my notes. I employed thematic analysis as recommended by Spears and Riley (2019) as the research questions required examination of the breadth of the phenomena over members of a specific, purposive population, explicit interpretations, and pragmatism to attain the sought after understandings.

I took the initial step of reading and re-reading both sets of raw data several times, as well as comparing my journal notes with the interview transcripts. As I did this, I

developed a color-coding system within which to place the quotes and bits of verbal data obtained into some specific categories related to lived experiences of SWB, LS. I also thematically grouped present meanings of midlife former Division III team-sports athlete's experiences, particularly as they pertained to SWB and LS. These were the initial relevant subthemes that arose from the data, generally under the umbrella of SDT, coping, resiliency, communication, and other SDT related concepts. In addition to using colored transparent markers to color code the raw data, I made detailed notes next to the descriptive comments provided by the participants. I followed this by placing these original specific themes onto a large spread sheet, referring to the comments relevant to each of the specific themes as well as recording which participants made the comments.

I then went on to examine for overlapping themes and subthemes. The following eight main themes emerged from the data: (a) SWB is family and needs based, and most important to quality of life; (b) LS is wants based and related as foundational or subservient to SWB; (c) intrinsic, process oriented goal setting; (d) generativity is foundational and crucial to SWB; (e) collaborative collegiate sports had a positive impact all aspects of life and served as a template for functioning in family and society; (f) active coping, resiliency, and perseverance; (g) work as primarily a means to an end; and (h) transitions from college and sport to midlife could be difficult to start with but became easier with time. Table 2 illustrates these themes by participant.

Table 2

Themes Emphasized by Participants

Theme	Parti-cipant 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
SWB/Family needs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
LS, Wants/SWB builder	X	X		X	X	X	X			
Intrinsic goal setting/ SDT	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Generativity for SWB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sports as a template for family life	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Active, coping, resilience, perseverence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Work,means to an end		X	X	X	X	X		X		
Transitions, college/sports to midlife	X	X		X	X	X				X

Participants emphasized most of the themes as important in their lived experiences and quality of life, particularly SWB and LS. In certain cases, however, they described some themes as not as important to them as others, deemphasized certain themes, or chose not to emphasize specific themes at all. Participants provided details concerning these instances. For example, Participant 10 believed that the feeling of providing for and establishing a family team entity contributed highly to her lived experiences of SWB and her family's well-being. Unlike all the other participants who described generativity as indispensible yet not as large a contributor to SWB as developing a loving family with a team dynamic, Participant 10 believed that generativity was the number one contributor to her SWB. She noted her inability to engage in as much generativity in midlife as she once had was something that detracted from her SWB and LS, though it did not result in dissatisfaction or injury to her SWB. All discrepant cases such as this were noted and are discussed in the results section of this chapter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I emphasized my need for truthful information with each participant before and during the interview. I reminded them at various points that their descriptions and answers should be based entirely on their own beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. I continued to remind them not to answer or describe phenomena in a way that they felt others might have wanted them to. I asked clarifying questions as necessary and encouraged them to expand on thin descriptions. My pilot study helped me determine the structure of the interview and ensure the interview questions would elicit enough data to answer my

research questions. Testing out the structure and delivery of the interview questions during the pilot study phase allowed me to concentrate more fully collecting data and ensuring credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability during the main interviews. I delve thoroughly into how I ensured these aspects of trustworthiness over the course of the following sections.

Credibility

I used several methods in data collection and analysis to ensure credibility as suggested by Creswell (2014), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (2000, 2014). I triangulated the data by using both semi-structured interviews and my journal entries to collect and understand the data and descriptions provided by the participants. This helped me to obtain consistent and valid results. I could also then concentrate on obtaining detailed, thick, and rich data from the participants.

I used member checking both during and after the interviews, particularly when something new, particularly relevant, and/or interesting emerged. This was a slight adjustment from the plan I presented in Chapter Three where I stated my intent was to use member checking at a separate time following the interviews. I decided to implement this procedure during and following each interview so that I could place this information into the journal and gain understandings when a topic was fresh in the participants' minds. This also, provided for detailed and understandable descriptions of the phenomena by participants.

I made notes in my reflexive journal regarding the interview schedule, times, and my ideas and feelings concerning the data and the participants as I conducted the interviews. In this way I ensured reflexivity during the interviews with follow up and clarifying, and when I cross-referenced and finalized my interpretations with the transcribed data. This technique, therefore, also ensured that the study can be replicated.

Transferability

I encouraged and obtained thick descriptions from the participants during the semi-structured interviews. I enabled the participants to describe how they defined and experienced SWB and LS in their current, everyday lives against the backdrop of the meanings they have now attached to their Division III team-sport student athlete experiences. I further encouraged them to provide as much information as to each of these phenomena as possible, both as individual topics and altogether as they connected different data points in their realities and experiences.

As a result of my pilot study I proceeded through the data collection process with confidence, utilizing the same techniques in the main study as in the pilot study. All of the individual participants took advantage of the opportunity to provide thick and detailed descriptions of SWB, LS, and continuing impact of their earlier collegiate sports experiences as they approached and lived in midlife. The participants discussed feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and values with regard to SWB and LS in their current lives. They further described how their collegiate sports experiences both directly or indirectly impact their perceptions of these phenomena in their lives today. Such detailed

descriptions led to some understandings that can immediately be of benefit to midlife former Division III athletes. Perhaps more importantly, these understandings can now be explored or quantitatively tested by other researchers and colleagues to gain information on how to further tip individuals towards generativity, personal, and engagement in socially beneficial behavior in midlife.

Dependability

My use of triangulation not only helped me ensure credibility in my study but provided me with the ability to maintain an ongoing audit trail throughout my study (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). My research journal contains information on the times of collection of the data as well as its storage locations. I wrote notes in my journal such that names of participants and any other information that could threaten confidentiality could be easily removed from the journal. This will ensure continuing confidentiality should researchers wish to use the journal to learn more about the study or replicate it in the future. I also organized the journal by participant. The order of my semistructured questions was sometimes varied slightly if the participant led the interview in the direction of a different semistructured question from the next one on my list. This helped participants to maintain their train of thought and to provide more detailed descriptions. The methods described above allowed me to arrive at dependable results in my study (Creswell, 2014: Moustakas, 1994).

Confirmability

I used most of the same tools to establish confirmability in my study as I did to ensure credibility, transferability and dependability. I triangulated the data collection process between the transcribed, semistructured, phenomenological interviews and the reflexive journal. This allowed me to ensure a comparable consistency in the results of the study. Triangulation combined with the pilot study, which was peer reviewed by my dissertation committee, ensured an objective and reflexive data collection and analysis process. No changes were needed in my semi-structured interview data collection process. I, therefore, knew before I began that the descriptions that were going to be provided by the participants would be rich and detailed, something borne out at the conclusion of the study. My journal entries combined with the pilot-tested semi-structured questions, the audit trail that resulted, and the highly detailed data I gleaned from the participants added up to ample detail for someone to replicate my study. These techniques also provided confirmation of the accuracy and comprehensive nature of the data obtained and understandings that I reached in this study.

Results

As I began my analysis of the data I collected in this study, themes became readily apparent. In the main study, eight distinct themes emerged beyond which no further combinations or condensing of themes appeared possible. These themes tied in directly to understandings of the participants' SWB, LS, and their reported current

meanings for heir Division III team-sports experiences. I identified each participant by number to ensure continuing confidentiality as noted earlier in this chapter.

Theme 1: Subjective Well-Being is the Most Important Thing in Life and is Primarily Family- and Needs-Based

The most predominant among the themes that emerged from the verbal data in this study was the belief that SWB was the most important ingredient in the quality of participants' everyday lives. The participants emphasized the importance of SWB and that it was both derived from and contributed to the development, maintenance, and involvement in their family unit or team. For example,Participant 1 stated: "I need to be stable at home, you know, having a bad day athome affects me greatly into having a bad day at work, it can stress me out really bad." Participant 1 summarized that family was the largest influence on SWB.

Participant 2 said, "Personally, well-being is about the happiness of my family and less about myself." Participant 2 also analogized family as her new "team" and said that providing for her family teammates' needs is the activity from which she derives the greatest SWB in her life.

Participant 3 said, "I guess a lot of people talk about focusing on their kids. That keeps them going; for me with no kids it's my wife and our relatives, making them happy makes me happy and well."

Participant 4 said, “Even though I do work out some or walk, it is the time you actually spend with family that is the real source of well-being. SWB is more important than being personally satisfied with my life.”

Participant 5 indicated that family was always important to him and that he chose his Division III university based on having a lot of family members nearby. For him the family roots for his present day SWB have continued. Participant 5 also reported: “Family outweighs a lot of things so well-being for me comes from my family and friends.”

