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NAVAJO HOOPS & HIGHER LEARNING:  
A Study of Female High School Basketball Players and  
Their Post-Secondary Academic Success

by  
Traci Nemechek

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the  
GRADUATE INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM IN AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES  
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For the Degree of  
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In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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SIGNED:

*Traci Nemeth*

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

*K. Tsianina Lomawaima*  
K. Tsianina Lomawaima  
Associate Professor of American Indian Studies

*April 30, 1997*  
Date

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother who always believed I could.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES .....	1
LIST OF TABLES .....	2
ABSTRACT .....	3
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	4
Setting .....	4
Redrock and Navajo High School.....	7
Anglo Teacher.....	10
Original Research .....	13
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	22
High School Dropouts .....	22
College Persistence.....	25
Navajo Culture and Education.....	29
Athletics.....	30
3. METHODOLOGY.....	46
Demographics .....	49
Selection Process .....	55
Interview Process .....	60
Hypothesis.....	63
4. THE COMMUNITY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS "BALLERS"	64
Navajo Culture.....	64
Formal Education.....	77
Athletics .....	80

Redrock & Its Athletes: Support or Pressure?	85
5. NAVAJO HIGH SCHOOL.....	95
Educational Setting.....	95
Social Setting.....	100
Athletic Setting.....	107
6. THE ACADEMIC/ATHLETIC DILEMMA .....	111
The Roles of the Student-Athlete.....	111
Academic Standards?.....	115
Synergy vs.Sacrifice.....	120
7. INDIAN EDUCATION: STATE OF SURVIVAL OR REAL ACHIEVEMENT? .....	128
Diminishing Returns: The Problem of Unpreparedness.....	128
The Positive Impact of Basketball Participation.....	134
Summer Programs as a Bridge to Preparedness.	135
The Dilemma of Navajo Public Education .....	137
8. IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF.....	139
Seeing, Knowing, Remembering: The Significance of Navajo Culture & Values.....	139
The Significance of the Support Group.....	146
Basketball as a Structure for Reinforcement.	153
9. CONCLUSION.....	158
Recommendations.....	164
Implications for Further Research.....	171

10. APPENDIX 1 .....	174
Mother and Daughter Sports Day Flyer.....	174
“If You Let Me Play” Nike Advertisement....	175
11. APPENDIX 2 .....	176
Pseudonyms.....	176
Subject’s Consent Form .....	177
Thesis Explanation/Interview Letter.....	180
Questionnaire .....	182
Questions .....	186
12.WORKS CITED .....	197

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
3.1 NHS Basketball Players' College Attendance and Success.....	47
3.2 Comparison of NHS Basketball Players' College Attendance and Success Group 1 (1990-92) vs. Group 2 (1993-95)...	48
3.3 Class of 1993 Females: Post High School Occupations for All Female Graduates in College Prep Track.....	51
3.4 Teachers at Navajo High School.....	56
3.5 Total Basketball Players and Number Interviewed.....	59
6.1 Cumulative GPA's of NHS Females Interviewed .....	124
6.2 Average ACT Test Scores of NHS Females Interviewed.....	125
9.2 Necessary Skills for College Success.....	163

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table	
9.1 Basketball Players' Perceptions of HOW OTHERS Saw Them in Terms of Successful Leaders, Students, and Athletes.....	160

**ABSTRACT**

This study identifies, describes, and analyzes female Navajo participation in high school basketball and that participation's impact on the students' post-secondary academic experience.

Two major hypotheses were formulated: 1) female Navajo participation in high school basketball does contribute to future post-secondary academic success 2) the basketball players' support group played a significant role in the students' future academic or athletic success.

The total sample of eighteen included former basketball players, former non-athletes, family members, and high school teachers and staff.

My findings were: 1) the support group contributed significantly to the students' future academic and athletic success 2) the importance of Navajo cultural values and philosophy significantly impacted the students' post-secondary academic success 3) participation in basketball began as fun, but transformed into a positive learning experience that reinforced and provided structure for previously learned values from Navajo culture, family, and/or significant mentors and role models.

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Setting

Cold winter nights on the Navajo reservation are a stark contrast to the hot, sweaty gymnasiums that bring communities together in their support of basketball. During the day at school, classmates and teachers verbalize their support and decorated lockers distinguish players from others. Assemblies cater to athletic teams throughout the year, and homecoming royalty is dominated yearly by athletes. At Navajo High School<sup>1</sup> in Arizona 5,000 fans pack the gymnasium, rabidly following their team in its quest for a state championship and the accolades that follow. Entering the building, players are encouraged by the fans: "You can do it," "Kick their ass," "Hey that's Summer Long\* - Can I have your autograph?" After dressing in their red and silver uniforms, the team gathers in the locker room to mentally and spiritually prepare for their test. Players visualize their actions and success, followed by the coach's explanation of the game plan. Corn pollen is passed around and prayers are said. The fire begins to burn stronger and stronger. You

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of those interviewed, pseudonyms for both people and places are used throughout the thesis, and designated by an asterisk.\* Navajo High School (NHS) and the community of Redrock are also pseudonyms.

see it in their eyes. You feel the heat when the team exits the locker room, inching its way towards the court.

The fans become restless as they catch glimpses of the players. The smell of hot dogs, pizza, popcorn and fry bread are constant reminders that it truly is a get together. Grandmas arrive wearing their fancy velveteen blouses and skirts while older men wear cowboy hats decorated with a concho belt around the crown. Children run and play with their friends and relatives living out their own basketball fantasies on the baseline. This building is a monument to "Rezball" and the community. The NBA-quality scoreboard methodically counts down towards zero and the tip-off. Navajo radio and TV stations broadcast live the starters, records and probable strategy to those unable to attend.

The teams enter the court to the cheers of their fans. Circling the court they are intent on their task. Forming two lines, they begin their warmup. With the orange grained basketball in their hands they dribble towards the hoop, spin, fake, jump, shoot, off the glass ... swish. Over and over the players showcase their game in front of basketball-crazed fans who cheer wildly at their magic. The temperature in the gym continues to rise as the anticipation grows as well as the number of fans finding their seats. The horn sounds; the players return to their bench and remove their warmups for player introductions. The crowd quiets just enough to hear their favorite players introduced and then

scream as loud as they can with pride. The coach screams last minute instructions to his team over the crowd noise. They are confident. They put their hands together and announce their intentions, "DEFENSE." They walk confidently toward the center of the court for the jump ball. The center-court design is appropriately a basketball surrounded by a Navajo pattern similar to a wedding basket. The ball is thrown into the air, the two players rise to tip the ball to their teammates' anxiously awaiting hands:

[Y]ou can tell there is a burning fire inside. You'll see that fire in their eyes [and] it just gets bigger.[T]hat one flame [is] just gonna [grow] into a huge fire... [The] ball is tipped [and] that big fire just scatters all over the court. All the emotions scatter up into the bleachers and [it's a] big huge fire. During that whole game you can feel the heat. You can feel it. Everybody's sweating whether they're playing or not. People way up in the bleachers are sweating. They try to find the cool air by opening all the doors, but yet it's just too warm in there. And it continues all through the game until it is finally over...It's just that feeling before the game and everybody gets caught up in it. That's what makes the game a rush. That's the ultimate rush you can get. Sometimes I pull out those old tapes and sit and watch. Even though it's just on video, I can see it and feel it. It'll never go away from an athlete. A true athlete will never let those flames burn out (Little\* 1997).

Rezball is a thrilling, non-stop, full court pressure defense and fast break offense. For two hours this organized chaos becomes the center of attention in Redrock, Arizona.

"Rezball" is king on the Navajo Nation and over time has transformed into a game that borders on being a dangerous

addiction or the ultimate high.

With this unabated community commitment to Rezbball, the question arises: Is this love affair good or bad, and if it is good, can the positives carry over to future success in college and later life? With most research concentrating on the Native Americans<sup>2</sup> dropping out of college, this study will focus on female Navajo high school basketball players who succeed and will ask the question, why? Hopefully, from their answers, educators can reflect on notions and practices, and learn from these young women's success in Navajo hoops and higher education.

### Redrock and Navajo High School

The Navajo reservation sprawls across 19.8 million acres of incredible beauty in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. It is as big as New England but spiritually grounded between four sacred mountains. Traditional Navajos believe that when the people emerged into this world, the Holy People created four mountains to mark the boundaries of the sacred land. Sis Najiní, or Mount Blanca is the eastern mountain located in the Sangre de Cristo Range; Tsoodził, or Mount Taylor is the southern mountain located near Grants, New Mexico; Dook'o'osłííd is the western mountain better known as San

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<sup>2</sup> The terms Native Americans, American Indians, and Native people will be used interchangeably.

Francisco Peak near Flagstaff, Arizona; and the northern mountain, Dibé Nitsaa, or Mount Hesperus is located near Durango, Colorado. Traditionalists believe that life and happiness are possible for anyone who follows the laws of the Holy Ones and live within the boundaries of the sacred mountains.

Within the Navajo Nation lies the community of Redrock with a population of approximately 4,500, the sixth largest town on the reservation. This community is located in the Western Agency, two hours to the nearest town which provides all the necessities. Many of the children who attend this school district are also physically isolated from Redrock. Many live in smaller communities or in several buildings clustered together far from main roads. These students may ride a bus an hour and a half one way to school. Many are picked up at 6:30 am to arrive at school by 8:00 am and begin class at the high school at 8:15 am. This community and its students are quite isolated from mainstream America.

Although remote, this school district is one of the financially stable districts on the reservation due to the proximity of, and an agreement with, the Bullwinkle Corporation<sup>3</sup>. Because the reservation is on federal land, property taxes do not exist. Therefore, Bullwinkle has agreed to infuse money into the local school system because so many of their employees' children attend the Redrock Unified School District. Consequently, Navajo High School

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<sup>3</sup> This is a pseudonym for a nearby corporation.

has adequate facilities and state of the art technology that many schools in mainstream America lack. The Community Center was funded in part by the Bullwinkle. Not only does the basketball gym reside in this building, but included is a 5000-seat auditorium with make-up and dressing rooms for theatrical productions, and band accommodations include individual sound-proof practice rooms.

Academically, the school prides itself on incorporating technology into the classrooms. Most classrooms have two computers, one for the teacher and one exclusively for student use. Access to the Internet is easily available in virtually every classroom and satellite courses from Northern Arizona University are also provided to the community.

As a result of the physical isolation, size of the community, school district, and love of basketball, it is no wonder that the high school and its activities are the focal point of the community. The community's only recognition comes from the teams' success and scattered media coverage. The community's identity revolves around the success of the athletics teams and the fact that Navajo High School has won numerous league, regional and state championships in various sports in the 3A classification.

Anglo Teacher

In 1989, I was hired as a first year teacher at Navajo High School. I had never been on a reservation or interacted with Indian people. I knew very little about the Navajo culture. I would learn from first-hand experiences in the community, the classroom, and on the basketball court. Having coached for four years in Colorado and played at a small college, I was immediately hired as an assistant basketball coach. I was excited and confident.

My arrival was definitely a transition period. I felt out of place. Recognizing I was the minority, I felt I stuck out like a sore thumb. But my students and colleagues assisted me with my transition. Most of my lessons regarding the Navajo culture came from two trusted Navajo colleagues willing to educate me about multiple facets of Navajo culture. Slowly I learned, but more importantly I learned to respect what is different.

My first two years, I taught learning disabled students and assisted in mainstreaming them into academic classes. My third year I transferred into the Social Studies department and taught U.S. Government, World History, and Psychology. My fifth and sixth year I team taught a Junior U.S. History/English and Senior U.S. Government class. Following my transfer into the social studies department, my teaching philosophy and expectations transformed. I was teaching

required classes and college-prep electives and my expectations of the school, the students, and myself rose accordingly. I believed these Navajo students were capable of anything they set their mind to: attending college, acquiring jobs after high school, or herding sheep. Yet I was determined to raise their expectations of themselves and the quality of their work. I grew weary of many Navajo High School teachers comments: "They're just Indians;" "We shouldn't push them - it goes against their culture." In actuality, Navajo culture values an individual's search for knowledge, and pride in doing the best job possible. It is important not to measure yourself against others, but one should strive to improve herself.

