¿Por Qué Jugar? A Study on Sport Socialization among Hispanic and Latina Female Student-Athletes.

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Hispanics and Latinos are currently the largest ethnic minority in the United States, comprising 17% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). When considering higher education, 16.5% of undergraduate and graduate level students enrolled in colleges or universities identify as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Despite those percentages, representation for Hispanics and Latinos in intercollegiate athletics is lacking. During the 2013-2014 NCAA athletic season, only 4.45% of all female Division I student-athlete’s identified as Hispanic or Latina (NCAA.org, 2015). While this percentage is indeed staggering, it is an increase from the meager 2.41% of Division 1 Hispanic and Latina female student-athletes that participated during the 1999-2000 NCAA athletic season (NCAA, 2015). Although the percentage of Hispanic and Latina female student-athletes has slightly increased over the past 14 years, this still calls into question why so few Hispanic and Latina women participate at the elite level of sport.

Previous research aimed at examining sport participation among Hispanic and Latina female athletes have reported conflicting sport participation intentions and outcomes. For example, Erkut, Fields, Sing, and Marx (1996), examined Latina girls in upper school sport participation and found that Latina girls were as likely to identify sports as an activity that made them feel good about themselves as were girls from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Contrastingly, Erkut and Tracy (2002) later found that within each Latina subgroup (Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican), girls actually reported lower involvement in sport activities, lower self-esteem, and lower scores on physical well-being than did boys.

While research has previously focused on an analysis of Hispanic and Latina youth sport participation and involvement experiences, there is a gap in the literature aimed at examining the experiences of Hispanic and Latina females who have reached elite levels in their respective sports. The aim of this current study is to examine the factors that may have contributed to consistent sport participation for Hispanic and Latina female athletes throughout their youth and college careers. More specifically, this project will use a phenomenological approach to examine the socialization processes of current elite Hispanic and Latino NCAA Division I female student-athletes. This population of athletes will provide great insight into the socialization processes that have assisted a small number of Hispanic and Latina athletes to thrive in sport. This research will extend the body of research on Hispanics and Latinas and potentially provide researchers and practitioners’ evidence of successful processes that can be used to generate more meaningful and more consistent sport participation among Hispanic and Latina females.

Previous research has successfully applied the framework of socialization processes in order to examine patterns of sport involvement (Brustad, 1992; McPherson & Brown, 1988). According to Brustad (1992), socialization influences are integrally related to children’s sport involvement. More specifically, socializing behaviors have been linked to sport involvement, self-perceptions of ability, and affective consequences of sport engagement (Brustad, 1992). Further, previous research has identified differing social influences that impact sport participation for varying cultures (Claeys, 1978; Stensaaesen, 1976; Patriksson, 1979). For example, Belgian sport participants tended to be influenced by parents, family members, peers, and teachers, while Norwegian sport participants were strongly influenced by socioeconomic factors (Claeys, 1978; Stensaaesen, 1976).

This qualitative study will explore the sport socialization process of Hispanic and Latina NCAA Division I student-athletes through the use of three distinct research questions:

1) How do Hispanic/Latina females develop interest in playing a sport?

2) What factors influence the selection of a sport for Hispanic/Latina athletes?
3) What factors contribute to persistence in sport participation?

Participants for this study will be selected using a homogenous sampling technique (Patton, 2002), as we look to examine the Hispanic and Latina student-athlete subgroup, specifically. Thus, participants for this study must identify as Hispanic or Latina; they must also play an NCAA Division I sponsored sport.

Data collection will occur between November 2015 and January 2016. Participants will be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews that explore sport participation from childhood to college, factors influencing participation, and factors influencing persistence in sport participation. Interviews will be conducted until saturation is reached (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) or up to 15 participants. An interview protocol has been developed and tested through two initial pilot studies. Three participants took part in the initial pilot study in early October 2015. Following the initial pilot study, the interview protocol was modified. With the modified protocol, two additional participants took part in a second pilot study. The pilot study participants are current student-athletes at two different NCAA Division I institutions. Based on the feedback from both the first and second pilot studies, interview questions were modified in order to clarify and streamline the interview.

Once the interview cycle has been completed, the data will be transcribed and coded by three researchers in order to examine the phenomenon of Hispanic and Latina female student-athlete socialization into sport as well as persistence through sport to college participation. Initially, an inductive approach will be used in first cycle of coding allowing for patterns to emerge naturally. A second cycle of coding will involve thematic construction. The three researchers will compare patterns and themes after each cycle of coding in order to ensure validity. Triangulation via external research on the participants will be used in order to maintain reliability.