Participant 6 described SWB as being the most important contributor to his overall quality of life. He emphasized his wife, extended family, and former Division III football teammates being part of a family team for him as foundational to his SWB.

Participant 7 reported, “Am I happy with my home life, with my family, is everything going well, are things good with those people? If the answer is yes, anything else going on is irrelevant. If they are well, I am well.”

Participant 8 characterized his family of two younger children and his wife as a team he has been coaching and that balancing that role so that he can focus enough on it versus time spent on work is very important. Participant 8 reported, “My well being is most dependent on a well and happy family. It is mainly based on being happy, that my wife is happy, that my children are happy. That makes me happy.”

Participant 9 stated that to her, family was everything. As a K-12 teacher, she likened her students to a family and said that the connections within that unit are,

therefore, family connections. She bases these connections on love, collaborative, and supportive behavior where everyone helps one another. Participant 9 stated: “Being able to find what makes you happy and being able to share that with others, these are the biggest parts of well-being.”

Participant 10 has a husband and two children and was the only somewhat discrepant case within this theme. While Participant 10 clearly saw family, providing for, and interacting with them in several specific ways as important ingredient in SWB she also felt raising children took away from other aspects of SWB. Participant 10 said,

> I actually have two young ladies I coached in youth basketball that should be living with me right now because their situation at home is so bad. But, I have small children here. It is a bit of a letdown.

In conclusion, simply being with, and positively interacting with what most participants described to be a family “team” has led to SWB for the participants and is SWB ingredient for SWB. It was reported that there were other ingredients of SWB like physical fitness, but the participants felt these things were secondary to simply being present with a healthy happy family. Generativity was confirmed as the most important ingredient of SWB by one participant. Nonetheless, that participant still emphasized that family was still an indispensible ingredient of SWB.

Theme 2: Former Division III Student Athletes and an Experiential Template for Life

The participants indicated that they had internalized their team-sports experiences as an important part of a template for raising their families and maintaining SWB. While some of them said they actively engaged in some conscious reflection of these factors as they experienced SWB and LS during the typical day, they also said that for the most part these things had become a part of them. The participants stated that the skills and values of being a good leader and teammate were automatically and positively triggered by different events and experiences routinely encountered in everyday life. For instance, Participant 1 remarked, "Well in college and football you had to hold yourself and your teammates up. I have always liked to be in a position of leadership, and all this translates into family, it is like a team."

Participant 2 related, "Well, in life I think you have to be unselfish and a team player. I think about other people and compassion for other people, and I think a lot of that is, just sports are not going to be your whole life, but it directly gives you those lessons you are going to take through your whole life.

Participant 3 alluded to Division III sports as providing an even more grounded experience in working for team or family and not putting self first. He compared this to Division I athletes whom he perceived as requiring external accolades for fulfillment in life.

Participant 4 stressed that families are teams. Participant 4 said, “There are a ton of parallels between football and my life now, and ahm, I do think about it quite often.”

Participant 5 indicated that the lessons learned from sports are now ingrained in him, and that he learned how to foster a positive and supportive atmosphere for himself and his family from college football. He described that this phenomenon has continued into his present day life. Participant 5 stated, “I think speaking to Division III, the whole staff was awesome in teaching leadership and accountability, you know, turning us into grown men and even more importantly beyond football, to just be good people.”

Participant 6 reported, “I think it was an overall education, it was a package deal, football and academic work. It has benefits in society as a whole in regards to motivating or giving people something to strive for.”

Participant 7 said, “With the sports background it is easy to gain each other’s trust, and a lot of time that leads to well-being, happy feelings, and it’s just good both ways, I think. It is often very positive, with a positive relationship communication and respect open up.”

Participant 8 said,

> Team is related, I think, to leadership. I’ve been a captain of just about every team I’ve been a part of and I feel that was the biggest piece that transferred to the next level of my life; the leadership piece of it. That always seems to have a direct, positive effect on well-being.

Participant 9 noted that everything about team and family has contributed to her present day well being and her ability to be a good teacher.

Participant 9 stated,

> I think when I was in sports I really learned about what to do as a teacher and what not to do. I learned a lot about myself at the Division III level. I found out what motivates and demotivates me and I think that is a very important thing later in life to have.

Participant 10, who has a husband and two small children, talked about her college sports experiences in terms of her present day family.Participant 10 said,

> Yeah, it translates a ton, we actually now call ourselves 'Team WXYZ', a team of four, you know. We treat each other as teammates, we build each other up, we have to bring each other down to earth at times, um, but all in all we have the same goals and we are going to get through it all together.

The participants indicated that their Division III team-sport student athlete experiences meant a great deal to them today. They said these experiences contributed to forming a framework or template for their actions and behaviors in raising their families, and maintaining their SWB and LS. Further, all of them indicated that the values and skills learned in the team-sport atmosphere are an intrinsic a part of them. Participants 4, 7, and 10 indicated that they also consciously thought of employing some of these skills and values from time to time as they made their way through their days. I noted that Participants 3, 5, and 10 specifically emphasized the value in the current meanings they

attribute to their past student-athlete experiences at the Division III level. They believed that their life values and skills were able to more fully develop because in Division III there were no payments of any kind for participating in their sport and they were involved in their sport only because they wanted to be involved. Participants 3, 5, 9, and 10 all indicated that they had to make good individual choices in college because of their sports participation; a skill they felt has carried on into their present day lives.

Theme 3: Intrinsic, Process-Oriented Goal Setting

The interview transcripts and my journal notes revealed that goal setting remains an important component of establishing and maintaining a happy family life and resultant SWB as well as LS for most participants. Participants emphasized goal setting as being particularly developed within what scholars know to be an SDT framework. They noted that the goals they set in life were process oriented and intrinsically based on meeting their family, team, and/or their own needs for success.

The participants indicated they were not motivated by grasping the accolades or the trophy at the end of some endeavor. They reported being mastery oriented in their goal setting processes, and belonging and relatedness were felt to be a natural byproduct of these goal setting processes. These things are among the hallmarks of SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2014).

Participant 1 said,

> I think you have to enjoy life, you can't just wait until retirement, you are just wasting your life then, but relating that to work you do and to enjoy the process,

> I've had thousands of situations, none the same, but many similar, where I have to get a patient better and I can become a better coach to them because I know the road that lies ahead for them.

Participant 2 said,

> Like right now, what matters most is not if you win but if you get better at every game, every practice, every class.…Did we learn something for next time, leading up to high school, college, and then life where wins and losses might matter most.

Participant 3 described how outcomes and results are important to him, but that his goals were still intrinsic and process oriented. Participant 3 said,

> Even if you didn't, say, win the championship, you have to compare it in regard to life expectations; it would be more rewarding that everyone got better than the results. You mastered certain skills and the results were there that showed improvement from the effort, yeah, reaching that goal would be rewarding.

Participant 6 described how processes and the quality of friendships are where his goals now rest in life. Participant 6 reported,"Outcomes were important to me back then. As I think about it now, I hardly ever think about our record, it is now the quality friendships I have and the teammates I'm still friends with." Participant 6 noted that he changes his goals to suit whatever stage of life in which he finds himself.

Participant 7 reported, "It's both getting better every time you do something and then to do a little better than the guy next to you." Participant 7 said, "No one is the same

as everyone else, we all have our strengths and weaknesses but being on a team and having a common goal, recognizing that goal, it just falls right into life, no matter what profession you're doing."

Participant 10 noted, "I think what it comes down to in the end is that I have intrinsic, personal goals, standards and expectations for myself, and it is most important that I meet those every single day."

Participant 5 indicated that he had intrinsic motivation in his life, and said "Working towards something bigger than yourself," was important, but he didn't emphasize any particular goal setting process or structure. He was, therefore, somewhat of a discrepant case in the sample. Likewise, Participant 8 was broader in his discussion of goals. He said that seeking out challenges and overcoming them could make life better in the future without zeroing in on any specific goals.

Theme 4: Coping, Resiliency, and Perseverance in Overcoming Stress

Participants saw coping, resiliency, and perseverance as important skills for navigating life successfully, overcoming stress, and maintaining SWB and LS. These skills were largely seen by participants as being developed by dealing with the inherent adversity faced in competitive team-sports at the same time as they managed their academic lives in college.

Participant 1 said,

> You know, about how you can't help others unless you take care of yourself first, I use that on just about a daily basis with my patients and their family members

that come to the hospital. They are sitting there with their loved ones, they don't eat right, they don't exercise, and they just sit stressing and crying. I had to relearn what I took from team leadership, working with others, and moving on for my own good.