My expectations in the classroom were similar to those on the basketball court. Attention to detail, hard work, teamwork and commitment were necessary for success. In the classroom, tests and assignments were tools for evaluation, while on the basketball court, weekly games became our barometer. Yet with coaching came welcomed perks. Coaches were given certain prep periods so we would not need a sub for our late afternoon classes, and we were rewarded with recognition in the community, and respect. If your teams demonstrated continued success, the players, administrators and community were in your corner. In three years as the junior varsity coach, my record was 38-7. Additionally as varsity assistant coach, the varsity team was in the elite

eight, final four or state runner-up every year between 1990-95. Coaches held enormous power in this small community; several "high profile" coaches were recruited and their coaching salary was not on the district-recognized scale.

As a by-product of this basketball success, I began to question the possible priority of athletics over academics. During my stay, one of my former students was accepted and enrolled at Stanford University, yet few people in the community and none of the administrators knew this fact. How could such a statistically improbable and exciting achievement go unnoticed in this innovative school district recognized in progressive educational circles as "on the cutting edge in Indian education?"

I took a step back and began to study and analyze the relationship between academic and athletic achievement at Redrock. I tried to make sense of it, and I also tried to change the mentality that academics should not receive the attention and commitment that athletics did. My vision was that both academics and athletics should and could have the same commitment, recognition, success. One should not have to suffer at the expense of the other.

As my educational philosophy changed, I questioned the administration in their lack of discipline and ethics regarding students academics, especially for athletes. Many times teachers were "encouraged" to change grades which would maintain an athlete's eligibility, or lower the standards of

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the athletes' performance as a result of team travel. Additionally, athletes who found themselves in trouble, appeared to receive less harsh consequences compared to non-athletes. Bad blood surfaced between coaches and academic teachers after continuing confrontations. Teachers were upset that athletes missed so many classes and could not come in after school to make up the work due to practice, but coaches stressed the point that the athletes, as a group, had the best grade point averages in the school. As a member of both groups, I recognized merit in both views. In reality, several of the coaches made sure their players followed all school rules and lived up to classroom expectations or they did not play.

As a result of my frustration with this inequity, I chose to go back to school and get my masters degree. My teaching and coaching experiences at Navajo High School provide the starting point for this thesis.

### Original Research

In the Fall of 1995, I began my studies at the University of Arizona and my job as Coordinator of Basketball Operations for the Arizona Women's Basketball Team. During the early part of the semester, I watched a young Navajo player on our team make the transition from border-town

education to major university. I began to realize many of my former basketball players were still in college, and I did not hear about very many non-athletes still in college. Was participation in athletics, their acquired skills and lessons, and extended support group contributing to these former athletes' persistence in college?

To begin to answer this question, from 1990-1995 I studied 141 students, both male and female, at Navajo High School (hereafter referred to as Navajo High School study). Initial data was collected on the potential correlation between Navajo students' participation in varsity high school athletics and post-secondary attendance and academic success. The startling statistics of Native American success at institutions of higher learning, which I found for high school athletes, encouraged me to do follow-up research. (See Chapter 3 for more details about the original high school research.) The result is this thesis, Navajo Hoops and Higher Learning.

The study was narrowed to focus on Navajo female basketball players at Navajo High School between 1990-95, their families, and their support group; these students were compared with a small number of female non-athletes who attended NHS during the same time period. I felt a desirable sample size would be 8-10 former athletes, representing as many of the years as possible. This delimitation was crucial for several reasons: 1) a smaller number of student-athletes

would be easier to contact and interview; 2) due to my role as basketball coach at NHS, contacting and interviewing former female basketball players would be facilitated by our common experiences and established relationship of trust; 3) Native and American society gender roles are complex, and by only studying Navajo females, a solid data base for the future will exist. More sophisticated research may follow addressing the complex issues of female and male participation in athletics, academics, and traditional and contemporary gender roles in Navajo society.

The findings from the Navajo High School study in 1995 revealed 83% of the female athletes attended college, and 84% remained in college or graduated with their degrees. This information broadens previous research regarding Native American college attendance, retention and graduation rates. In comparison national statistics cite, 52% of natives graduate from high school, 17% attend college, 4% graduate from college and only 2% attend graduate school (Russell 1994, 52). Additional statistics from the 1994 status report on minorities in education parallel these findings, finding that 65% of native students graduate from high school and only 9% graduate from college (Pavel et al. 1994, 37). At the University of Arizona, the recruitment of Native American students has doubled since 1981, although the dropout rate still remains a steady 46% during the students' first year of

college. Additionally, of the 81 Native American students in the 1989-90 freshman class, 16% graduated in six years as compared to 52% of Anglos students, and 41% of Hispanic students (Heller 1996, 8). These statistics are both alarming and unacceptable.

Despite an increase in Native people attending post-secondary institutions the past thirty years, the fact remains that "less than 0.8 percent of all college students are Native American" (Pluchinota 1996, C6). Many of these students come from low income families, are academically unprepared for a tough college curriculum, have lower SAT scores compared to the national average, and receive low grade point averages during their freshman year of college (Pluchinota 1996, C6).

On the Navajo reservation, schooling has not always been viewed as positive. In the old days, parents and grandparents only enrolled "unruly children, those they identified as 'no ears,' or diigis, meaning 'insane, crazy' in school" (Reid 1993, NV-4). Those children who were bright and hardworking stayed at home helping the family, and those less bright were sent off to school. Many families hid their children under sheepskins and told the police officers, "our sheep camp [doesn't] have children" (Reid 1993, NV-4). Gradually times have changed, During the 1920s few educational opportunities were available for Navajo people except for a handful of Bureau of Indian Affairs, mission,

and off-reservation schools. This generation eventually produced the first college graduate in the 1920s. In the 1930s, an average of 10 Navajos attended college each year, in the 1940s, 35 Navajos attended college each year, in 1954, 81 Navajos attended college and by 1961 that number had grown to 401. In the 1970s, the Navajo tribe awarded almost 2,000 scholarships to students with financial need, and in 1990, college enrollment had risen to 661 students attending private colleges and 5,552 students in public institutions (Reid 1993, NV-4).

Redrock's adult population directly reflects this trend: 25% of its adult community have received at least an associate degree, as compared to 33% in Keams Canyon, AZ (Hopi), 8% in White Mountain, AZ (Apache), 1% in Towaoc, CO (Ute Mountain), and 15% in Pine Ridge, SD (Lakota). In Arizona the percentage is 33.2% and nationally it is 33.8%. These percentages may appear somewhat low, but the fact is that most reservation communities live in incredible poverty: 37.5% in Redrock, 55% in Keams Canyon, 56% in White River, 58% in Towaoc, and 58% in Pine Ridge.<sup>4</sup> These percentages are significantly higher than Arizona's 13.8% and the national average of 12.7%. The fact is many Navajos still lack the basic amenities found throughout America. On the reservation, 77% of occupied homes on the reservation do not have a telephone, 30% of all homes lack a bedroom or complete

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<sup>4</sup> All Indian community percentages obtained from 1990 United States Census.

plumbing, only 30% are connected to a public sewer system, and only 6% use electricity for heating. Most families haul water, wood and coal for heating their homes (Reid 1993, NV-2). With the lack of basic amenities, substantial poverty, the persistence of the Navajo language and tradition in this part of the reservation, the fact that 52.8% of this community has received a high school diploma (Krammer 1993, NV-5) reflects Redrock's apparent belief in and commitment to education.

As a result of the 1995 research on former high school athletes and college persistence, questions and assumptions were formulated. What are the post-secondary academic success percentages of Navajo female non-athletes from NHS? Does the female student-athlete's support group provide the necessary support and increased self-esteem that contribute to college enrollment and long-term post-secondary academic success? Do higher expectations of self and commitment to complete assigned tasks result from participation in high school athletics? Are college attendance and academic success encouraged because of the community's support of athletics and identity with the athlete's/team's success? Do the school and/or community's commitment to sports help or hinder Navajo female athletes prepare for post-secondary academic success? Do the "benefits" of being a leader, successful athlete, and student (as viewed by the athlete's support group) help or hinder the female student-athlete?

What are the necessary skills for post-secondary academic success? And to what do the Navajo female student-athletes attribute these skills - Home? School? Teachers? Athletics? Has the increase in female college athletic scholarships contributed to the increased post-secondary attendance and academic success because of the continued support group OR has it hindered academic success because of lack of academic preparedness? And finally, what traditional Navajo values towards games and sports are significant (positive or negative) factors in female athletic participation and success, and future post-secondary academic success? Based on these questions, teaching and coaching at Navajo High School for six years, maintaining constant communication with former athletes attending post-secondary schools, and my 1995 research, my hypothesis was formed: Female Navajo participation in high school athletics, specifically basketball, does contribute to future post-secondary academic success; the athlete's support group plays a significant role in the student's future success, academically or athletically.

Before continuing, it is appropriate to define several important terms used throughout this thesis. Post-secondary institution refers to two and four year colleges and universities, as well as vocational schools. Retention is defined as attendance at a post-secondary institution for at least two consecutive years. Graduation is the completion of

a post-secondary degree (associate or bachelor) within six years. Stop-out refers to students who stop attending school for various reasons, but return later to finish their degrees. Post-secondary academic success is defined as retention and/or graduation from a post-secondary institution. The following are members of the student-athletes' support group: fellow athletes and students, family members, teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, school board members, and many community supporters. The non-athletes' support group is considerably smaller and includes: fellow students, family members, teachers, and the senior counselor.

The purpose of this research is to identify, describe, and analyze female Navajo participation in high school athletics and that participation's impact (positive and/or negative) on the students' post-secondary academic experience. Due to the lack of specific research on Native American, and specifically Navajo, participation in high school athletics as a form of high school drop-out prevention or as a positive preparation for post-secondary academic success, this study contributes vital and timely data to research on retention and academic success.

My findings reveal that the contributions of the support group positively affected the former basketball player's post-secondary success; this hypothesis was supported by the data. All basketball players identified relatives, local

female role models, and an academic or athletic mentor as members of their support group that significantly contributed to their success in high school and in college.

Interestingly, interviews revealed the importance of Navajo culture in the personal development of these Navajo women. Specifically references to maintaining balance, physical fitness, cooperation, the strength and importance of women in Navajo society, and the Navajo view of success and excellence were cited. Participation in athletics was also consistently expressed as significantly contributing to post-secondary academic success, but values, beliefs and personality were developed prior to their serious athletic participation. The skills necessary for post-secondary academic success were formed during childhood, shaped by Navajo culture, and maintained through their school years. Participation in athletics began as fun, but transformed into a positive learning experience that reinforced and provided structure for previously learned values from Navajo culture, relatives, role models, and mentors.

Navajo High School and other Native American school districts and communities may use this information to correct possible problems, and build upon and incorporate athletic success into increasing the academic preparation needed for post-secondary academic success.

CHAPTER 2.  
LITERATURE REVIEW

High School Dropouts

A a result of my interest in Native American students and school settings, I focused on scholarly research pertaining to these four distinct subjects: 1) high school dropouts; 2) college persistence; 3) Navajo culture and education; and 4) athletics. The analysis of high school drop out studies started in the 1960s. Swisher and Hoisch (1992) criticized these studies for varying statistical methods and incompatible data; as a result, comparisons of results with the national figures were problematic. Reyhner's (1992) study cited school-based factors (large schools, uncaring/untrained teachers, passive teaching methods, inappropriate curriculum, inappropriate testing/student retention, tracked classes, and lack of parental involvement) for students dropping out. Deyhle's (1992) work with Navajo and Ute "school leavers" agreed with Reyhner and cited institutional racism as another reason for dropping out. Rhoades' (1988) data suggested that a holistic<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rhoades (1988, p. 26-27) defines holistic as "a fostering of a broader base and context for understanding, a multi-level approach which encourages understanding of many aspects at the same time of the inter-relationships involved, which, in turn, encourages involvement, ownership, and commitment."

teaching and learning approach worked best for Native students. Focusing his studies specifically on Navajo students, he contrasted the Navajo learning process with that of an Anglo. Anglos learned through trial and error while Navajos learned skills through observation. When a Navajo used the trial and error method a setback usually occurred. This difference in learning styles was critical to the relationship between teacher and student. Yet McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, and Benally (1991) challenged Rhoades' work with evidence from a successful bilingual-bicultural curriculum which emphasized "open-ended questioning, inductive/analytical reasoning, and student verbalization in both small and large groups" (McCarty et al. 1991, 42). In their view, a Navajo philosophy of learning stressed that, "knowledge and understanding exist as distinct, but integrated and mutually supportive levels...without basic understandings at each level, higher knowledge is unattainable because the learner simply is not prepared to understand or effectively use it" (McCarty et al. 1991, 51). With the integration of Navajo philosophy and formal education, learning extended beyond the classroom and allowed the students to make relevant connections to their lives and the world around them.

