



Sports Specialization of Female Division I Athletes on a Sports Team



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BACKGROUND

- The most important reason for playing sports is having fun, and lack of fun is a main reason for dropping out of sports (Petlichkoff, 1992).
- Sports specialization is choosing to play one sport at the exclusion of all others (LaPrade, 2016).
- Athletes choose to specialize in the sport they are enjoying the most. The second and third most frequent reasons to specialize are to earn a college scholarship and to be the best at that sport, respectively (Post et al., 2016).
- Elite athletes specialize later than the non-elite athletes** (Post et al., 2016).
- While specializing has benefits, highly specialized athletes have negative experiences with sports, mainly overuse injuries (Post et al., 2017).

PURPOSE

- The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of sport specialization as it pertains to female NCAA Division I athletes on sports teams, and to better understand the positive and negative experiences associated with their sport choice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

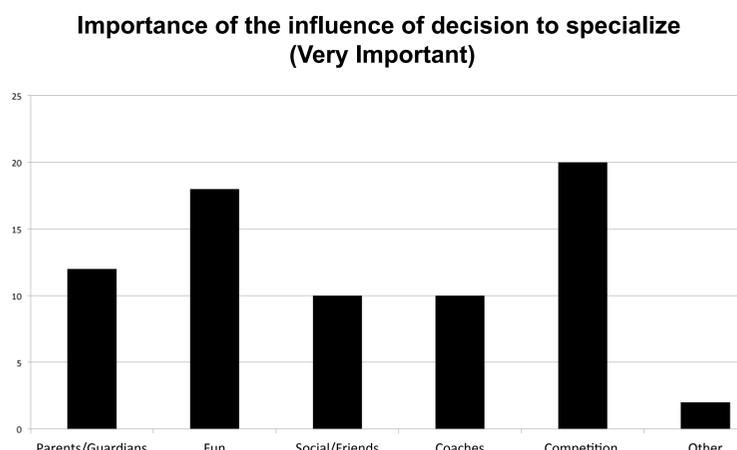
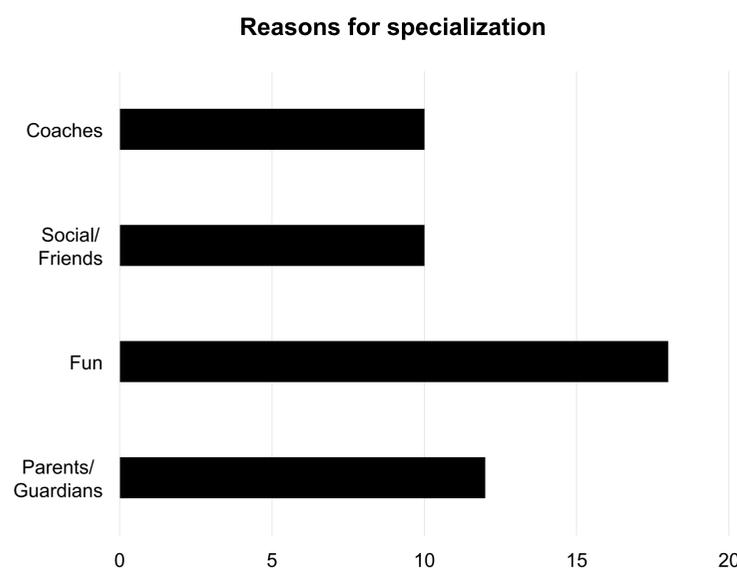
- What is the nature and extent of sport specialization among female team sport athletes competing at the NCAA Division I level?
- Is there a difference in level of sport enjoyment between athletes who chose to specialize in their current sport prior to coming to UNH and those who did not?
- Is there a difference in athletes' perceptions of negative sport experiences between those who chose to specialize in their current sport prior to coming to UNH and those who did not?
- How do female NCAA Division I athletes describe benefits of sport specialization and playing multiple sports prior to college.

METHODS

- A mixed methods approach was used for this research.
- A survey was constructed on Qualtrics based on previous sports specialization studies (Post et al., 2016) (Russell et al., 2017).
- Emails were sent to familiar Division I female athletes on sports teams.
 - An initial email started the snowball sampling.
 - An email provided the link to complete the Qualtrics survey.
 - Prompted participants to send the link to fellow teammates and female athletes.
 - A follow-up email was sent two weeks later as needed.
- Final response was **N=45** out of a possible 127.

SPORT SPECIALIZATION

- Specialized Athletes (**N=29** 64.44%)
 - 96.43%** trained for 9 or more months per year.
 - 57.14%** specialized between **14 and 16 years old**.



SPORT ENJOYMENT

- One-way ANOVA
 - No significant differences were found.

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rate your level of enjoyment in your current collegiate sport. - Not specialized	16	4	3	7	5.38	1.147
Rate your level of enjoyment in your current collegiate sport. - Specialized	28	4.00	3.00	7.00	5.1786	1.09048
Valid N (listwise)	0					

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

- Athletes who specialized in their sport were significantly more likely to report having experienced **psychological stress** ($\chi^2=3.71$, $df=1$, $p=.05$), **sport staleness** ($\chi^2=15.07$, $df=1$, $p<.0001$), and **sport burnout** ($\chi^2=4.87$, $df=1$, $p=.03$) than athletes who did not specialize.

BENEFITS OF BOTH

- Specialized athletes
 - Social
 - Health
 - Leadership
 - Career
 - Time Management

“Making friends that I can call my second family.”

- Multi-sport athletes
 - Variety - Being busy

“Loved the variety.”

DISCUSSION

- Sport enjoyment is not a function of specialization.**
- Sport specialization does not appear to be an epidemic at a young age.
- Athletes who specialized in their sport were more likely to report having negative sport experiences (stress, staleness, burnout).**
 - Future studies can examine why these athletes chose to continue in their sport and not drop out.
- Limitations
 - There is not a full representation of female athletes.
 - Did not interview those that dropped out.