Participant 2 reported,

I've learned to wait things out a bit when somebody new comes in, not just to immediately go to the worst-case scenario, you know, and I've learned how to deal with the way the district functions, which is not a normal way. The right coping skills contribute to my SWB, resiliency too, that is good for my family.

Participant 3 said, "Perseverance is important, that comes from the athletic arena probably. Some stuff you just power through, that would be my term there."

Participant 4 said,

You have to figure out how you are going to address conflict and address it appropriately. First you have to cope with the problem, it will come up in any job and you won't be successful at the job unless you can cope, and to do so, there is a collaboration or teamwork concept that goes with it. You know there is resilience in that regard as well. My college sports experiences taught me this. In general, the positivity, the outlook, if you can't find a single point of positivity in a thing, I think you are in trouble.

Participant 5 described that one copes by approaching the problem, "pushing though it," and then emerging positively on the other side of the problem.

Participant 5 stated,

> I think adversity is good, sports or life, whatever you do there is always going to be adversity, in life many people crack or run away from adversity. For me there are no other options but to look for a challenge and take it head on. There is no quitting, no other options.

Participant 6 said, "You get beat down a little, but you've got to get back up, and move forward in order to cope with those things and maintain resiliency, absolutely."

Participant 7 spoke about celebrating the good versus embracing the bad as the way he actively copes with the bad that arises in his life. Participant 7 stated, "The two go hand in hand. You can't just have the bad and forget about it because history repeats itself. You have to celebrate the good, embrace the bad and take it on and learn about it."

Participant 8 noted,

> Whether it be at work or in sports, opportunity is where growth happens, where you have potential, you need that challenging opportunity to use it and grow. The number one thing is to take that job that you know nothing about and it scares the heck out of you, but you power though and grow and learn so much in these roles as you move up. There are such parallels then between athletics and the corporate world.

Participant 9 stated, "You occupy the moment and take it for what it is, learn from it; you know what happened and you can chalk it up to a learning experience and just move beyond it, adversity, to making the right choices."

Participant 9 summed up coping and resiliency in her life today as based on prioritizing tasks and roles as well as time management. She said that she developed the foundations for this behavior during her student athlete experiences but has now coped with adversity that arises in her life by modifying or setting new goals to meet the challenge.

Theme 5: Life Satisfaction Is "Wants" Based and Part of the Foundation for Subjective Well-Being

The participants in the study indicated that SWB and LS can be similar things, but unlike SWB which is based on what one *needs* in life, LS is based on what one wants in life. Some participants said they did not believe being well was possible without LS. Others reported that they believed SWB was possible without LS. Still other participants said they did not feel having LS was possible without SWB. The participants, however, reported that they viewed LS as less important overall to a positive life experience than SWB.

Participant 1 said,

> I mean, losing games, losing opportunities, losing people; I think you can have negatives and still have satisfaction, sure, but I don't think anybody wants that. It would seem you would want all positives, but in reality you can't have positives without negatives to compare.

Participant 2 reported,

> Well, you know, I think life satisfaction is somewhat of a foundation for well-being, but I do what I feel what I have to do or need to do, ya know. I don't put myself first so it might not be a life that is exactly what I wanted with my family now, but my well-being is that I'm doing what I think is right.

Participant 3 said,

> My satisfaction comes from seeing my wife happy, making her feel good, not to have to worry about things. At this small company, it is satisfying to know I had an impact on it increasing its revenue. That's my satisfaction there. The family is more important, but seeing the companies do well, I feel good about it.

Participant 4, noted that teaching or coaching his kids successfully was very satisfying and that this contributed to family well-being and, therefore, his SWB.

Participant 4 said, "Right now, just being around my kids is the most satisfying for me. Life satisfactioncontributes to well-being. You can be well without being satisfied, but it's the time you actually spend with family is the real source of being well.

Participant 5 said, "I do think some satisfying things are necessary, my kids' happiness and being successful, they are part of who I am now, that is a huge part of well-being, and 100%, life satisfaction is a foundational thing to well-being."

Participant 6 noted that to him, satisfaction leads to SWB. Participant 6 said,"If I'm satisfied with where I am at in my life, be it mentally or physically, then my well being is very high; I think they go hand in hand."

Participant 7 stated,

> To me, life satisfaction is that I want to go home, I mean I don't dislike work, but it's you are happy to get home, you love the people you live with, when you play a role in having them develop and get stronger, smarter, successful. So my life, general satisfaction, that is pretty much it.

I found discrepant cases with three of the participants. Participant 8 described LS and SWB as one in the same to him. He also reported that one did not have to be productive to have LS or SWB. Participant 9 took the view that LS was a minor or subtheme of SWB. She referred to life satisfaction as "the little me things," not necessarily needed for SWB but still wanted and enjoyed. Finally, Participant 10 said she felt one could be dissatisfied but still be well as she noted, "Nothing can be completely satisfying."

Theme 6: Generativity as Essential to Subjective Well-Being

The participants in my study indicated that they believed engaging in generativity related behaviors with younger people was a necessary precursor to SWB at their stage in life. Many participants emphasized their student athlete, team-sport experiences provided them with generativity related skills. The participants reported these skills include being able to mentor, nurture, and help others, particularly younger people. These are the hallmarks of generativity. One participant even rated engaging in generative activities with people outside the family as the most important precursor to SWB.

Participant 1 said, “I mean, you give to a community, but you also take. You learn how to make due with things in therapy with very little money and very little resources sometimes”.

Participant 2 described be a student athlete as something she worked hard for and is very proud of as it provides her with opportunities to be generative today.Participant 2 said,

> It’s a tool for me to raise my kids and have experiences that I can use to teach them lessons. Also I have a niece who is going in to college this year to play soccer, which I have this unique ability to, um, relate to her in a way even her parents can’t, that I created from being on the team I was on in college.

Participant 3 reported,

> If you had someone on the team who didn’t understand or needed help, I think your inner teacher or coach comes in to play; you want to help people. To head your company you need to have a nurturing or coaching type environment to make things work.

Participant 5 stated,

> Anybody that wants advice, I’m there; I mean I’m still learning. I take in as much knowledge as I can from people, but then also other kids are around, babysitters, I’m also asking them, where are you going to school? What do you want to do? You know, I tell them, get involved in a sport, or get involved in music

whatever it may be, an English program, just get involved in something in college beyond just classes to get those life lessons.

Participant 6 stated,

Well in the supervisory role I am in now, I deal with a lot of younger generations coming straight out of college and stuff. They are great, they bring great ideas, but what motivates them now is much different from how I was motivated, competition wasn't everything to them like it was to me. So, I've learned over the years that it has to be done in moderation as with anything.

Participant 7 summarized that that working with his family in a generative way was the largest contributor in his and his family's life. He noted that his SWB is related directly to what is going on with them.Participant 7 stated:

Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. You can kind of approach the kids through what they are doing in sports at the time. I like to plant that seed with everything they do as they are growing up. The school term, you can only do so much in public school, you sort of have to pick up the ball and run with it at home.

Participant 8 said,

At work I am seen as a fixer. I get to finish up and clean up things, and then I can look back and see where improvements could be made so these things wouldn't be a problem. As a leader you need to lay out the vision, lay out the goal, so

everyone can see the bigger picture, those things make me happy, my family happy, and help make me into a well person.

Participant 9 talked about observing her coaches and teaching. She also focused on embracing mistakes as learning opportunities; that mistakes often are to be celebrated. She noted that she believed you needed to be generative to be well. Participant 9 stated:

> I think as humans we are just naturally wired to be social, it's something that I try to do, I think a lot of sharing happiness is just trying to be helpful, you know, you see somebody struggling with something, or you can just see they need help with something, happiness seems to come from helping them and in turn it makes you feel better to help them feel better.

Participant 10 stated,

> I feel like I am having a great impact on the community through coaching used that to impact the young ladies here. I mean, it is just a sport, it is just a small part of their lives, but I can use it to kind of instill larger things into them, what is really important in life you know, grit and hard work and being able to communicate and work on teams. It is really a comfortable, joyous life.

In conclusion, the participants in my study described a perceived personal need to be generative so as to help others with their well-being, and to maintain their own SWB. All participants had a consciously targeted group and preconceived notions about how to go about being helpful and nurturing to that group of younger people. All of them felt

generativity was an indispensable component of SWB, and one, Participant 10, saw it as the most important component of SWB.

Theme 7: Work as a Means to an End

The participants viewed work or employment as important to a good family life but primarily only in that regard. Participants said that they did not completely dislike work and some said that it provided challenges through which they could improve skills for the well-being of their family and SWB. Participants emphasized, however, that work or employment was mainly important mostly or only as a means for earning a living that would support their family in comfort and provide health insurance. The participants in my study described coworkers with frustratingly low work ethics, and too many under-performing work settings. Several participants viewed employment or work as a rewarding undertaking. The participants did not, however, describe work or employment as a more important contributor to SWB and LS than a good family and home life.