Bowker's (1992) study of female Indian students identified factors which contributed to success, or lack of educational success. One significant factor in Bowker's

research was "[t]here is evidence that if a girl is to be successful in school she must have a caring adult during her adolescent years" (Bowker 1992, 16). The importance of family and caring adults are also important in Navajo culture. Also noted is the fact that the adult could be a parent, grandparent, other relative or teacher. Other factors which also contributed to college success for female Indian students included: home environments with established and maintained restrictions and rules, parents serving as positive role models, and being involved in their children's lives, both in school and out of school. Deyhle's (1995) research, "Navajo Mothers and Daughters: Schools, Jobs, and the Family" addressed the fact that Navajo culture values matrilineal networks which provide respect for mothers and daughters. These values directly contradicted the American educational system which emphasized an individualistic lifestyle and adoption of middle class orientations. Although none of these studies mention participation in athletics, they all stressed cultural significance of family and women. The most relevant research examined thus far is Platero's (1986) Navajo Area Student Dropout Study (NASDS). This study tracked 889 Navajo students through census numbers and interviews, and found a 31% dropout rate. The study examined socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural variables, support systems, transportation factors, and extracurricular activities in student retention. Participation in sports was

specifically cited as a "positive force in keeping students in school" (Platero 1986, 17). The NASDS was the only research found that specifically connected sport participation to reducing high school dropout rates for Navajo students.

### College Persistence

Studies of college persistence fell into two categories: 1) quantitative statistical studies, and 2) studies which investigated issues and influences. In the National Longitudinal Study of High School Class of 1972 (Pavel 1994), 7% of American Indians were four year persisters in college, as compared to 20% of whites, and 32% of Asian Americans. The High School and Beyond Senior Cohort Study (Pavel 1994) paralleled the National Longitudinal Study with similar numbers. The Well's Survey (Pavel 1994) reviewed 79 institutions with at least 4% American Indian enrollment, and found 53% of the American Indian students left college after their first year, while 24% completed a degree program. Pavel also referred to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which reported that "29% of American Indians and Alaska Natives who were first-time full-time freshman in 1984 graduated by 1990, compared with 53% of all students"

(Dempsey 1994, 46). This report by the NCAA is interesting since it is an athletic organization which leads me to believe they are referring to American Indian athletes.

O'Brien's (1992) "A Foot in Both Worlds" mentioned some potentially useful information. The data from the Center for Educational Statistics stated the following: 47.6% of all Indian students attended college on a part-time basis as compared to 43% for all other students; females represented 60% of Indian students as compared to 54% for all other students; 75% of Indian students attended public institutions of higher education; and 54.5% of Indian students attended two-year institutions as compared to 37.3% of all students in two-year colleges.

The Native American Resource Center (NARC) at the University of Arizona documented that Native American student enrollment at the University of Arizona has increased by 60% since 1988, but 69% of Native Americans drop out of the university before graduating (Hardy 1997, 1). These statistics have created great concern among tribal leaders and university administrators whose goal is retention for Native American students at institutions of higher learning.

An adequate amount of scholarship was available addressing common barriers faced by Native Americans in post-secondary institutions. Fleming (1982) discussed the cultural differences between Anglo institutions and Navajo students in areas such as concept of time, cooperation

and being in harmony with nature. She concluded as a result of these cultural differences, stress is a common barrier faced by native students as they attempt to adapt to college life. Lin, LaCounte, and Eder (1988) examined the effect of school environment on academic performance and graduation expectations of Indian students. Pluchinota (1996) cited fear of performance evaluation, unpreparedness for college, loneliness, unrealistic goals, and giving into external pressures instead of focusing on internal beliefs as problems most faced by Native students. Additionally, Sawyer (1981) examined Native students' study habits and attitudes, and found that high school background may be more significant than culture shock on a college campus. Specifically, Indian and white students from primarily rural backgrounds are probably not as experienced or skilled in taking notes in lecture situations which may contribute to problems at institutions of higher learning.

Tierney (1992) criticized university recruitment and retention methods applied to Native Americans. Universities and colleges actively recruit top Native students, but fail to understand the strong spiritual and cultural ties many students possess. Additionally, many institutions attempted to solve the problem by assuming all Native students are the same. The administration, faculty and fellow students do not comprehend the complexities of Indian people. Indian students represented different regions of the country, speak different

languages, possess different tribal histories and cultural values. Tierney offered an alternate to the university attitude of "one size fits all." He championed his framework as more accurately analyzing the Native experience in higher education, resulting in the formation of more efficient retention methods.

Only two scholars addressed qualitative issues and influences on achievement. Huffman, Still, and Brokenleg (1986) analyzed social, cultural, and aspirational factors among Sioux and Anglo students and found that high school grade point average and parental encouragement to attend school indicated college achievement for Anglos, but a strong sense of cultural identity and heritage, and confidence contributed to higher educational success for Sioux students.

Benjamin, Chambers, and Reiterman's (1993) research focused on the successes of Navajo college persisters. They used interviews as the primary research tool in an effort to find answers that are not evident through quantitative, statistical analysis. After comparing Navajo and non-Indian students, the study found a Navajo "who had made good grades in high school, who graduated at the top of his or her high school class, and did well on the ACT exam was just as likely to struggle with college academics, as was an American Indian who had measured deficiencies in these criteria. By the same token, those with less than ideal high school grades, high school class rank, or composite ACT scores were as likely to

succeed as those with apparently stronger grades, ranks, and scores" (Benjamin et al. 1993, 29-30). Based on this anomaly, personal interviews are necessary to learning how Native Americans achieve post-secondary academic success.

### Navajo Culture and Education

While the literature on Navajo culture is overwhelming, the following are essential for a basic understanding. Ortiz's (1983) edited handbook provides a solid overview of Navajo language, social organizations, ceremonial systems, origins, history, tribal government, and economic development. Another excellent beginning resource is Iverson's (1976) critical bibliography which focuses on additional historical, cultural, educational, social, economical, governmental, and language-based texts.

Sam and Janet Bingham's (1982) publication parallels Ortiz, but provides Navajo insight. More specific is Kluckhohn and Leighton's (1962) revised work focusing on Navajo culture and society. Their (1948) companion book examines the formation of Navajo personality and values during childhood. Yazzie's (1971) work promotes itself as the first textbook of Navajo tribal prehistory written from the Navajo viewpoint, and published by the Navajo Curriculum Center at Rough Rock Demonstration School. Witherspoon (1975)

studied the complex Navajo social organization, Lamphere (1977) focused on the importance of Navajo culture and values through cooperation, and Ruth Roessel (1981) used personal experiences and feelings to describe the role of Navajo women in a changing Navajo society. Dyk's (1938) autobiography of a Navajo man's life from childhood to adulthood incorporates all of the above mentioned elements of Navajo culture.

Literature relevant to Navajo education includes three important publications. Woerner's (1941) dissertation covered years prior to the Long Walk, and ended with the implementation of Livestock Reduction during the 1930s. Thompson (1975) continued the historical analysis from the 1930s to the 1960s, and Robert Roessel, Jr. (1979) critically examined Navajo education from 1948-1978 "to help, not harm, the realization of quality meaningful education in adequate physical facilities directed and controlled by Navajo people living in Navajo communities" (Roessel 1979, 5).

### Athletics

Indian sports related literature is immense. Oxendine's (1988) historical overview generalized and categorized all Native American sports and their impact on native people. Also problematic was Cheska's (1979) general view that

traditional games assured societal maintenance of North American Indian tribes. Blanchard's (1981) and Nabokov's (1981) studies adequately narrowed the focus and impact of sports to specific tribes.

Despite Cliff's (1990) review of traditional Navajo games and Shewman's (1996) overview of Navajo women overcoming obstacles and earning college volleyball scholarships, most literature dealt solely with basketball, or "rezball" as it was affectionately called. Chazin (1992) detailed the pride in girls basketball at Shiprock High School, and Smith's (1993) "A Woman of the People" portrayed the struggle Ryneldi Becenti faced in her desire to play Division I basketball at Arizona State University while maintaining her identity as a Navajo. Krammer (1993) observed that Rezball has become the new, unifying ritual on the Navajo Reservation, and Cameron and Patrick created the "Navajo Hoops" magazine as a means to adequately cover the Navajo Nation's addiction to rezball. This literature dealt with the positive impact rezball has had on rural Navajo communities and specifically on female basketball players. Additionally, Nemechek's (1996) analysis of the "Evolution of Navajo Spirituality" began with traditional games and ended with the contemporary sport of basketball.

Blanchard (1974) and Allison's (1980) outdated research presented cultural differences and similarities between Navajo and Anglo basketball, and the impact on the players

and the community. Blanchard contrasted Anglo and Navajo styles of basketball based on his observations during the 1970s. The Anglo game was based on the "Indiana"<sup>6</sup> style of basketball: more deliberate strategy emphasizing passing, teamwork, fundamentals, picks and screens, working for inside shots, with the coach commanding order with regular substitution patterns. Conversely, Navajo basketball was more of a free-lance, run and shoot style, with primary shots coming from the outside or from fast break opportunities. Value was placed on individuals who can score and impress the crowd with their dribbling prowess, with less concern for teamwork. Authority roles were loosely defined with substitutions generally creating confusion.

The "Indiana" style of basketball emphasized the center position because many of the Anglo players average height is between 5'11"-6'3", compared to the average Navajo height ranges between 5'6"-5'11". Blanchard's research was conducted over 20 years ago; watching any college or pro basketball game in the 1990s, it is obvious the game has evolved to capitalize on speed and strength at all positions. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) 1996 national champions, Kentucky (men) and Tennessee (women) balance speed at the guard position and height and strength at the center position, as well as incorporating a pressing defense that results in high scoring fast break opportunities at the

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<sup>6</sup> This so-called style of play is associated with University of Indiana basketball coach, Bobby Knight, and his teams.

offensive end. As a result of Navajo's lack of height, basketball coaches utilized their players' strengths - maneuverability and speed - rather than their weakness - height. Navajo basketball coaches employed a style that complimented their team's strengths and exploited an opponent's weaknesses, regardless of culture.<sup>7</sup> Blanchard's generalizations of Anglo and Navajo basketball styles, and coaching preferences are obsolete, and reek of racism.

Allison's (1980) Ph.D. dissertation analyzed three areas of Navajo basketball -- style, group vs. individual orientations, and use of Navajo medicine -- and came to the conclusion that Navajo basketball is defined in a culturally-specific way. She generally agreed with Blanchard's assessment of Anglo and Navajo basketball styles, and stated that Navajo society stressed a strong group and process orientation, while Anglos are more product oriented and individualistic.

Allison's (1981) study addressed sociocultural influences on achievement motivation in the educational and athletic arenas. Her findings supported her dissertation's conclusion that different environments dictated different views, and are supported by historical evidence that Navajo people have used their synthesizing abilities to survive and prosper in an ever-changing world. In the classroom, Allison found Navajo students defined success as product-oriented

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<sup>7</sup> According to my personal observations during 10 years of coaching experiences on and off the Navajo reservation.

(good grades and passing the course) and believed their teachers are primarily product-oriented but also place value on individual effort. Yet in athletics, the Navajo student view and the perceived view of the Anglo coach differed. Athletes viewed athletic success, as in the classroom, as outcome-oriented (winning races, making it to the state tournament), while coaches defined athletic success as being confident, desiring to do well, or having ability. The view of failure in Navajo society was primarily related to product-oriented personal behaviors, such as getting drunk, clowning around, not attending school or missing practice, not outcome-based, such as losing a game.

