



## BACKGROUND

- Concussion is a complex injury that can result in short term physical, cognitive, and psychosocial impairments, potentially impacting occupational performance.
- College student athletes are at a crucial time for identity development and have unique physical and cognitive demands both academically and in their varied roles as athletes, students, and peers on campus.
- Change in participation in preferred occupations due to concussion injury can negatively influence sense of self, thus leading to a possible disruption of identity

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is there a gap between desired occupational engagement of the student athlete, post-concussion, and their perception of what they can do?
2. To what extent do the occupations that college student athletes engage in contribute to their or their identity and can a gap impact or influence their perceived identity?
3. Can systematic examination of the description of personal experiences by student athletes with concussion provide evidence of a connection between occupational gaps and identity?

## METHODS

- Design: Explanatory sequential, mixed methods design
- Data Collection:
  - Occupational Gaps Questionnaire (OGQ)
  - Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)
  - In-depth interview
- Data Analysis: descriptive statistics for OGQ and AIMS to determine frequencies and percentages. An emergent strategy was used with the qualitative data leading to the development of themes.

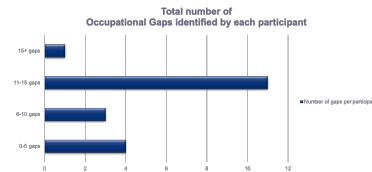
## RESEARCH FOCUS

The focus of this research was to describe how concussion injuries in college student athletes may pose a threat to perceived identity based on disruptions in preferred occupations.

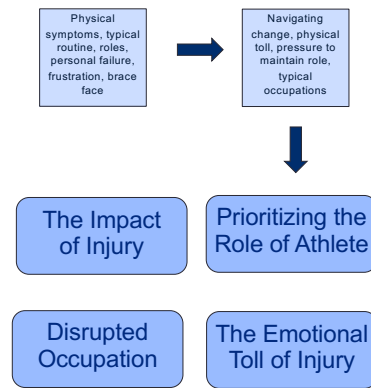
## RESULTS

### Occupational Gaps Questionnaire

Occupational Activity	% participants with Gaps	N=19
Using the Computer	74%	14
Involvement in clubs/activities	74%	14
Participating in sports	74%	14
Participating in outdoor activities	68%	13
Watching TV	68%	13
Transporting oneself	58%	11
Studying	58%	11



### Qualitative Themes



### Integrated Data

Integration occurs between the quantitative data analysis in the first phase of the research and the qualitative data collection in the second phase. Four of the participants with identified occupational gaps were interviewed to provide an expanded explanation of their perceived gaps and their experiences related to athletic identity. The following participant quotes further explain and support the quantitative data.

"I have never had to miss a practice or anything. This one was different, it took forever. *I felt like I wasn't the same person*, like I dropped my status on the team, I was letting them down"

"It wasn't the same after my injury, *everything was normal for them but not for me. Not to be weird, but it was kinda like I was left out*"

"I feel like I put a lot of pressure on myself to play, and when I couldn't play, *I didn't know what to do*"  
"This is honestly something I struggled with when I was injured, *the feeling of identity and belonging, like I am a [sport] player, but is that all?*"

*"[Sport] is definitely something that I am for sure.* It is my entire life. I don't know what I would do without it"

"All of my activities revolve around [sport]. So then, I get injured, and I am separated from my team. It was like, *what am I supposed to do? Who am I? It was like I needed to find out who I was without my team*"

## DISCUSSION

- It is at this sport related concussion injury-identity convergence that the researcher hoped to draw and expand on previous research to address a gap in knowledge on the lived and personal experience of student athletes with concussion and how they have come to make sense of their disrupted occupations and identity.
- This study informs us beyond the physical recovery, and the psychological and social aspects of quality of life, to consider the return to self, specifically focusing on the student athletes perceived sense of self related to athletic identity
- An unexpected finding to emerge from the qualitative interviews was the idea that student athletes may misrepresent their symptoms to themselves and others. To maintain their strong athletic identity, participants minimized their symptoms and even returned to sport before full recovery.
- Limitations: There were two primary limitations with this research. The first limitation was related to sample size and the second was the diversity of the population.

## CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Student athletes who are struggling with loss or change in role, as well as the need to fill occupational time may benefit from the holistic approach offered through occupational therapy as they attempt to reengage in meaningful occupation after injury.
- Not being able to participate in a primary occupation of sport negatively impacts athletic identity and perceived sense of self. The implication of disrupted identity during this critical phase could lead to halted or changed identity development, and may also be associated with an increased risk of depression and/or negative behavior following athletic injury
- College student athletes who sustain a concussion would benefit from increased support post injury, not just related to physical recovery and returning to the classroom, but to social emotional recovery as well.
- Occupational therapists have specialized training in the social emotional development that is needed to acknowledge the potential for the post-concussion emotional sequelae and work with the athletic and college community to increase or enhance the protocol to ensure transition to a more complete physical and emotional recovery from injury.