Participant 2 stated,

> I'm a survivor; I survive work. If I could have left I would have, but I needed the benefits and insurance for my family, so in a way it does benefit my family and my well-being too. It's a sacrifice I make for my family.

Participant 3 reported,

> I'd rather be challenged and multitasking rather than just doing this one type of work and having to just focus on that all the time. The job I'm at now really mixes it up, it keeps you on your toes pretty much; the days kind of go by quicker. I'm

happier at home. We re a mobile work force so I get to be at home a lot. I'm not one of those who feels they have to work all the time.

Participant 4 described a job prior to the one he currently held as a constant source of stress and frustration. He described taking his present job as a step up in pay, more conducive to his health and, therefore, better for the health of his family and himself. Participant 4 said,

> I mean, the essence of work really is in providing, there is a lot of pressure, but if I feel like I did as good as I could, it helps me stability-wise both long and short term in being able to provide for my family. That's a big aspect of it.

Participant 5 reported:

> Work is something you have to do, I guess, you have to tolerate doing. I'm not the absolute happiest at work; I can think of a lot of other things I'd rather be doing. Family outweighs a lot of things. I work to live, not live to work. It's not that I don't want to spend any time at work but as little as I can to get by for my family.

Participant 5 also stated, "A work ethic is ingrained in me now as it was then, for myself and my work team. Now I work as hard as I do because at the end of the day I am providing for others, for my family".

Participant 8 reported,

> but at the same time being challenged in any career you chose you need that sense of competitiveness and challenge that keeps you moving forward, you know. Still you could have the best experiences and be the best you could be at work, but

there are way too many cases where the balance tips completely toward work and destroys well-being completely.

Most of the participants emphasized work and employment primarily as a means to an end. Some participants did not place emphasis on work as a component of their SWB and LS or their family's wellness, even as a means to an end. Participant 1 described his work in the medical field as "rewarding" when he could see people responding to treatment, but said little else on the topic. Participant 7 reported that he didn't dislike work, but said he often concentrated on work in the sense of simply getting along, pacing himself, or speeding up so he could home to his family sooner. Participant 10 said she works for her kids, such as to obtain insurance but ultimately saw work as coming down to her personal goals, standards and expectations for herself.

Participant 9 was an entirely discrepant case in terms of work and employment. She was, as noted, an elementary school teacher and described her job was completely integrated in team concepts, family, and SWB. She explained that her students, coworkers, friends, and her husband were all integrated as parts of her family, connected by love and common goals. Participant 9 made it clear that the concept of work for her was not mutually exclusive to anything but rather was an indispensible component of life, her family, SWB, generativity, LS and love.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the important characteristics of work each participant particularly emphasized during their interviews.

Table 3

Breakdown of Components of Work or Employment as Emphasized by Participants

Work Component	Participant 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Means to Ends for Family		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Challenge for Self Growth			X			X		X	X	
Frustration Stress Sacrifice		X		X						X
Extension of Family							X		X	
Happiness	X		X		X				X	
Rewarding in and of Self	X								X	

Theme 8: Transitions from Sport and College Approaching and Into Midlife

Participants reported that transitioning out of the collegiate; team-sport environment was very difficult for them at first. This same group tended to also report that because of the life skills and values they learned in their Division III team-sport setting, that it was only a short time before this transition ultimately became smooth and easy for them.

Participant 1 said,

> Team is like a family. I felt like crap and I was really distraught when I had to hang up my helmet. At that time it was like my identity, but now I could sort of substitute my family and career in because of those things. Ya know, I think football made me organized, and that feels good now.

Participant 2 said, "When fresh out of college when I first started working it was more difficult coping with those who were younger and less mature, but now having been there over 20 years, I've learned how it kind of works."

Participant 4 described his life as now featuring his family as a sort of team and that he and his family collaborate a great deal. He said they are all finding understandings and their roles and responsibilities within the family. He described the family as being built on many sports team "aspects" and that all came to develop well-being from being within this atmosphere.

Participant 5 explained that he has learned how to fill the void of collegiate sports competition by going back to mastery type behavior; competing against himself to maintain SWB and be there for his family.

Participant 6 reported,

> It was the first time I was out of close proximity with family and friends, and I didn't have that close team environment, camaraderie, or family. It really sort of hit me. Now I have a supportive family and everything and I was working in an office with six former athletes. I finally did find an outlet.

Participant 10 said,

> Well, the transition to start with was awful, it was just horrible, and it was one of the worst times of my life. It took me a while to find my way after college. I think I had to redirect my goals in life and it took me a year or two to do that.

Some participants reported they were able to easily the transition from college and sports to work and midlife from the beginning. They reported this seemed to be due to enjoying challenge and change, something they began to develop in earlier life. Participant 3 said that things started well. He moved out of state for work and considered it an adventure. He joked that he enjoyed his then new, more southern location because he did not have to shovel snow for half the year. He said it has always been easy for him to make new friends that he has stayed in touch with his former teammates.

Participant 5 reported no transition issues. He noted that through his connections in football he was able to move straight into what he considered to be a great job, and he

had met his wife while still in college. He indicated that he had been taught by his father early on to work hard, how to talk to older people and younger people, to make eye contact, and to truly listen to others. Participant 7 reported that since he participated in team sports in college he thought his transitions all the way to midlife were easier. He noted that he had to be on top of everything during his time as a student athlete and he stayed around college another semester with his future wife and former teammates. Participant 7 said that the slowness of this transition and his sports experiences, prepared him for real life before he left school.

Participant 8 said he was able to start his profession while still in school due to sports contacts, and he was able to join a work "team" right away. He described the steps from school and professional life to be "pretty clear cut". Participant 9 finally explained that said that her collegiate teams were really like a family and that she did and still does consider them as part of a close knit family today. She said her move to a very family-oriented work environment was pretty seamless. She said she had already been thinking of teaching and how all the same things apply from family to the classroom. She also noted that teachers are lifelong learners which also contributed to a smooth transition from being a student to the teaching profession.

Summary

I asked semistructured, follow up, and clarification questions exclusively during the phenomenological interviews I conducted with participants. In so doing, I obtained detailed descriptions of emergent themes relevant to the phenomena of everyday SWB,

LS, and the meanings my midlife participants now attached to their earlier Division III team-sport student athlete experiences. I supplemented this data collection with detailed notes in my personal, reflexive journal as I conducted the interviews and engaged in member checking during and after the interviews with each participant. The care and detail I included in my data collection provided me with a study that is transparent and replicable. My study is trustworthy in that it has provided the credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable data and analyses that stakeholders and future researchers can be confident in. I constantly coded data throughout the study as suggested by Belotto (2018) in my journal and on spread sheets as I proceeded through the study.

My data collection process also, therefore, provided for the six-step thematic data analysis process suggested by Scharp and Sanders (2019). With such detailed descriptions I was able to: (a) become as familiar with the data as soon as possible starting from the beginning, (b) create code subcategories which could be lumped into larger code categories as I proceeded, (c) create subthemes and then larger themes, (d) review and re-review themes, (e) label themes appropriately, and, (f) easily and thoroughly indentify the meaningful quotes and paraphrased exemplars that I described in this chapter (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). I was, therefore, able to illustrate the key understandings and findings in my study.

Eight richly described themes emerged from the data. First, SWB was strongly reported as being family and needs based for these midlife, former Division III team-sport student athlete participants. The participants reported that simply being around their

families led to SWB, and the more stable, healthy and happy their families were the more well they were. Only one participant, Participant 9, indicated that family wellness was not the most important component of SWB; for her it was engaging in generativity. Still, she said family was important and indispensible to maintaining SWB. The participants, in various ways, described SWB as based on what one needs to live well.

Conversely, most participants described LS as wants based. They based LS on things they wanted but did not necessarily need for a good quality of life. Most of them described LS as part of the foundation for SWB, but that it did not necessarily have to be. Many participants said LS could stand alone as a positive. Participant 3 described SWB as a necessary precursor to LS, Participant 8 said SWB and LS are nearly one in the same, and Participant 10 reported that she could be dissatisfied but still maintain SWB. Participant 9 described SWB and LS as similar, but that SWB was more important than LS to overall quality life. She said SWB was about life overall whereas LS involved smaller "me things." The participants believed their realities concerning SWB were the most important phenomena to overall quality of life, more so than LS.