In 1982, Allison continued to build on her original Ph.D. dissertation in recognizing strong cooperative orientation in Navajo society as quite distinct from the individualistic, independent competitive orientation in Anglo society. Navajos are criticized by Anglo coaches for not having the "killer instinct." Instead Navajo athletes are not as opponent-oriented and are more interested in competing for themselves, rather than dominating an opponent. The Navajo culture emphasized a cooperative effort to facilitate group solidarity. Allison supported this view with Margaret Mead's (1937) assessment of the dynamic complexity of competition and cooperation in sport: "Are people cooperating in order to compete or competing in order to cooperate" (Mead 1937, 47)? Allison's (1980) dissertation also critically

examined the use of Navajo medicine, or witchcraft, as a system of culturally controlling individual athlete's behavior on and off of the basketball court. Status in Anglo society was usually attained through public recognition, but in Navajo culture to act better or be ahead of another can be problematic, and may result in social controls, such as accusations of witchcraft. If an athlete does what the coach says, and was not flashy that was okay, but one should not expect extrinsic rewards. The Navajo athlete must find a balance between performing well and not distinguishing herself from the team or community. All of Allison's published work concluded that sports and games were adopted by the Navajo, and refined according to Navajo culture.

Adler and Bissinger examined two different teams and their communities. Adler (1991) discussed the importance of college athletics and role engulfment, "the process by which athletes become engulfed in their athletic role as it ascended a position of prominence, and where the athletes progressively detach themselves from their investment in other areas and let go of alternative goals or priorities" (Adler 1991, 27). This concept of role engulfment was a factor that must be considered with the student-athletes at NHS because of the notoriety received by the athletics. Bissinger (1990) analyzed the high school football team in the small Texas town of Odessa and found sports kept this town alive: "Those Friday night lights ... burned with more

intensity than I had ever imagined ... those lights became an addiction if you live in a place like Odessa, the Friday night fix" (Bissinger 1990, xiii-xiv). Odessa's parents lived vicariously through their children, and their athletic children were extensions of the rural town, much like the parents and basketball players of Redrock.

B.B. Meyer's (1990) study of academic performance of female college athletes contradicted the Adlers' study of male college athletes, and Bissinger's look at male high school athletes. Through in-depth interviews of female basketball and volleyball players, Meyer found women were more academically-minded, took a more active role in their education, saw themselves as more than athletes, and viewed athletics as having a positive effect on their academic achievement than men did.

The Women's Sports Foundation has published several prominent studies pertaining to women and sports over the past fifteen years. Corbett, Griffin, Harris and Sabo's (1985) report on women in sports was the first comprehensive study of athletic women (91% Anglo, 4% African American, 2% Hispanic American, and 1% Native American). Findings revealed participation in sport was beneficial to women. Specifically, women were more likely to view adolescent body image as positive, and to identify a local female role model. Many women felt sports participation brought families together, and parents influenced their daughter's

participation in sport. Other findings included: the belief that participation with mixed ethnic groups reduced prejudice; an increase in coed participation, in an attempt to find equal skill levels regardless of gender, resulted in increased self confidence; 88% attended college; 93% equated success in athletics to success later in life; and the top three reasons for participation were health, reducing stress, and a sense of accomplishment because of athletic skill. The women also continued their sport involvement into adulthood.

Garfield's (1988) report on moms, dads, daughters and sports studied the influence of parents and family factors on girls participating in sports, and concluded participation in sports has increased as a result of Title IX<sup>8</sup>, and as a result of a positive view of sports by parents. Additional positives cited by parents were that sports promoted fitness and fun, built confidence and self esteem, promoted teamwork, fostered cooperation, and encouraged friendship. Reasons cited for dropping out of sports were lack of opportunity, feeling skills were inadequate, lack of time, interest in boys, and the "puberty barrier," not participating as a child.

Acosta, DeFrantz, Farrall, Jones, Lapchick, and Pollock's (1989) report on minorities in sport studied the

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<sup>8</sup> Federal legislation passed in 1972 declared "no persons in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (Coakley 1994, 210).

varsity sport participation on the social, educational, and career mobility of minority students. Only Anglo, African American, and Hispanic Americans were studied due to limited data on Asian and Native Americans. Over 14,000 youth were studied from their sophomore year in high school, 1980, followed up in their senior year, 1982, again in two years, 1984, and four years after graduation, 1986. The question asked was, does high school sports help or hinder minority youth? The answers were both positive and negative. The positives included enhanced school and community involvement, increased popularity among peers, inspired leadership aspirations, athletes not just seen as "dumb jocks," minority athletes faring better than non-athletes academically, decreased high school dropout rates in rural and suburban high schools, and former athletes were two to eight times more likely to continue sport involvement four years after graduation.

The negatives reported high school sports were commonly oversold as vehicles for upward mobility for minority athletes, whereas data showed mainly whites experience upward mobility which reinforced white privilege. Exceptions to the report's conclusions on upward mobility were Hispanic rural athletes. As a group, both male and females were five times more likely than non-athletes to attend college (two years after graduation). Additionally, female Hispanic athletes were two times more likely than non-athletes to reach and

stay in college, score well on achievement tests, enjoy increased popularity, stay in school, attend college, seek a bachelor degree, and make progress towards a degree. The positives regarding Hispanic youth in an academic setting are obvious in this first study of Hispanics and sport. Although Native American representation is absent from the report, Hispanic women resemble Navajo women in several ways: the importance of women and motherhood within their culture, their recognition of their responsibility to teach their distinct cultural components, and the maintenance or partial maintenance of a language other than English, within the dominant Anglo society.

Greendorpher, Oglesby, and Spade's (1993) report on sports and fitness in the lives of working women continued the Women's Sports Foundation's effort to prove that women's participation in sports was positive. This report confirmed past findings, while transferring the findings to working women. The data showed: working women continued to exercise in adulthood, exercise was used as a stress reducer, and exercise positively affected their job performance. It also cited more post-Title IX girls participated in sports than girls before Title IX was enacted.

Fifteen years after the passage of Title IX, women are reaping the benefits that men have experienced for years from participation in sport. These reports published by the Women's Sports Foundation have also become the foundation for

the Nike<sup>9</sup> slogan: "If you let me play." Nike supports this slogan by citing the following statistics and information in their advertisements: "I will like myself more. I will have more self-confidence. I will suffer less depression. I will be 60% less likely to get breast cancer. I will be more likely to leave a man who beats me. I will be less likely to get pregnant before I want to. I will learn what it means to be strong. If you let me play sports" (See Appendix 1). The University of Arizona Intercollegiate Athletics Department also encourage female participation in athletics in their promotion of the Mother and Daughter Sports Day where "Wildcat coaches and student-athletes...will conduct educational session[s] and clinic[s]" (See Appendix 1). With this media attention, female participation in sport is on the rise, and the importance of these studies is undeniable.

Maddi and Hess' (1992) analysis of personality hardiness and success in basketball positively connected "personality hardiness," a combination of commitment, control, and challenge, to overall basketball performance. The athletes' hardiness was directly related to the coach's decision on the amount of playing time and number of games played. With increased playing time, the athletes' confidence increased, as did their commitment to the sport.

Annadale's (1968) thesis on high school basketball players' creative thinking abilities recognized basketball as

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<sup>9</sup> Internationally recognized leader in athletic shoe sales and performance.

a problem solving sport which required analytical skills and the synthesis of mental alertness, physical agility and bodily movements. On the court this process resulted in putting a play together, but in life the product was an idea. Annadale concluded that both basketball players and those in extra-curricular activities possessed higher creative abilities than non-athletes. The author noted the difficulty in separating athletes from those who competed in other extra-curricular activities since many athletes also participated in clubs and activities. This study concluded that participation in extra curricular activities may help enhance one's creative output, but the question remains: did the basketball players develop qualities of originality and creative personality measures as a result or end product of sport or were their physical skills and creative assets responsible for their high creative abilities? This question led to gravitational and selective mortality theories.

Gravitational and selective mortality personality theories (Coakley 1994, Morgan 1978) attempt to explain why individuals become athletes, musicians, or artists. Gravitational theorists believed individuals gravitate towards activities and interests which match their personality traits. Selective mortality theorized that predisposed skills match the activity; the individual will continue with the activity even though the skills progressively become more advanced, and the competitive level

increased. Selective mortality is similar to Darwinism - the strong adapt and survive, or perish. This theory may explain why some athletes at NHS continued playing basketball while others did not continue past intermediate or middle school sports.

More recent literature directly contradicted these two theories. Sports psychologists Deborah Feltz and David Yukelson presented their (1987) findings at the New Agenda II Conference, citing environment as the main reason girls participate in sports. Support and encouragement from family members, teachers and coaches was critical to participation. Plus, early athletic success resulted in an increased interest and commitment to the specific sport, along with increased self esteem.

In addition to these personality theories, social theories were originally used as a framework for my own scholarship. According to Coakley (1994) structural functional theorists<sup>10</sup> believed that society must remain constant and orderly, and institutions fulfill that role by socializing the masses with the necessary skills to participate successfully in a democratic society. These character building skills, teamwork, hard work, obedience, planning, organization and sacrifice, created good workers dedicated to achievement and productivity. "Muscular

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<sup>10</sup> Read sociologist Robert Merton (1968) for more information regarding structural functionalism social theory.

Christianity"<sup>11</sup> developed out of this theory, and adherents believed these skills should be used for the glory of God and country. Educators soon followed suit and implemented this theory with sports as the avenue for educating "lost" immigrants and native people, and showing them the value of the Puritan work ethic.

One problem with this theory was that it assumed and exaggerated the positive functions of sport. Additionally, theorists attempted to maintain the status quo by allowing the majority to dictate what "common values" are necessary for society to function appropriately. As a product of this theory, I too hypothesized that athletics contributed to post-secondary academic success, and many of the athletes said similar things. Whether this was an extension of my belief, and expectations I do not know. Reflecting on this point, I looked at other social theories.

Symbolic interactionism focused on how people develop meanings and identities associated with sport participation, and how these meanings and identities inform their behavior and relationship with others. The key to investigating this theory was observation of the participants and in-depth interviews; I have done both with the basketball players at NHS. Symbolic interactionism<sup>12</sup> does a poor job of explaining

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<sup>11</sup> This was a common phrase used in the late 1800s by Christians promoting the connection between hard work and Christianity through sports. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) put the theory into practice.

<sup>12</sup> Read J. Macionis (1991) for additional research using the symbolic interactionism theory.

how structured forms of inequality operate in sports and societies, and explaining behaviors grounded in processes other than rational problem solving and choice making. Recognizing both of these theories have relevance, but are too narrow in scope, I then turned to critical theory.

Critical theory is concerned with power in social relations, and action and political involvement. Recognizing that sports in most societies have been socially constructed in ways that privilege some people over others; critical theorists want to expose this fact, and open the doors to new, more equal alternatives. Sports are socially constructed by people as they cope with the realities of everyday life in their own families, groups, and communities, not as a reflection of society. Therefore, an individual's view of sport takes different forms, exists for different reasons for different people at different times.

The ultimate goal of research based on critical theory is effective social change. Critical theorists<sup>13</sup> focus on 1) what sport could be in society 2) how sport opportunities vary from one group to another 3) how sports could be changed to reflect the interests of participants and 4) when and how sports could become sites for promoting changes in social relations in particular situations. The problem with critical theory is that it does not provide a tight,

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<sup>13</sup> Sport sociologists Michael Messner and Don Sabo (1991) and feminist sport scholar Ann Hall (1988) use critical theory to convey their view of sport in society.

clearly understood framework, and seldom considers personal experiences in everyday life situations.

All three of these theories have merits, yet limitations. No one theory will guide my research, but when taken together the theoretical frameworks provide a broader and deeper understanding of the society we live in today, and the role sport plays in that society. This multiple approach shows how basketball reaffirms American values (structural functional theory), reveals interaction patterns and constructs the basketball reality at NHS and in Redrock (symbolic interaction theory), and can create positive direction for social change (critical theory).

Although literature was readily available on Native American high school dropouts, college dropouts, and athletics, there was virtually nothing that directly connected high school athletics and post-academic success for female Native Americans.