Third, the participants described that they had a goal setting process that was intrinsic and mastery or process oriented, not outcome oriented. They emphasized goal setting as necessary to SWB and LS. Eight of the ten participants emphasized it as a major ingredient in SWB while Participants 5 and 8 only briefly described their goal setting processes. The participants, however, did report that their present way of developing and setting goals was predominantly based on their student-athlete

experiences. They stated that they simply had to change their goals as they passed out of their college years, through adulthood, and entered midlife. Fourth, the participants described coping, resiliency, and perseverance as critical to SWB, LS and overall quality of life in midlife. They described stress and adversity as being unavoidable in life just as it was during their student athlete experiences. They variously described that approaching or attacking problems was the best way to attack stress and adversity. Fifth, the participants described generativity; helping, teaching, mentoring and sharing experiences, as indispensible elements of their SWB. They perceived they were having the same impact on the younger people they engaged with.

Each participant described their collaborative collegiate sports experiences as a continuing positive in all aspects of life and a template for functioning in family and society. All described engaging in generativity, and that they typically had helped to mentor, support, teach, and help younger teammates during their intercollegiate sports days. They noted this seemed less important to them then than it was to them now in midlife.

Many participants said they seldom thought consciously of their collegiate student-athlete experiences during the course of a day, but they also said they had internalized the values and life lessons learned from those experiences. They said that they could now understand how and when these experiences have served as constant framework for them when negotiating any number of daily realities. These realities consisted of developing or maintaining their SWB and the well-being of their families,

their ability to set and reach goals, and their ability cope with stress and adversity in their daily lives.

Seventh, many of the participants saw their work or employment as a sort of necessary evil or means to other things such providing for the maintenance of their family's well-being. Most participants looked forward to going home or getting out of work to spend time with their families. Only Participant 9 described work as a synonymous with happiness, SWB, LS, generativity, goal setting, and joy in her life. Participant 1 described his work as so helpful to other people that he had become very passionate about it. He said that as such work was a source of happiness, SWB and LS that made him a better family and team leader. Participant 7 described work as a way to provide solidity and stability for his family. He described work as a source for healthy challenge, but again rated family as more important to his SWB and quality of life. Other participants noted work to be a good place to engage in generativity while again, they were always looking forward to their family time.

Chapter Five begins with a review of the purpose and nature of my study as well as why it was conducted. I summarize the key findings among those discussed above in Chapter Four. I discuss my interpretation of these findings including how they are consistent and sometimes inconsistent with earlier research is discussed. I mainly discuss the ways in which my findings and analysis expanded knowledge beyond that found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter Two. The limitations of this study are addressed in Chapter Five as well as recommendations for further studies and practice.

The implications of this study for positive social change are discussed. As Chapter Five and dissertation conclude, I provide a strong “take home” message as to the essence of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological interview study was to better understand midlife SWB and LS for former NCAA Division III team-sport student athletes. Findings yielded a better understanding of how the participants experience SWB and LS on a daily basis (see Belotto, 2018; Spiers & Riley, 2019). Participants provided personal meanings regarding their earlier experiences as intercollegiate student athletes, which helped provide context to their current SWB and LS. The results help to fill a gap in understanding the daily lived experiences of this underresearched group of midlifers and enhance societal awareness of the values of intercollegiate team sport experiences, especially those from the NCAA Division III level.

Several themes emerged from the data provided by the participants: (a) SWB is family- and needs-based and is the most seminal and important component in overall quality of life; (b) LS is wants based and serves only as a component of SWB; (c) participants employed intrinsic, process-oriented goal setting in their lives; (d) enerativity is a positive ingredient in, and foundational to SWB; (e) collaborative intercollegiate sport experiences contribute values and skills to employ in establishing a positive family and social life; (f) active coping, resiliency, and perseverance are essential to SWB; (g) work is a means for a stable, happy, and productive family as well as SWB; and (h) transitions from college and sport to midlife are initially difficult but become easier.

Overall, the participants indicated that LS was generally supportive of SWB and could be tied closely to SWB. The participants stated that SWB was a requirement for a quality midlife, however, and although they felt that LS was important in their daily lives, they reported that its primary importance was as a part of SWB. They described LS as based on things they wanted but did not necessarily need to be well or maintain a high quality of life. For instance, Participant 4 reported, "Right now, just being around my kids is the most satisfying for me. You can be well without being satisfied, but it's the time you actually spend with family is the real source of being well."

The participants also indicated that generativity was a necessary component for maintaining SWB. They described generativity as the nurturing, mentoring, and passing on of helpful reflections to younger people, which is consistent with previous research (see Cheng et al., 2015; Erikson,1993; Slater, 2003). Participant 9 stated.

> I think as humans we are just naturally wired to be social; it's something that I try to do. I think a lot of sharing happiness is just trying to be helpful, you know, you see somebody struggling with something, or you can just see they need help with something, happiness seems to come from helping them and in turn it makes you feel better to help them feel better.

Furthermore, factors based on intrinsic and process-based goal setting, coping, resilience, and perseverance in overcoming stress and adversity were reportedly reinforced during participants' Division III team-sports experiences, and they referenced these as skills they still use today. Finally, the participants reported that the family aspect

of their team experiences stuck with them the most into midlife. The participants reported that a family that was healthy, close to one another, financially secure, and productive in their roles was indispensable to SWB. Participant 7 reported, "Am I happy with my home life, with my family, is everything going well, are things good with those people? If the answer is yes, anything else is irrelevant. If they are well, I am well." Participants reported overall that simply physically being with and engaging with their family "team" was the single most important factor in their SWB and thus overall happiness and quality of life.

These key findings all related to the framework of SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018), which includes intrinsic and mastery-oriented motivation, fulfillment of personal needs to succeed and achieve competence, and a family-oriented relatedness or sense of belonging. Because my target population was different from those involved in most prior related studies, my findings cannot confirm or disconfirm previous findings, but they expand knowledge through exploration of an underresearched group, former Division III athletes in midlife (Senecal, 2017). Additionally, because my study was qualitative, my findings are not generalizable across the entire population from which my participants came (Creswell, 2014). However, my findings provide an understanding of what Division III collaborative team-sports experiences mean to participants regarding their SWB, generativity, and LS. These findings can be used for further study of midlife former Division III intercollegiate athletes to develop treatment for those suffering from stagnation, support the maintenance of SWB, and thus promote positive social change.

In the remainder of Chapter 5, I will more specifically focus on my thematic interpretation and analysis of the findings in this study. Although my findings, again, were not generalizable to the entire population from which my study sample was chosen due to its small size, the participants did provide data that fell into certain repetitive themes. These themes became particularly apparent when examined through the context of SDT and related components. I go on to review the limitations that were inherent in my qualitative research. I also discuss how sound interpretation and analysis of data provided by the study sample expanded knowledge and helped to provide understandings needed to start to fill the research gap identified in Chapter 2. I describe how my findings were largely consistent but sometimes inconsistent with related research discussed in Chapter 2. I also examine how my findings may serve as the basis for further qualitative and especially quantitative or mixed-methods research.

I further discuss how quantitative studies have the potential to confirm and reinforce the extension of knowledge achieved in this study in a generalizable way to midlife former Division III athletes and potentially other social groups in the future. I finish the chapter with further specific discussion of the immediate potential positive social change implications that could be achieved through practice at individual and family levels as well as any potential further beneficial social effects for the future. I conclude the chapter with a strong argument that studies like this one should be continually undertaken and expanded due to the ever changing and increasingly complex nature of American society and intercollegiate sports.

Interpretation of the Findings

Family-Based Subjective Well-Being and Quality of Life in Midlife

The participants reported that SWB was the most important component of quality of life and happiness in midlife. They stated that the skills and values learned or reinforced in their previous Division III intercollegiate team-sports experiences transferred from late adolescence and early adulthood into midlife to help them maintain SWB and overall quality of life in midlife. For example, Participant 10 stated,

> Being a Division III student athlete at one time is in my DNA, I mean it is wrapped into my very being …. I excelled in that atmosphere with other people, not only does it work for me but it also works for other people. So why would I not want to replicate that in my everyday life as an adult. It works for me, it works for others, so why not replicate this every day?

Family based SWB was considered indispensible by every participant to quality of life in midlife.

The participants emphasized that the skills from their experiences were learned whether they had participated much on the court or field in games or not. This theme expands on knowledge in previous studies in which high profile former student athletes suggested that their student athlete experiences had provided them with a good foundation for SWB and a high quality life during early and middle adulthood (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007; Chen et al., 2017; Kaluzna-Wielobob, 2017). Therefore,

my study began to fill the gap in the literature regarding SWB and LS for former lower profile Division III athletes.

In addition to this finding on quality of life, the participants reported that being in the presence of or interacting with their family was the single most important component of SWB. However, Participant 10 reported something as more important to SWB than family. She believed that generativity regarding youth in the community was the most important for SWB for her, though she believed a happy, stable productive family was also important.