CHAPTER 3.  
METHODOLOGY

Navajo High School is located on the Navajo reservation in northern Arizona. Eighty percent of the students ride the bus to school from outlying areas, and family and community are extremely important to the students. The enrollment of NHS is approximately 1,000 students, grades nine through twelve. Ninety-six percent of the students are Native Americans, mostly Navajo, and three percent are Anglo Americans. Fifteen percent of the teachers are Navajo and fifty percent of the coaches are Navajo. With the assistance of NHS coaches and counselors, the Navajo High School study tracked 141 male and female former varsity athletes. The sports tracked were the ones that received the most community support: boys and girls basketball, boys and girls cross-country, football and girls volleyball. Of the 141 former varsity athletes tracked, 44% were male, 56% were female and the majority of the athletes lived in town. The results of this information showed that an unusual percentage of former student-athletes, both male (74%) and female (84%), attended and stayed in post-secondary institutions.

Building on the Navajo High School study, I wanted to pursue research that would examine the reasons athletes and non-athletes give for their persistence in post-secondary

education. I then narrowed my focus to female Navajo basketball players from 1990-1995. Of 29 female former basketball players at NHS, 97% (N=28) initially attended a post-secondary school, and of that number 73% (N=21) are still in school or have earned a degree. Figure 3.1 reflects college attendance and success by graduating class.

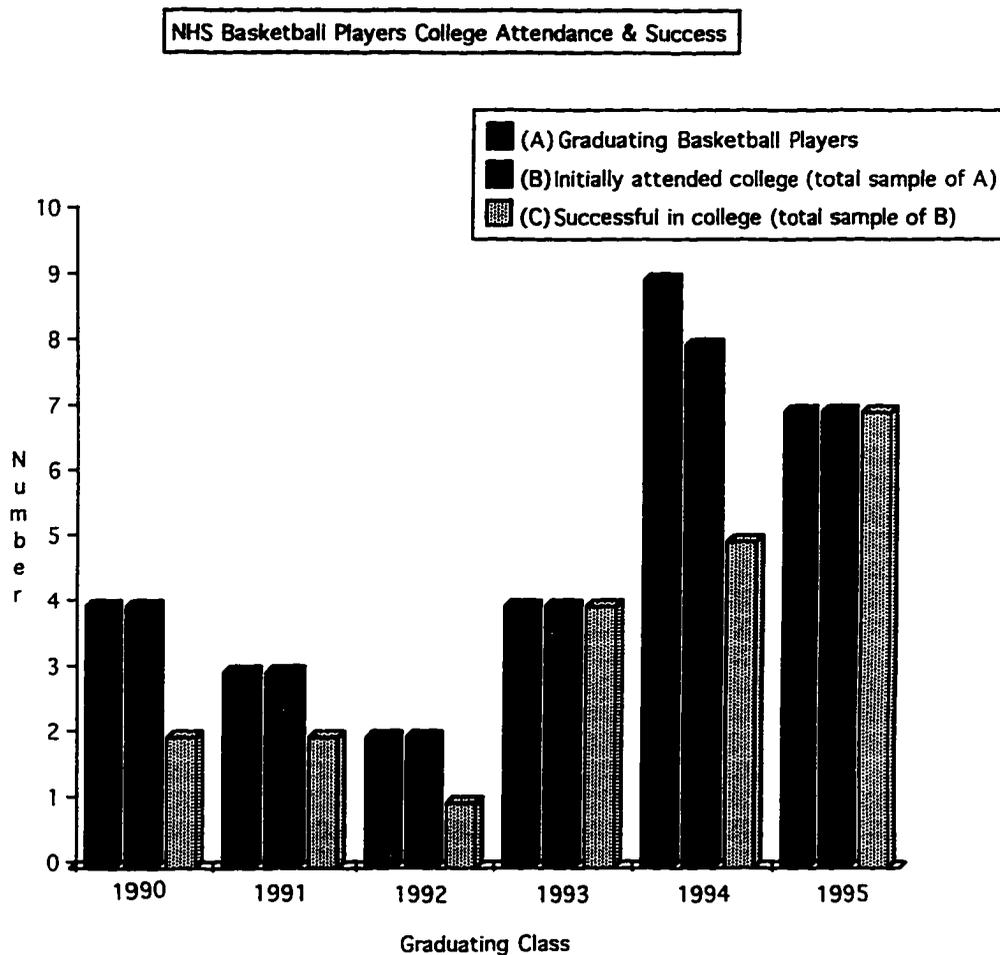


Figure 3.1

Two different three year periods were also analyzed in Figure 3.2. One hundred percent of Group 1 (female basketball players who graduated from NHS between 1990-92) attended post-secondary institutions, with 56% of them continuing or graduating with a degree. In group 2 (female basketball players who graduated from NHS between 1993-95) the percentages increased with 95% attendance at a post-secondary institution, and of that group 84% were still in school or graduated with a degree.

Comparison of NHS Basketball Players College Attendance & Success: Group 1 vs. Group 2

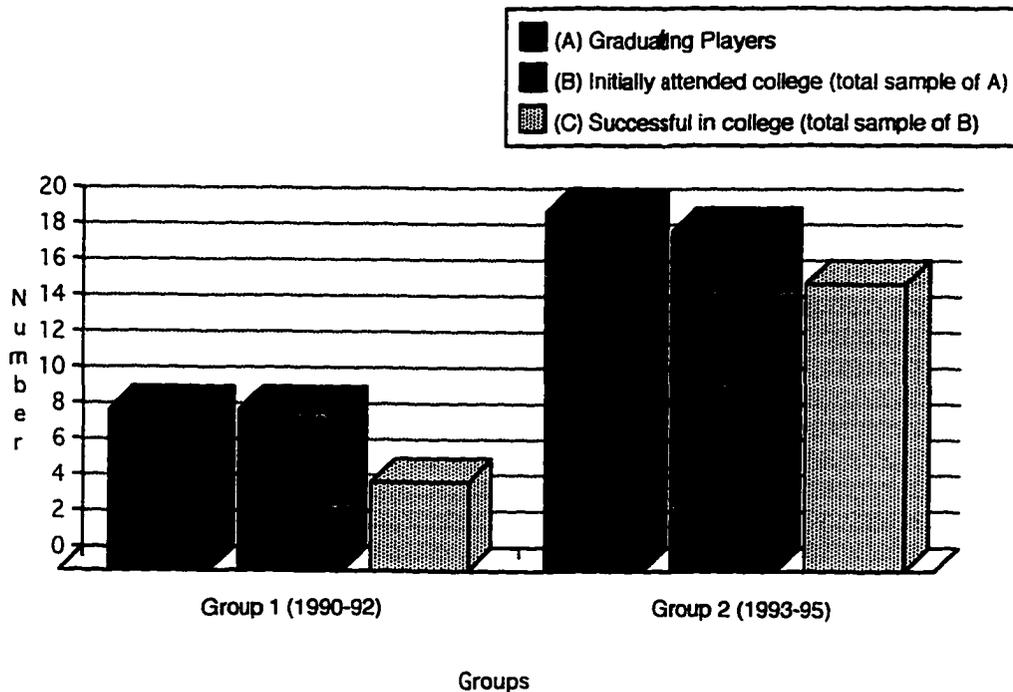


Figure 3.2

This unusually high attendance and persistence for former student-athletes between 1993-95, may be related to a significant increase in team success at the conference and state level. In the years 1993-95, the following girls' teams were either state runner-up or champions: basketball (two times), Volleyball (two times), and Cross-country (three times). As a result of this initial tracking survey, my thesis began to take shape.

#### Demographics

As a rule Navajo High School has not kept records of post-secondary attendance or success, but Mrs. Mary Bennett\*, sponsor of the class of 1993, has tracked the 1993 alumni in their post-high school endeavors. My data on non-athletes will be based entirely on her information. She has been a member of the Redrock community for thirty years dating back to her graduation from NHS. With a historical link to the community as well as her marriage to a Navajo man, her acceptance and respect in the community is solid. Consequently, she has many contacts that ensure the reliability of her information. The class of 1993 consisted of 160 students; 55% were male (N=88) and 45% were female (N=72). Of the seventy-two females, I will focus only on the sixty-eight Navajo females. Eighty-five percent were non-athletes (N=58) and 69% of the non-athletes (N=40) were in

the college preparatory track. This college preparation included either Advanced Placement English, Chemistry, or Calculus courses, along with upper level courses in English, foreign languages, math, science, and social studies. Physics, third-year French, and psychology were some of the college preparatory electives offered. Of the the total (N=68) Navajo females in the class, only 6% were basketball players (N=4). All four of these basketball players were in the college prep track.

Comparing Navajo female college-prep non-athletes to basketball players, 8% (N=3) of the non-athletes and 100% (N=4) of the basketball players have received their degree or are still in school in the Spring of 1996. Two of the former basketball players graduated from community colleges with Associate degrees; one is now a housewife and mother with hopes of returning to school and finishing a bachelor's degree, while the other is working in the Phoenix area. The other two are successfully continuing their studies at two of the three major universities in Arizona. Despite the startling contrast between the two groups, it is pertinent to recognize the very small size of this sample, and that 10% (N=4) of the females in this class are in the military, 18% (N=7) are experiencing post-secondary success, 20% (N=8) are in the work force, 42% (N=17) are unaccounted for, and 10% (N=4) are either married or a mother (See Figure 3.3). It is also important to emphasize that in Navajo culture, taking

care of oneself and family are extremely important responsibilities; if an individual is doing that, then she is viewed as successful in the community. This Navajo view of success is different than the one I use in terms of college attendance and retention.

Class of 1993: Post High School Occupations for All Female Graduates in College Prep Track

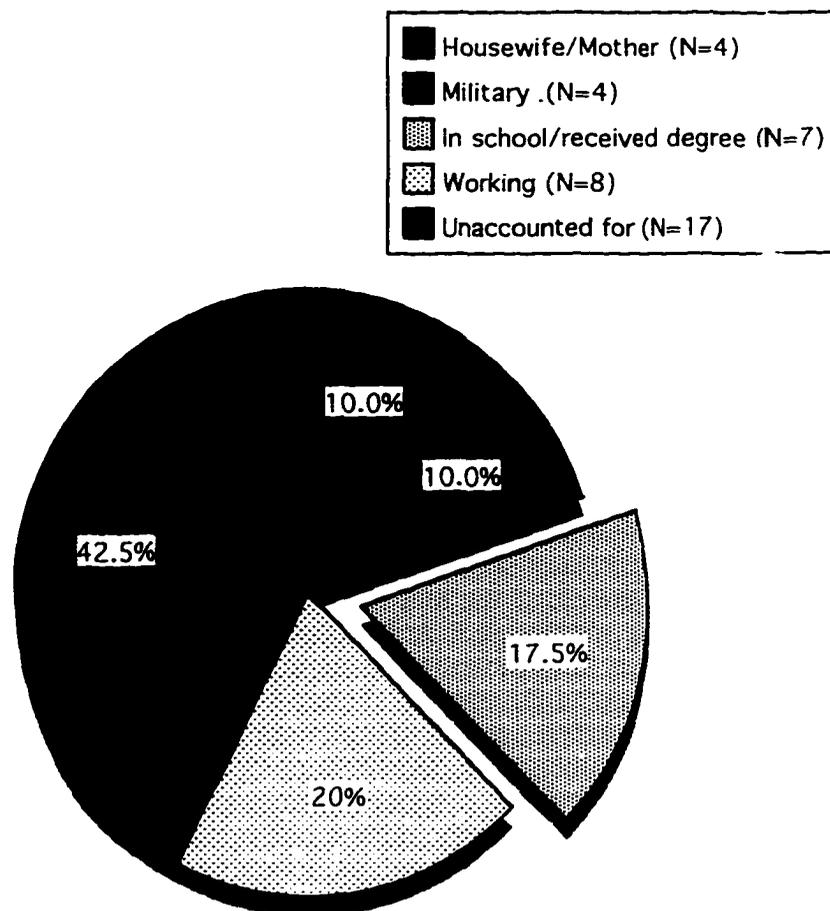


Figure 3.3

Although Mrs. Bennett's\* statistics regarding female students from the class of 1993 are incomplete, my research is based on my personal contact, during high school and beyond, with all of the basketball players from 1990-95. Basketball players are defined as varsity participants throughout their high school years. During the six year period, from 1990-95, twenty-nine female basketball players played on the varsity basketball team. Of that number, 41% (N=12) have continued with athletics at the junior college level. Ten of the twelve girls played basketball in junior college, and two participated in other sports. This participation in junior college athletics lasted at least one semester. Five of the basketball players finished their Associate degrees while playing basketball, and two are still participating in athletics and continuing with their academics at a junior college.