Transitions From College and Division III Intercollegiate Team Sports Into Adulthood

Several of the participants reported difficult times and even shock as they transitioned from college and Division III team-sports into a world focused more on work, management, negotiation of adult social issues, and the development of further relationships with family and friends. The participants who described easier transitions to life after college and sports reported special circumstances including earlier experiences with their nuclear family, business environments, a sense of adventure, and the inspirational nature of their initial employment. Despite difficulties, participants reported they eventually successfully transitioned to everyday life, helped at least in part by their earlier sports experiences. These findings expand on existing knowledge provided by former Division I student athletes in previous studies, who also described successful transitions to life after college and sports due to the effect of their intercollegiate team-

sport experiences (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Sauer et al., 2013; Tanguay, Camp, Endres, & Torres, 2012).

Generativity as an Important Component of Midlife Subjective Well-Being and Social Wellness

Though participants reported that family wellness and stability was the first priority in establishing SWB in their lives, they stated thatgenerativity was another essential component of SWB. Every participant reported that they first fully developed the hallmarks of generativity in midlife (see Cheng et al., 2015; Erikson, 1993; Slater, 2003). As noted, Participant 10 even rated generativity as the most important factor in achieving SWB, slightly higher at this point in her midlife than interactions with a well family. However, all participants reported generativity to be indispensible to midlife SWB and LS.

The participants reported a midlife inclination to develop the hallmarks of generativity (Cheng et al., 2017; Erikson, 1992; Slater, 2003). These hallmarks included helping, nurturing, mentoring, and passing on past helpful experiences to younger generations. The participants further reported that doing so positively impacted their SWB. The participants also reported their desires to engage in generative behavior as rooted in family-oriented team-sports environments where SWB as well as success depended in part on leadership, helping and supporting teammates, coping and resiliency, self-confidence and efficacy, and social and community contributions. Many of these former Division III athletes even reported using or having used these athletic experiences

to develop a sort of generative template or framework for living their lives, raising their children, and contributing to family and social well-being and SWB. This finding can extend knowledge beyond that involving former Division I athletes in previous studies who also related a development of these hallmarks of generativity in midlife (Cheng et al., 2015; Erikson, 1992; Lachman et al., 2015; Slater, 2003; Zelinski, et al., 2008). This may encourage more detailed study regarding other specific midlife populations.

Life satisfaction, work, and employment. Many participants also indicated that LS was similar to SWB but was only a contributor to SWB, not a necessary precursor to SWB, or not necessary to SWB at all. Most participants indicated that work could be satisfying but was less important to SWB than maintaining a stable, happy, and productive family. As Participant 5 stated, "I work to live, not live to work." The participants who had no children still reported the well-being of their spouse, other close family members, and close friends as indispensible to SWB. They stated that a family team was more important to SWB than a work team or any other type of team both upon graduation from college and in their current quality of life. For instance, Participant 8 said, "Family is more important . . . You could have the best experiences and be the best you could be at work, but there are way too many cases where the balance tips completely toward work and destroys well-being completely."

Additionally, the participants often related their view of work or employment to what they described as generational distinctions in work ethic and inability or lack of desire to develop closer relationships with younger fellow workmates. They viewed this

younger and larger group of workers as more self-centered and outcome or reward oriented. Nonetheless, the participants depicted their Division III student athlete experiences as eventually helping them to better negotiate work environments as a more significant contributor to their SWB in midlife. They linked this primarily to the development of new and more productive ideas through increasingly diverse work "teams" or "families." This is supported by previous researchers such as Comeaux et al. (2014) and Gull and Rana (2013), who suggested that SWB in younger adults benefitted from acceptance of diversity and a collaborative culture that was well developed in higher level intercollegiate team sports environments. The participants in my study, however, still reported that in some cases it took them some time to recognize and integrate these sorts of benefits into their work experiences.

Further, this finding supports further research regarding the importance of gaining an understanding into how midlife former intercollegiate athletes might transfer skills from their sports activities to later life settings (Senecal, 2017). Trust, sacrifice, role fulfillment, and honesty in the workplace and across life will socially important to understand in the future, especially when sports experiences change over time (Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015; Senecal, 2017). In addition to supporting this research, my findings also suggest the need for additional research into whether there are differences between midlifers who participated in Division I team-sports and those who participated at the Division III level regarding the development and acceptance of positives like diversity and collaboration at work, and if so, how and why

Summary of Key Findings Related to Expanding or Extending Existing Knowledge

The main finding of my study was that the participants' Division III team-sports experiences were linked to family values, collaboration, stability, and teamwork; an indispensable precursor to SWB. SWB, in turn, was essential to the participants' awareness of the continuing need for family wellness and the subsequent development of generativity and its maintenance. This finding could lead to further studies concerning generativity regarding former Division III team-sport athletes or other midlife groups.

Some specific positive aspects of Division III team-sport experiences that led to subjective well-being and life satisfaction were identified. Neither existing studies nor my study reveal which intercollegiate sports experiences might better contribute to midlife SWB and generativity. However, the participants described some component experiences that they personally derived from their intercollegiate team-sports experiences that they deemed necessary to maintain SWB in midlife. The participants described coping, resilience, and what several described as "perseverance" or "mental toughness" as skills and values necessary to overcome stress and adversity in midlife. All of them further reported that these skills and values became particularly well-developed within their former Division III team-sports environments, which helped them maintain SWB and engage in generativity today.

This description was consistent with the studies recounted earlier in the literature review in which former Division I student athletes and other high-level former athletes were the participants. For instance, Tamminen et al. (2013), Collins and McNamara

(2012), and Dias, Cruz, and Fonseca (2012) suggested that anxiety and stress appeared to be naturally embedded in competitive, intercollegiate collaborative sports environments. They noted that these challenges promoted the development of transferable coping and resilience related skills while still engaged in intercollegiate athletics. Cowden et al. (2014) stated that these skills equated with the mental toughness many elite athletes develop during sports activities. These findings establish the basis for further studies that could replicate, confirm and extend my findings. Therefore, my findings could serve as the basis for continuing to fill the gap in such literature beyond the Division I and higher profile levels of sport to the larger group of former Division III team-sport athletes in midlife. Such studies could also reveal and explain any differences between life stages and levels of the sports participation regarding coping, resilience, and potentially improved SWB in midlife.

Many of the participants in my study also reported that they developed the notion of setting reasonable, intrinsic or mastery oriented, process-type goals as another means to SWB, generativity, and a stable, healthy, collaborative and loving family. This finding is consistent with earlier findings by Stults-Kolehmainen et al. (2013) who also focused on Division III athletes. Stults-Kolehmainen et al. found that Division I athletes do possess intrinsic goals and motivation but also perceive the need for extrinsic, results or reward-oriented motivation. At the same time, they also found that Division III athletes are completely intrinsically motivated to reach their goals. The results of my qualitative, phenomenological study do not solve the issue of the paucity of literature and scholarship

concerning this topic nor can they confirm the findings of studies involving other groups of former intercollegiate athletes. They do, however, begin to fill the research gap. They also expand the base of knowledge to suggest studies that could identify and inform any potential connections between Division III or intercollegiate team-sports at any level with midlife SWB and LS.

Work and LS as means to an end of essential family-oriented subjective well-being. Some of the participants in my study believed that while not crucial to midlife SWB, work and the often gradual development of work teams could be important bases for LS which in turn could serve as part of the foundation for family oriented and SWB. Others reported thinking LS, when it existed, was not necessary for someone to possess SWB. They all reported the belief that one needed to possess and live with SWB if they were to enjoy LS. When it came to SWB, however, the study participants reported LS was at most a secondary and supportive factor to family well-being in developing and maintaining SWB. LS was described as important in terms of what a participant wanted but it was only based on personal wants and not needs.

Work was variously described in my study as an important means of stability for the family, provided health insurance for the family, and also financial wellness necessary to the family's future. This contrasts with the SWB and the family wellness that my study suggests *must* serve as its basis for high quality of life for midlife former Division III team-sport student athletes. My study, therefore, extends knowledge in suggesting that unlike anticipated in some prior studies participants felt that membership

in a satisfying work team and LS, while good, were not indispensible across the board for a high quality of life in midlife. For midlife former Division III team-sport student athletes, my study suggests induction of testable theories and hypotheses that the reality of a good life comes down ultimately to SWB based on family success, closeness, collaboration, and productivity, as well as a subsequent midlife state of generativity.