The class of 1990 consisted of four players; all four attended a post-secondary institution following graduation; two participated in junior college athletics. Only one of these four graduated with a post-secondary degree, and one is still in school.

The class of 1991 consisted of three players; all three initially attended a post-secondary school, but two have continued. Summer Long\* is attending school again after becoming a mother, and Eileen Benally\* remains in school

despite transferring from a four year institution to a junior college and working full-time.

Two players make up the class of 1992. Both attended post-secondary schools following graduation, but only one has continued in school in addition to getting married, having a child and working part-time. The other works in the Phoenix area.

The class of 1993 has been the most successful to date. All four of the players attended a junior college and played basketball for two years. Of those four, two received their Associate degrees and the other two are continuing their education at major universities. Two are now living in the Phoenix area. Additionally two of these students had children during their post-secondary experiences: one completed her degree and the other is continuing to work towards her degree.

The class of 1994 is by far the largest class of basketball players - nine. Of these nine, eight initially attended post-secondary institutions and were still in school in the fall of 1996. One has taken time off from school to earn money and gain valuable experience with the Americorp and plans to return to school next year. Three of these high school graduates played college basketball their first year, but none have continued in athletics. Three of these nine former players are still in school, and another is in the army. Two of of the original nine have children and are

struggling financially to raise a family and trying to earn a college degree.

Finally, the class of 1995 consists of seven basketball players. Of these seven, 100% returned to school for their sophomore year. All are attending junior colleges. Three participated in athletics during their first year in college. No one in this class has any children.

Overall, 41% of these former basketball players participated in college athletics at least one semester following their high school graduation. Twenty-eight percent of the basketball players now have children. Most of the mothers raised their children while continuing their education. This creates substantial financial and emotional stress on the mother and others involved in raising the children, yet "creating new life is extremely valued, and at the same time it reaffirms a woman's place in Navajo society" (Deyhle 1995, 143). But the fact remains, that despite the additional financial burden and stress involved with raising children while in school, seven out of eight of the mothers (88%) have either earned their degrees or are continuing their education. This is not a startling statistic when we take into account the fact that Navajo people consider raising children in a positive environment as an asset to the community. In the past decade, education is also gaining acceptance as a valuable community resource.

### Selection Process

The selection process for interviews in this study was based on accessibility to former basketball players, non-athletes, family members, and high school teachers and staff. The family members, teachers, and high school staff all comprise the athletes' and non-athletes' support groups. Prior to any interviews, an informational letter regarding the completed 1995 research and an invitation to participate in this study were sent to the following groups: athletes, support group, family members, and non-athletes (see Appendix 2 for sample informational letter and invitation to participate in the study). After that, I phoned individuals and made plans to either interview the individual in person (which was preferred) or over the phone (depending on scheduling conflicts or distance problems). Several trips to NHS and the community of Redrock were then arranged to interview members of the support groups. Six staff members from the high school, four teachers, one counselor and the principal, were chosen based on the college prep courses they taught, their involvement with extra-curricular activities (athletics, student government, and clubs), and the significance of their involvement with the entire student body at NHS. All six consented to interviews.

All four teachers interviewed were Anglo; two female and two male. This selection of teachers was made exclusively on

the basis of teaching college prep courses, the length of time at Redrock, and interacting with students in extracurricular activities, such as student council, creative writing seminars, and the yearly social studies trip to Washington, D.C. Two of the teachers taught English (Ann Jackson\* and John Brown\*), one taught social studies courses (Mike Green\*), and the other (Mrs. Mary Bennett\*) taught physical education (which every female must take and pass to graduate). All but one of these teachers are still teaching in Redrock, and the average tenure is twelve years. Two of the teachers have been in Redrock over fifteen years.

At NHS there are fifty-five teachers; eight are Navajo, the rest Anglo, of whom five women are married to Navajo men. The demographics reflect 15% of the teachers are Navajo, 9% are married to Navajos, and 76% are Anglo (See Figure 3.4).

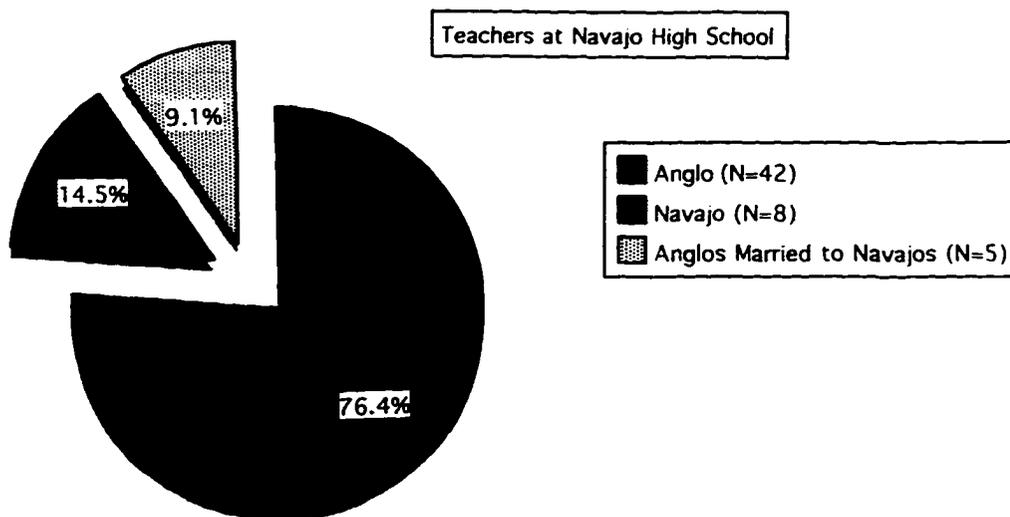


Figure 3.4

Of the Navajo teachers, only two teach college preparatory courses (math). These two individuals were not interviewed because they did not teach at NHS during the time of the study. The Anglo women married to Navajo men were not interviewed because they did not teach college prep courses. The physical education teacher was interviewed because she taught every female in the high school.

The support staff, or administrative staff, at NHS is made up of approximately twenty people. At least 50% are Navajo. They include secretaries, registrar, attendance officer, parent liaison, study hall coordinator, library assistant, activities monitor, special education aides, and the at-risk coordinator. Two people were interviewed from this group - the NHS principal (James Evans\*) for the past five years and the counselor (Betty Gray\*) for several of the classes in the study. Both of these individuals are Navajo.

Of the four teachers interviewed, two were also coaches. Both coaches captured state championships in their respective sports, but did not coach basketball between 1990-1995. They were selected precisely for that reason. As coaches leading successful programs, both are qualified to speak in reference to the inner workings of the athletic department, academic perceptions of athletes and coaches, as well as the community's perception of NHS's athletic and educational programs. The importance of this research lies in the basketball players' perspectives and I wanted their voice to

be heard.

The athletes were interviewed based on availability. Several did not respond to inquiry and the subsequent tracking process was extremely difficult. Since the study focuses on successful former basketball players, I focused on contacting these people. Due to my continuous contact with these students, it was fairly easy to make arrangements for an interview. The more recent graduates were easier to contact based on my personal interaction with their families, and having them in class as students also helped. Of the six classes, only two are not represented, the class of 1990 and 1992. The class of 1990 (N=4) did not know me very well since that was my first year at Redrock, and I only coached the class of 1992 (N=2) for one year. Figure 3.5 breaks down the total number of basketball players<sup>14</sup> and number interviewed by graduating class.

Finding non-athletes who fit the requirements was extremely difficult. They had to have graduated between 1990-95, taken college prep courses, attended a post-secondary institution, and not participated in varsity athletics while at NHS. The most difficult aspect of the requirements was not participating in varsity athletics. Although the number of basketball players is relatively small, many of the students who have gone on to college did participate on one of the athletic teams at NHS (cross-country, volleyball, track and field, or softball). With the

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<sup>14</sup> The term basketball players always refers to females.

help of basketball players, teachers, and counselors, I identified, contacted and interviewed three non-athletes.

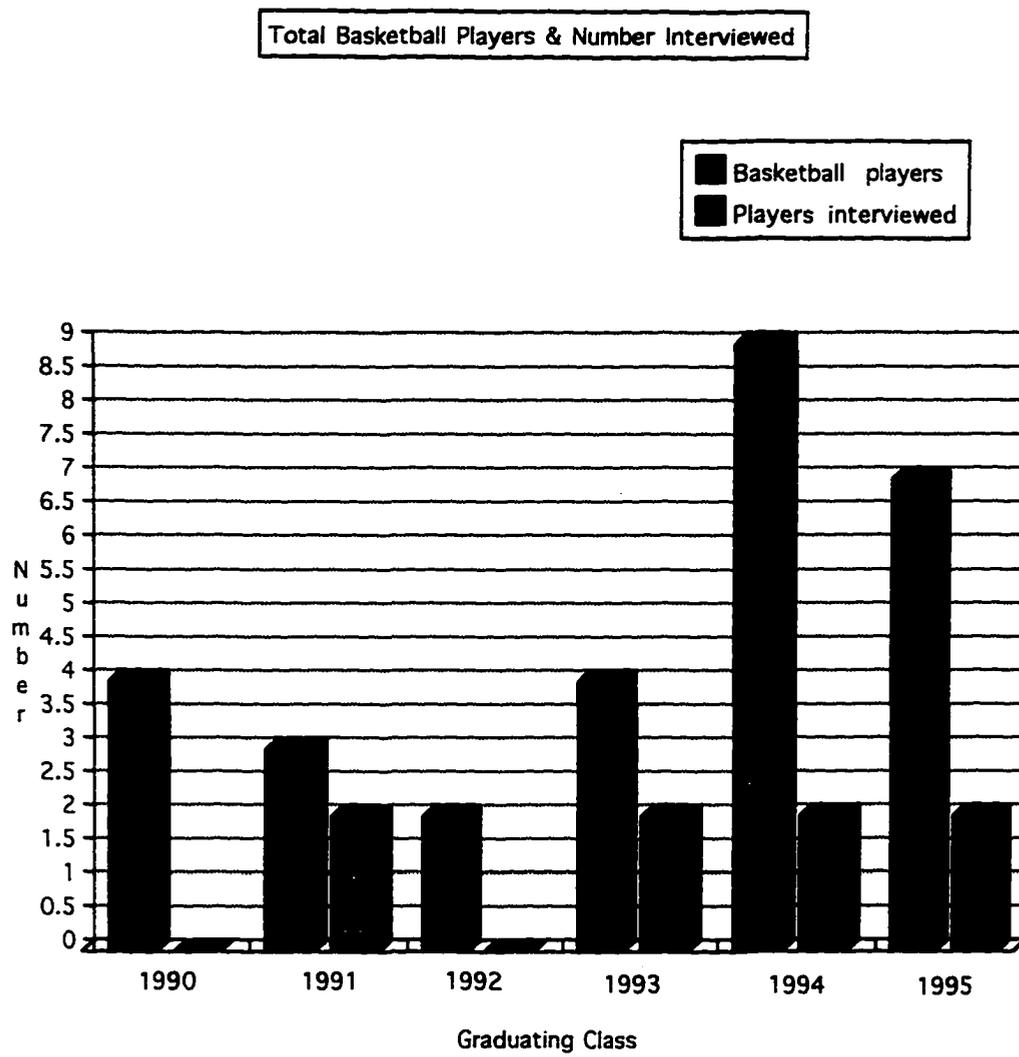


Figure 3.5

Barbara Cly\* graduated with the NHS class of 1991 and graduated December 1996 from one of the state universities in Arizona with a degree in political science. Nancy Blackhorse\* graduated with the NHS class of 1992 and presently is attending one of the universities in New Mexico. Finally Stephanie Holiday\* is a sophomore at the University of Arizona and graduated with the class of 1995. Based on the statistics from the class of 1993, forty of the seventy-two females (55%) of the class participated in the college prep track. Although my sample of three represents only 8% of the non-athletes, at least their voice will be heard.

Due to poor timing on my part (the Navajo Fair was happening during my visit), lack of communication, distance, and scheduling conflicts, only one family member was available for an interview. Bernadette Yazzie's\* insight is valuable in that she speaks specifically of the community's expectations, and consequent pressures on the athletes.