Findings in relation to previous research on midlife for former Division III team-sport student athletes. Few researchers in previous studies concentrated specifically on Division III team-sport experiences and any impact they had on non-sports, later facets of life. Rettig & Hu (2016), Senecal, (2017), and Warehime, et al. (2017) all suggested that former Division III team-sport student athletes are the most under-researched group of former student athletes. I did not, however, find a complete absence of such studies. In addition to the Stults-Kolehmainen et al. (2013) study, Griffith and Johnson (2002) found that the nature of Division III sports experiences led to better integration of athletic and other life goals. All of the participants in my study reported the experience of this phenomenon starting in college and continuing into their present day lives. None of them indicated that their lives would have been the same, then and now, without their prior Division III team-sport experiences. As consistently reported by Milroy et al. (2014), most participants cited a physical health component in being responsible to their families and maintaining their SWB. Several participants included not overly indulging in alcohol as part of this responsibility. Finally, the participants all reported maintaining high grade point averages throughout their collegiate careers. This

is consistent with the findings of Robst and Keil (2000) who found Division III student athletes consistently reported higher grade point averages than their non-athlete counterparts. The fortification of some of these studies by my findings suggests further study of how and why some of these Division III team-sport experiences might have the impact they did upon these former intercollegiate athletes and then how the affect, if any, could relate to other athlete and non-athlete midlife populations as a basis for an even greater social good.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Findings in a Self-Determination Theory Context

Many of the findings discussed above clearly appear to relate to the values and skills that serve as hallmarks of SDT (Lumpkin, 2018: Ryan and Deci, 2000). In the next section I will discuss how the findings in this study can all be described and better understood under the theoretical umbrella of SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This will include an analytic discussion of how their Division III sport environments were ripe for the development of and application of SDT in their lives to achieve the SWB my participants reported. I will also provide analysis as to how the participants' Division III coaches were described as having performed their jobs using SDT related principles, and how SDT appears to have guided participants along the path to, and has helped them maintain, midlife SWB and an integral state of generativity.

The relationship of subjective well-being and self-determination theory. The findings in this study which was designed to explore current SWB, LS, and meanings of sports participation for midlife former Division III team-sport student athletes appear to

be built and colored by SDT and related principles. I found this to be especially true when I examined them through the lens of SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018).

Moller and Sheldon (2019) took a closer look at this issue and indicated that SDT may involve a set of skills that become especially well developed and reinforced in non-scholarship intercollegiate athletes such as those at the Division III . They found that athletic scholarships awarded at all other NCAA levels of competition tend to have both the short and long term affect of decreasing intrinsic motivation throughout post- college and later stages of life (Moller & Sheldon, 2019). Along with the development of life skills, relatedness, self-efficacy, and needs fulfillment for success, (Hagler, Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2016; Ryan and Deci, 2016 Sherman et al. 2016), intrinsic motivation has been found to be a hallmark of SDT (Lumpkin and Achen, 2018). Thus, whether social well-being or SWB comes first for former Division III team-sport student athletes may not be important to a positive quality of life through midlife as long as healthy SWB is ultimately established and maintained before and through that time. This literature along with the findings in my study suggest, therefore, that a social/family based SWB could, indeed, be a positive precursor to long term overall quality of life (Hagler et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2016; Sherman et al. 2016). Other theories notwithstanding, an SDT-related framework such as those that appeared to be developed in Division III team-sport environments by the participants, could be found to help explain and serve as a crucial element to both social well-being and SWB in midlife stages.

My study, thus, extends existing knowledge and suggests testing the theory that SDT is something that could potentially be confirmed to be an essential product of intercollegiate team-sports, not just at the Division III but perhaps at any level or even in non-athletic settings. My research could also even serve as the basis for study of non-athlete related social groups and how by embracing the helpful SDT-related qualities developed in intercollegiate sports; they too may develop generativity and have a positive impact on society in general.

A closer look at the questions and findings through the lens of self-determination theory. I noted at the outset of my study that in its most basic interpretation, SDT consists of three main pillars. These pillars include autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). These things all relate in some way to leaders and social entities being cognizant of each individual group member's needs for success. The hallmarks of SDT involve human motivation and the nature of the need for individuals to not only be self-aware and self-regulating but also to be part of something larger than themselves; something bigger than the sum of its parts. Such entities could involve the family, sports team, or business team (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). This indicates that SDT can be at the root of both individual and social needs. The suggestion from both my study and those cited above in this section is that both SWB and social/family well-being were important factors in quality of life for anyone. These main characteristics of SDT appear to be consistent with the findings in my study that some Division III student-athletes have, through their sport, become rooted in the hallmarks of

SDT, become socially well, and as a natural result had begun to enjoy SWB and a high overall quality of life.

The participants in my study made it clear that while they believed SWB to be the most important precursor or component of SWB that the establishment of SWB was dependent on a variety of other precursors and needs like family relatedness and well-being, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy and awareness. These all represent skills and values within the framework of SDT (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). To take this explanation and understanding a bit further; for the participants in this study, the Division III team-sports concept of an intense and intimate family-based leadership function was reported as a necessary precursor to SWB. Lumpkin and Achen (2018) indicated that a family type of leadership is entirely based on SDT and most of its inclusive skills and values include awareness, empathy, fairness, integrity, intrinsic motivation, trust, relationships, respect, and self-management. As noted in my findings, all participants stated these skills and characteristics were important to establishing relatedness with, and the well being of their families.

The participants in my study also noted the importance of engaging in generativity with younger generations along with various sorts of other mental and physical wellness as parts of a foundation to develop, maintain, and support SWB. While no participant used the term “SDT” on their own, they all described a progression of employing what are the hallmarks of SDT to establish the social/family foundations that support SWB. SDT appeared to be a helpful and accurate precursor to develop the

leadership, resilience, coping, and other social and familial group skills for past and present Division I and similar elite team-sports participants. This was clearly described in DeFreese & Smith (2013), Kaluzna-Wielobob (2017), Readdy et al. (2014), and Stults-Kolehmainen at al. (2013) as necessary to develop or increase and maintain SWB. Scholars such as Curry (1993), Griffith and Johnson (2002), and Robst and Kiel (2000) also arrived at findings consistent with those in my study where participants described that collaborative sports at the Division III level are a good environment for developing SDT related skills and values. They suggested this was so because in Division III sports the potential environmental confounds present in higher levels of higher level NCAA sports do not exist, something also found recently in Moller and Sheldon (2019). These confounds involved athletic scholarships and a win at all costs coaching influences. My findings, therefore, led to an extension of useful basic knowledge for former Division III team-sport athletes and the possibility for an eventual confirmation or conclusion that SWB, social well-being, and SDT supportive ingredients are essential to a high quality of life in midlife for former intercollegiate team-sport athletes from any Division. SDT appeared to be a good lens through which to understand the themes and findings of my study, and how they can potentially serve as a springboard to other confirmatory qualitative and quantitative studies.

Division III athletic participation and self-determination theory. My findings, thus, suggest that SDT could be used as a lens to even better discover, understand, and confirm the phenomenon of SWB and LS against the meanings that midlifers now

attribute to former Division III team-sport student athlete experiences. Additionally, the participants brought forth themes that suggested SDT and its several components including; intrinsic goal setting and motivation, coping and resilience, LS, helping, altruistic, or generative behavior, work ethic, and transitional life-stage abilities (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018) were developed and perfected from their Division III team-sport, student athlete experience. As noted earlier, it is suggested that these skills and values were used to establish family wellness and relatedness, SWB and an overall positive life for them.

Some participants indicated that they went as far as to use the skills and values as developed over the course of their Division III team-sports student athlete experiences as a sort of framework or template for raising their families and carrying on through their day to day lived experiences in midlife with SWB and often LS. Many participants provided direct descriptions and perceptions of their Division III coaches' responsibilities as helping to develop good young women and men rather than winning at all costs; perceptions consistent with the few previous Division III studies in the field (Curry, 2003; Robst & Kiel, 2000, Sturm et al., 2011).

This finding also contributes to a more in-depth understanding of how athletic scholarships have recently been found to be a detriment to development of SDT and intrinsic motivation for many higher profile athletes from participation in intercollegiate sports through decades including midlife (Moller & Sheldon, 2019). Most participants in my study, while not having the knowledge to compare Division I and II experiences to

their own, extended knowledge by describing their feelings and beliefs that the atmosphere and environment intrinsic to Division III team-sports could well be one that is relatively non-confounding and extremely ripe for helping them integrate their original athletic, and past and present non-athletic life goals (Chiu, et al., 2014; Gearity, 2012). Central to this theme was that participants emphasized SDT-related principles of the relatedness needed in a family-oriented team environment, coping and resilience in the face of sports' intrinsic stressors, and purely intrinsic motivation. My findings, therefore, not only serve as a basis for future study and discovery of potentially new understandings, but through application of SDT-related skills and values appear to directly expand, and help to better explain certain knowledge already suggested in the field of intercollegiate sports.

Limitations

Qualitative studies always have their limitations due to the relatively small sample requirements and potential researcher bias or world views that could slip into and affect the collection and interpretation of the data no matter how transparent and reflexive the researcher might be (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2000, 2014). I did take steps to reduce this as much as possible in this study by transparency in laying out my potential biases from the beginning of the study, bracketing and reflexivity in data collection, and interpretation as recommended by Creswell (2014), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (2000, 2014). Qualitative studies, nonetheless, are not generalizable over entire populations due to the inability of only 10 to 15 people to be representative of the

entire population from which the sample participants were selected (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990, 2014).

It was further difficult to recruit a sample due to privacy concerns at the alma maters attended by my participants. The necessary solution involving individual distribution of sample letters by acquaintances with whom I had no professional, business relationships, or close friendships with, did result in the benefit of a less geographically and sport restricted sample than I anticipated. While I was able to recruit a sample population of participants which included both men and women who lived in locations from the Southwest to the East Coast of the United States, most were located in the Midwest.

While the participants in the sample played football, soccer, basketball, and/or softball, the majority of participants were ex-football players. A more team-sport diverse sample would be better to recruit for future related research. The sample in my study contained seven men and three women There was a less than equal sex distribution in the sample population. This represented a limitation in this study. Finally, most though not all participants were 35-40 in age. It would have been better to have a more even distribution over the 35 through 50 year midlife age span in the study population. I recommend that in any future qualitative studies related to my topic that researchers to obtain a larger group of responding participants to better distribute sex and age. I further suggest that potential participants include information concerning the sport participated in intercollegiately, the general geographic region of their university from which they

matriculated, as well the general geographic region in which they now reside if they are interested in participating in the study.

Most research studies are also limited with regard to the inability of researchers to control for all potential confounding factors in the data and findings. This study contains that limitation though the qualitative, phenomenological interview nature of the study does allow for the detection and description of more initially unseen confounds than the limited categories of data can in a quantitative statistical study. Creswell (2014), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (1990, 2014) also point out that this is why this particular method and design of study is best for discovering and developing understandings of phenomena previously not well understood and then developing and measuring theories that can be inducted from such understandings.

Recommendations

The findings in my study suggest that SDT developed through participation in Division III team-sport has helped a group of former Division III team-sport student athletes to develop SWB based on family wellness, stability and relatedness. This has led to a reported overall high quality of life in midlife for the study participants. I, therefore, would recommend further potential qualitative studies to better understand a couple of things about SWB and LS for a much larger participant group drawn from the population targeted in this study through one of the other qualitative study designs. This should then more fully confirm and advance knowledge with regard to the quality of life for the overall population from which my sample was chosen.

I also recommend further studies be designed and conducted to obtain a more detailed picture of the value and application of specific SDT-related elements, life skills, and values developed and refined not just in Division III sports as found here but also to examine how they compare with skills and values reported as developed by former participants in Division I and Division II NCAA intercollegiate team-sports. Such future studies, in turn, could serve as a basis to more fully investigate, understand, and induct theories for measurement and quantitative comparison purposes across the various levels of NCAA competition for mid-life former team-sports athletes. The result ultimately would confirm findings that would serve in a guide for the discovery, development and implementation of the best intercollegiate team-sport derived skills and life values for the entire population of former NCAA team-sport student athletes. Eventually, practitioners and researchers would be able to use the findings of such studies to engage in tipping even non-former intercollegiate team sport student athlete midlifers towards a state of generativity and away from stagnation.

Implications

The findings and interpretations from this study provide a valuable extension of knowledge regarding daily lived midlife SWB, LS, and meanings of prior Division III team-sport experiences regarding the extent that they did or did not relate to SWB and LS in midlife. The population from which my sample of participants was purposively chosen was an under researched one according to my literature review (Senecal, 2017; Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015; Warehime et al. 2017). Therefore, providing the

participants the opportunity to describe their lived experiences, thoughts, feelings, and perceived realities led to new knowledge and understandings that can serve as a basis for the awareness of SDT and other related skills as developed in the lower profile level of NCAA Division III intercollegiate team sports. These results further suggest additional qualitative and comparative research expanding and increasing knowledge regarding this and other populations of former NCAA athletes from higher levels and even midlife non-former-athletes. This ultimately should lead to practices that will develop more SWB, LS, and generativity in midlife. These things could not only positively impact these midlifers themselves, but through generativity, positively impact other societal groups. These groups could include adolescents, young adults and older adults; the latter of whom midlifers are often called upon to provide care for (Hagler, et al., 2016; Mayordomo, et al., 2016, Slater, 2003)

The participants in this study reported numerous, strong, positive social skills, and values were carried forward from their Division III team-sports experiences. They reported using these largely SDT-related life skills, frameworks, and values today. The results of my study also, therefore, tend to offer a potential basis for helping refute the belief held by some that intercollegiate sports are an overall negative factor in a collegiate experience or college education.

The results of my study strongly suggest the immediate practice benefit that if one is able to participate full-time in a Division III team-sport, and that the experience would be one that matches their personality and other psychosocial traits, that they should not be

discouraged from participating. The participants here suggest that Division III intercollegiate team-sports participation would likely contribute to these individuals' SWB and the well-being of society both now and in the future. The paucity of findings of negative aspects of such experiences, both in my study and previously, is conspicuous. The caveat, of course, is that recommendations for such activities cannot be generalized across all potential, present, or past Division III team-sport athletes on the basis of a single qualitative, phenomenological questioning study. The promise of my study, however, came though the strong and consistent understandings that did emerge from my sample population. My participants stated the strong belief that participation in a variety of Division III team-sports, for several consistent reasons, led to highly positive SWB and, therefore, a high overall quality of midlife. These findings can be considered as a basis for further study as described above. This in turn could lead to further research, and potentially a basis for researchers, mentors, coaches and practitioners of all types to be able to determine whether participation in intercollegiate team sports should be recommended where and when possible. The results of such research could also indicate more fully and specifically what it is about these experiences that lead one in midlife to high levels of SWB, generativity, and away from stagnation. A treatment for midlife stagnation could be a potential finding of such further research. As such, another implication of this research is that it may not only benefit the SWB of the participants and other former student-athletes, but lead to non-former-intercollegiate athletes to find an alternate source for the values and skills to engage in valuable midlife generativity.

Conclusion

The findings and understandings that came from my study provided me with a firm basis to conclude that SDT and related life skills and values for my participants were developed, perfected, and are currently used by virtue of participation in Division III team-sports. Further, on the basis of the data provided by my participants, I concluded that these skills and values were transferable to midlife for my participants and critical to their development and maintenance of socially impactful SWB and generativity during that life stage. These skills and values fell nearly exclusively within the umbrella of SDT. They included instrumental life values and skills such as intrinsic motivation, active coping and resilience, process goal setting, LS, the development of well, stable families, an overall framework for raising a family and enjoying a good, overall quality of life, and impacting society positively through generativity (Lumpkin and Achen, 2018).

A few observers of intercollegiate athletics, apparently on the basis of the news of several specific scandals at high profile NCAA institutions in recent years, have chosen to cast some forms of intercollegiate athletics in a negative light as a part of student athletes' overall collegiate experience. These perceptions were reported by Gayles and Hu (2009), Moller & Sheldon, (2019) and Williams et al. (2010). The results of my study are consistent with the results in these studies in that their authors found these negative social perceptions to be inaccurate. These and other studies contain reports that intercollegiate athletic participantion, even at a high level, serve as a strong basis for forming an overall positive college experience (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Gayles &

Hu, 2009; Gayles, et al., 2012; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2008). My study extends these and other existing studies to Division III and midlife in terms of new understandings and a basis for further study.

Finally, I conclude that there is a basis for continuing to examine, understand, and explore the skills and values that are often developed and reinforced in Division III and other levels of intercollegiate sports. It is critical to understand any potentially positive contributions former intercollegiate team sport athletics can offer midlife individuals and, thus, society overall given the higher possibility for either stagnation *or* generativity specific to midlife (Fadjukoff et al., 2010; Manukyan et al., 2015; Mayordomo et al. 2016). It is important to tip the scales away from stagnation and toward generativity for all midlifers. This study serves as one basis for further studies that could lead to a thorough understanding of the how's and whys the skills and life values often developed in Division III and other levels of intercollegiate sports work towards an overall positive quality of life for midlifers. Such continuing expansion of knowledge is necessary to help midlifers continually develop and maintain socially beneficial skills and values because the nature of society and college experiences continually change and become more complex over time (Senecal, 2017).

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