### Interview Process

When I first met with an individual for an interview, I presented the "Subject's Consent Form" (See Appendix 2) for review and the individual's signature. All interviews were tape-recorded to insure accuracy in all quotations, and as a oral record of the interview. All tapes have been

transcribed. The subjects "agreed to the following methods to insure confidentiality: any use of this interview in the written work will be given a pseudonym; all tapes, transcriptions, and notes derived from this interview shall remain in the possession of Traci Nemechek" (Subject's Consent Form, 2).

I then discussed the role of interviewer and researcher. I reminded the individual not to say things they thought I would want to hear, or leave things out because it might hurt my feelings, but instead present their honest perspective. I emphasized that the answers lie in their story, their voice, so they should tell it!

From that point, a basic questionnaire was used to acquire demographic information such as name, address, graduating class, involvement in sports, grade point average, class rank, college prep courses taken, college information, financial aid, record of post-high school activities, problems and solutions in college, and a definition of post-secondary success (see Appendix 2).

Upon completion of the questionnaire nine areas were addressed through open-ended questions about their initial college attendance and subsequent retention: 1) family, athletics, and academics throughout their life, 2) participation in games, sports, and athletics, 3) the impact of the support group on the student, 4) self-expectations, and others' perception of the student as a leader, athlete,

and/or student. Building on the previous information, the climate of athletics and academics at NHS and within the community of Redrock was addressed through questions specifically addressing school administrators', teachers', coaches', and family members' actions and comments regarding academics and athletics. 5) Post-secondary experiences such as obstacles, solutions, and reasons for success in college. 6) Skills necessary for college success were looked at in two different ways. First students were asked to identify the necessary skills, then 7) describe the method by which they learned this skill, and who was the influence or teacher of this skill. 8) In conjunction with their view of necessary skills for college success, a list of recognized skills (through research) was presented. They were asked to rate the specific skill on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) and then give an explanation for their score. These skills were not compared to each other, so more than one skill could have the same score as another. 9) Students cited lessons learned from high school and college experiences, as well as giving words of wisdom to American Indian youth in general and specifically to students at NHS. The complete interview packet for athletes, non-athletes, and support group can be found in Appendix 2.

### Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that female Navajo participation in high school athletics does contribute to future post-secondary academic success; the athletes' support group plays a significant role in the students' future academic or athletic success.

## CHAPTER 4.

## THE COMMUNITY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS "BALLERS"

Navajo Culture

To understand the relationship between the community of Redrock and its basketball players, it is paramount to understand the Navajo culture and its importance in everyday contemporary life. The basis of Navajo culture lies in the emergence and creation stories of the past. These stories are the code of manners, morals, and laws, and they provide intellectual and ethical lessons as well as simple entertainment. Additionally, they provide the psychological foundation and stability for Navajo people in an ever-changing world.

In Navajo society, the most important cultural concept is to live a balanced and harmonious life, to "walk in beauty." The Navajo word, *hózhó*, "expresses the intellectual notion of order, the emotional state of happiness, the physical state of health, the moral condition of good, and the aesthetic dimension of harmony" (Witherspoon 1995, 15). In understanding *hózhó*, it is important to comprehend the Navajo view of the universe. In Navajo culture, the whole is more important than the individual parts. All parts have an identity, function and beauty in relation to the whole, yet disabling any part destroys the whole, and balance and beauty

are lost. Man is not superior to nature, females are not superior to men, and the mind and body cannot be separated. All things of this earth must live together in harmony or suffer from the imbalance.

When *hózhó* is disrupted, problems arise for the individual and group. In an attempt to restore or maintain *hózhó*, ceremonies and prayers are conducted to heal the mind and the body. In Lisa Begaye's\* family, prayers were conducted at the beginning of the school year "to bless us to do good, and stay away from all bad things." Many of these prayers are expressed through an individual's daily life and activities. This Navajo prayer exemplifies the importance of maintaining, and restoring *hózhó*:

With beauty (*hózhó*) before me, I walk.  
 With beauty behind me, I walk.  
 With beauty above me, I walk.  
 With beauty below me, I walk.

From the East beauty has been renewed.  
 From the South beauty has been renewed.  
 From the West beauty has been renewed.  
 From the North beauty has been renewed.  
 From the zenith in the sky beauty has been renewed.  
 From the nadir of the Earth beauty has been renewed.  
 From all around me beauty has been renewed  
 (Witherspoon 1995, 15).

The universe is an orderly system of interrelated elements, an all-inclusive unity that contains both good and evil. This ability to maintain balance and harmony, *hózhó*, is

essential to the survival of all species, and guidelines must be followed.

Navajo spirituality is based on *hózhó*. If a person follows the rules, then she remains safe or is restored to safety. In conjunction with these guidelines, ritual behavior provides appropriate and necessary formulas to personal well-being and survival. During specific ceremonies "the patient is purified through rituals and eventually becomes identified with deities whose help is sought to restore him to harmony with the universe" (Locke 1989, 48). Personal ritual and shared ceremony also provide connections and continuity to the community. One cannot stand alone, instead the Navajo believe, we are all part of the world which is much larger than our self. With spirituality interwoven throughout Navajo society, ceremonies and narratives are essential in maintaining balance in Navajo culture. Navajo spirituality allows the people to come closer to the universal whole, to *hózhó*.

Since Navajo people do not believe in an afterlife, emphasis is placed upon living a full life while on earth. Women command unparalleled respect as guardians of the family in this matriarchal society. Motherhood is defined in terms of life, reproduction, and sustenance. Newborn children become members of their mother's clan. Additionally, they are "born for" their father's clan. The concepts of mother and child are inseparable in Navajo culture.

The story of Changing Woman in Navajo culture provides the major framework for defining the importance and power of motherhood. Changing Woman was found alone on a mesa by First Man when the people had lost the ability to reproduce, and the monsters were killing the people. First Man and First Woman, along with other deities, planned to have Changing Woman restore the power of generation and give birth to twins who would later destroy the monsters. During First Woman's first menstrual period, the *Kinaaldá* (puberty rite) was performed. After this ceremony, Changing Woman united with the Sun and gave birth to the Twins and later the original Navajo clans (Witherspoon 1975, 15-16).

Changing Woman was the source of life for the Navajo, her children. Today she is symbolized by the mother earth. In Navajo mythology, the earth was the source of life for all beings through their emergence from the underworlds. The earth gave birth to all living creatures in this act of emergence. The earth also rejuvenates itself through the seasons. Other "mothers" recognized in Navajo society include corn and livestock:

The Navajos have always said that, as long as they have cornfields and *Kinaaldá*, they have nothing to worry about. These two elements of Navajo life remain in position of vital importance, and in both elements the women play the primary role. The cornfield, with its fertility and growth, and the *Kinaaldá* ceremony, with its recognition of the coming of age of the Navajo girl to womanhood, combine to focus on the cycle of reproduction, without which there can be no food and no people (Roessel 1981, 105).

*Kinaaldá*, a four day ceremony, celebrates a young women's first menstruation, and her transition into adulthood. Following the ritual established by Changing Woman in the creation story, "the ceremony's purpose is to impart the moral and intellectual strength that she will need now that she herself can create new life and continue Navajo culture" (Deyhle 1995, 139). Laziness, meanness, and stinginess are discouraged as undesirable traits, whereas helpfulness and caring for others are encouraged. Positive physical traits, such as a straight back and strong legs are important as Navajo believe the girl's bones are soft and must be molded and shaped during the ceremony which will influence her health for the rest of her life (Deyhle 1995, 139).

The running segment of the ceremony personifies the spirit of Changing Women, and demonstrates the importance of physical fitness in Navajo society. As dawn lightens the day, she runs to the east, usually 200 yards or half a mile, before turning back in the sunrise direction. Here is one of the running songs from the First Puberty Ceremony included in the Navajo emergence story:

My little one, they run out shouting, they run out  
 shouting,  
 My little one, they run out shouting.  
 My little one, they run out shouting, they run out  
 shouting.  
 My little one, they run out shouting.

The White Shell Girl, -they run out shouting-  
 From below the east, -they run out shouting-  
 Before her, the wind blows the trees, -they run out

shouting-  
 Behind her, the wind blows the plants-they run out  
 shouting-  
 The white shell stands erect all about her,-they run out  
 shouting-  
 The sacred words, your girl,-they run out shouting-  
 Before her, all is beautiful,-they run out shouting-  
 Behind her, all is beautiful,-they run out shouting-

My little one, they run out shouting, they run out  
 shouting,  
 My little one, they run out shouting.

The Turquoise Girl,-they run out shouting-

From below the west,-they run out shouting-  
 Behind her, the wind blows the plants,-they run out  
 shouting-  
 Before her, the wind blows the trees,-they run out  
 shouting-

The turquoise stands erect all about her,-they run out  
 shouting-  
 The sacred words, your girl,-they run out shouting-  
 Behind her, all is beautiful,-they run out shouting-  
 Before her, all is beautiful,-they run out shouting-

My little one, they run out shouting, they run out  
 shouting,  
 My little one, they run out shouting.  
 My little one, they run out shouting, they run out  
 shouting.  
 My little one, they run out shouting (Nabokov 1981,  
 140).

The young woman runs up to three times per day, with each run longer than the last. How far she ultimately runs determines how long she will live. Running makes her brave, seals in her energetic and industrious character, and increases her chances to acquire wealth with sheep, horses, and children. To shorten her run or rest results in laziness and invites trouble. The *Kinaaldá* ceremony formalizes a young

Navajo women's commitment to family and community; Changing Woman is the role model for all Navajo women, and represents all that is good and right.

Women's interests are centered on the family so they must use all available resources to promote stability; they are viewed as more stable than men. The positive characteristics that distinguish Navajo women include: physical strength and tenacity in spite of adversity and hardship, faith to keep going when achievement seems impossible, and recognition and acceptance as leaders among the Navajo people (Roessel 1981, 144).

Additionally the clan system provides identity to all Navajos. A child is "born of" her mother's clan, and "born for" her father's clan. An individual also identifies her maternal grandfather's and paternal grandfather's clans. This self-identification announces to others her place in Navajo society. Clans establish large circles of relatives which are important in cooperation and ceremony. The clan system also provides structure for Navajo people not to marry within one's clan (or family). This act of incest is repulsive and totally unacceptable within Navajo culture.

An individual is related to brother and sisters, and everyone in her mother and father's clans, her paternal grandfather's clan, and her maternal grandfather's clan. All these relatives are connected through *k'é* which means "kindness, love, cooperation, thoughtfulness, friendliness,

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and peacefulness" (Witherspoon 1983, 524). The primary bond of *k'é* is the mother-child bond. This bond is the closest and strongest of all relationships in the Navajo social system, and is expressed through affection, care, kindness, and sharing.

The primary bond of non-kinship is found in the husband-wife relationship. This relationship is contractual, originating with a bride wealth the husband's kin group provides to the wife's. This relationship is supposed to be advantageous to both parties through mutual obligations, such as ceremonies and raising the children. Authority is informal and shared, but the mother's brothers generally assume the role of disciplinarian instead of the father. Positive behaviors are reinforced by all family members, with inappropriate behaviors corrected by sanctions of shaming.

Ceremonies bring individuals together, unite the group, and remind people of the common beliefs, goals, and value system of Navajo culture. Because of geographical isolation, the Navajo clan system and *k'é*, very little interaction beyond relatives and local communities occurs. Therefore the family, clan, and community become the priority and *hózhó* is crucial to its success and well-being.

Cooperation and autonomy are important aspects of the Navajo cultural system. The phrase "It's up to him to decide" (Lamphere 1977, 38), describes the individual's right to speak for himself and act as he pleases as long as it does

not hurt others. Yet this phrase also refers to the collective action of the group. The rights and duties of relatives are expected, but not forced. This oxymoron, autonomy and cooperation, can best be understood in its application to sheep herding in Navajo culture. A small child is given individual sheep and her involvement in communal herding is strictly voluntary. She may separate her sheep from the herd, place them in a different herd, or leave them with her family's herd. She is not required to help care for the herd, but she is expected to do so whenever possible. When the girl chooses to put her sheep with the others, she is cooperating and must now assume responsibility for her actions.

If the young girl neglects her responsibility by taking shelter during a storm or losing track of the sheep, or abuses the sheep by riding and chasing them, she is scolded or whipped. This punishment quickly corrects these poor habits. By caring for her own sheep, she cares for everyone else's sheep and vice versa. As a reward for her cooperation, she receives more sheep. The herd is insurance against group hunger and starvation. What is good for the individual is good for the group, and what is good for the group is good for the individual. The sheep herd symbolizes autonomy and cooperation in Navajo culture.

Cooperation allows everyone to be equally valued within the group. Children learn early to work. When a Navajo

youngster brings in pieces of wood for the fire, she is praised for her attempt to participate in family activities. In Anglo culture, the youngster is told not to meddle and go outside and play. Girls are taught to cook and take care of children at a very young age. It is not surprising to see seven year girls successfully taking care of a two year old. The boys are taught about animal husbandry and agriculture. It is common to observe children chopping wood, and hauling coal, water and wood.

Riches are not identified with individuals, but with relatives. "All wealth is desired for security rather than as a means of enhancing the power and glory of specific individuals" (Kluckhohn 1962, 301). In Navajo society, one must support and share with relatives; this is a sign of wealth, not the accumulation of material goods as in Anglo society. Specific skills and knowledge carry prestige, and personal excellence is valued, but not at the expense of others. "Educational success is not viewed as a route for individual mobility, as in Anglo society, but rather as an investment for the community and family" (Deyhle 1995, 148). If an individual's desires are perceived as more important than the groups', if she is uncooperative or uncaring, or she distinguishes herself as superior and assumes power over others, suspicion is raised.

Uncooperative behaviors are undesirable in Navajo culture. These un-Navajo behaviors are the evidence of

witchcraft. "Both 'witches' and 'werewolves' are 'inverted' Navajos, or creatures who embody all the characteristics opposite to the cooperative, social individual" (Lamphere 1977, 37). Instead of practicing harmony, they are concerned with chaos and evil. Although witchcraft is not openly discussed, it serves several social functions within Navajo society. First it defines what is bad: meanness, jealousy, laziness, and not helping others. Second, it preserves equilibrium within a society. For *hózhó* to exist so must *hóchó*. "The purpose of witchcraft suspicion among the Navajo is not to punish any one individual but to explain the illness and prescribe the correct ceremonial cure which will counteract it" (Lamphere 1977, 38). According to former player Lisa Begaye, "we would use a medicine man if someone tried to witch us. We would go there to get it solved." Accusations of witchcraft provide a technique of social control (Lamphere 1977, 55).

In the world of the Navajo, to stand out or distinguish yourself from others brings potential envy and witchcraft. This perceived or actual superior behavior or disposition is inappropriate in Navajo society and may have sanctions. "The use of witchcraft and fear of witchcraft emerge[s] as a strong force in monitoring the relationship..." (Allison 1980, 136) between the individual and Navajo society.

In addition to these Navajo beliefs, health and strength are essential for a good life. If you are not

healthy, you can not work and you will starve. Therefore industry is also important. Running is considered a prerequisite for work and spiritual readiness. Talking God is the "Grandfather of Gods" and the traditional running coach. He travels on rainbows and sunbeams and guides his children towards self-sufficiency, stressing courage, enterprise, and a quick mind. Running helps root these attributes and provide direction to an industrious life. Navajo children were expected to rise before the dawn, and run to the east. If snow was on the ground, the children were expected to roll in it or jump into cold water to develop an "immunity to weather" (Nabokov 1981, 133). Running at dawn fends off laziness, cleared the eyes, and made the body strong. According to Rex Jim, "My grandfather told me that Talking God comes around in the morning, knocks on the door, and says, 'Get up my grandchildren, it's time to run, run for health and wealth'" (Nabokov 1981, 132).

Running at dawn included many spiritual elements for success. Breakfast was not eaten until the return. Many times sagebrush was boiled, drunk and later thrown up after a hard run. This was done to cleanse the body. The number four is also important as demonstrated by runners during their run. A runner yells four times, once at the start of the run, twice during the run, and once at the shaping place. The "shaping place" was the half-way point, where muscles were pressed down upon and punched to shape the body. In

addition, the runner ran around a bush clockwise, or sunwise.

Upon returning to the hogan, the runner circles the hogan four times, and holds corn pollen to [her] chest breathing deeply four times (Nabokov 1981, 135). Other items or beliefs associated with running at dawn include: carrying a talisman or arrowhead, smearing bird pollen, bear fur medicine, mountain lion fur or eagle skin on the body to acquire these animals' traits of speed and endurance. Talking God songs or leg songs were sung over long distances. Running at dawn provides balance in Navajo life. According to Rex Jim, "It is good for your fitness and your reputation, and it provides more contact with the gods. If you say, 'Oh, I'll run in the morning,' then you have to, or you're lying to the gods" (Nabokov 1981, 135).

Throughout history, the Navajo have adapted and adopted practices from other people and cultures, yet have retained their unique identity and cultural integrity. Central to this identity and continuity is *hózhó*. Despite wage work, pickup trucks, a capitalistic economy, basketball, educational institutions, and technological innovations, the basic elements of *hózhó* continue to permeate Navajo society: productiveness, cooperation, dependability, helpfulness, and generosity in giving and spending. This ability to synthesize the old with the new demonstrates the preservation and evolution of Navajo culture which is critical to the continued success of the Navajo Nation.

### Formal Education

Formal Anglo education did not initially meet the needs of Navajo people, who were not interested in a language they could not speak, read, or write. Coupled with geographic remoteness and lack of adequate roads, access to day schools was non-existent. Additionally, Navajo parents did not want to send their children away from home and their traditional teachings to attend far away boarding schools. Locally, the Bureau of Indian Affairs provided a day school in the 1940s, and the Presbyterian missionaries provided religious instruction to the children. Navajo children were expected to assimilate into the dominant society, and stripping them of their cultural and spiritual identity was essential:

Every effort was made to teach them to be white. They were forced to discard their native clothing and wear the castoffs of the dominant culture; they were told that the songs and legends taught them by their parents were the "work of the devil" and had to be erased from memory...Their names were changed to Charlie, Joe, Bessie, Linda or some other Christian appellation. Anything and everything that was "Indian" was forbidden - yet they were never allowed to forget that they were Indian...They learned to "act white" but remained Navajo (Locke 1989, 417).

Students caught speaking Navajo had their hands slapped by a ruler, and their mouths washed out with soap: "Nothing about you was valuable, not your culture, not your language"

(Krammer 1993, NV-5).

The gradual shift from Navajo traditional education to

American formal education began in the 1930s when Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier implemented his Livestock Reduction Plan on the reservation. With the physical and cultural loss of their livelihood, many people began to listen to the words of their great leader Manuelito and turn towards formal education:

My GRANDCHILD, the whites have many things which we Navajos need. But we cannot get them. It is as though the whites were in a grassy canyon and there they have wagons, plows, and plenty of food. We Navajos are up on the dry mesa. We can hear them talking but cannot get to them. My grandchild, education is the ladder. Tell our people to take it (Underhill 1953, 4).

During the 1940s, Navajo parents contributed food and their time as dormitory attendants in an attempt to entice more children to attend the local schools (Young 1961, 13). Following World War II, Navajo Code Talkers and war workers returned to the reservation with a better understanding of how vital a role education would be in the future success of the Navajo people. In 1946, a Special Tribal Delegation told the Interior Department and Congress "that formal education was considered by the Tribe to be its primary need" (Young 1961, 14).

With a 536-pupil boarding school built in Redrock, and the 5-year Special Navajo Education Program designed to educate the 13-18 year old age group (behind in school as a result of language or transportation barriers), many adults of Redrock participated in formal education for the first time. In 1958, a public grade school, junior high and high

school opened in Redrock. These adults are the relatives of the female basketball players interviewed.

Most of the basketball players' parents attained some schooling through boarding schools, but many do not have a high school diploma or G.E.D. At least two mothers returned to school, received their G.E.D., and now work for the local Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school. Only three of the eight basketball players' Navajo parents' have attended college. Mrs. Bennett\* explains the educational dilemma on the reservation: "It's acceptable to not have a college degree. Here on the reservation, you can succeed without a college degree. It's hard. You're not going to achieve some high level of financial stability... but it's acceptable." Many grandparents still do not understand the desire to leave the reservation. Claudia Laughter's\* grandparents said: "You should just stay here...We've got the livestock. We've got all this. Why don't you stay here?" Yet when they see their children's persistence they too join in supporting young women, such as Claudia: "[N]ow when I go back to Redrock, my grandfather says, 'you need to finish.' It's like I was the starting block for everything. Since I graduated from NHS, five of my cousins are in college." Despite only 10% of the adults in Redrock completing a bachelor's degree, Navajo families support their daughters' quest for a higher education. These young women are the new role models for achieving success in institutions of higher

education.

### Athletics

In conjunction with formal education, historically sport has been a successful tool "for changing behavior, shaping character, building unity and cohesion within a diversified population, and creating national unity" (Coakley 1994, 69). Members of religious groups also believed sport provided a link between physical strength and the ability to do good deeds. Sport became an avenue for spiritual growth and in organizations such as the YMCA and YWCA the concept of "muscular Christianity" evolved (Coakley 1994, 69). Team sports were used to tame "...the savage and undisciplined character of young lower-class males," (Coakley 1994, 70) and teamwork, obedience to rules, planning, and organization created good workers dedicated to achievement and production for the glory of God and country (Coakley 1994, 70). Public education also bought into the idea that sport built character and "muscular Christianity" was critical in properly educating those less fortunate, such as immigrants and Native Americans.

Henry Pratt's Indian Boarding School, at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, mirrored America's application of school sports. In 1892, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools for the Indian Service stated:

Group athletics include all pupils of a school and emphasize loyalty to members of society, alertness, judgment, justice, fair play, and clean sport. Games which require planning and effort to overcome obstacles are of real worth. Man reveals his age by the games and ways he plays. The success of any movement depends largely upon intelligent direction. The degree of success attained depends upon the amount of clear thinking and energy expended (Coon 1919, 2).

Indian youth were enthusiastic participants as a result of their cultural and spiritual experiences with games prior to their initiation into American formal education. Eventually these students excelled at baseball, soccer, football, track and field, and basketball, after its origination in 1892. By 1898, Carlisle was recognized as one of the nation's most successful football teams. For Pratt, winning football games meant winning support for the idea that "Indians, if given the opportunity, were capable of competing with whites not only on the football field but in society as well" (Adams 1995, 184). Pratt also believed:

[F]ootball was a powerful tool for acculturating Indians to the American value system. From football Indians would learn the value of precision, teamwork, order, discipline, obedience, efficiency and how all these interconnected in the business of 'winning.' Football also built character by teaching prized American values like hard work, self-reliance, and self-control it also gave ritualistic expression to one of the cardinal elements in American social thought, survival of the fittest (Adams 1995, 18).

The school's football heroes were living testimony to those qualities necessary for success on and off the field.

The Indian boarding schools in the East provided a model for new boarding schools in the West: Haskell Institute,

Phoenix, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque Indian Schools. From 1882 to 1885, Navajo children attended Carlisle, but all but a few became ill or died. As a result, leaders of the tribe wanted their children closer to home and chose the boarding schools in the West over those in the East.

The Phoenix Indian School opened its doors in 1891, and the school's football and baseball programs were solid by the mid-1890s. Following Pratt's "Carlisle model" that sport built character and physical well-being, athletics became an important part of school life. All healthy students were required to participate in physical training and those with athletic talents were encouraged to join athletic teams, but maintenance of a good academic record was essential. Physical activities were directly related to and emphasized discipline. Therefore games and activities were organized to "cover most of what would otherwise be spare time" (Trennert 1988, 128). Girls were encouraged to participate in "genteel" sports of basketball and tennis, yet still maintain both discipline and physical training. By 1903, girls' basketball teams were competing at the Phoenix Indian School. As a result of traveling and competing with other schools in sports, the Indian boarding school "reinforced the traditional value of cooperation for the good of the whole while encouraging the competitiveness in the outside world" (Hyer 1990, 49).

The Haskell Institute athletic teams included boys' and

girls' basketball, boys' football, and a gymnasium and playground equipment for both girls and boys. Haskell Institute specifically stated in their school catalog in 1930 the importance of physical training:

The mind is much better housed in a strong body than in a weak one. To be strong one must have outdoor exercise, and to this end all kinds of outdoor sports are encouraged. Baseball, football, track, tennis, basket ball, and other school and college sports are given due attention. Inter class and society teams and leagues are formed and do much to bring out a larger number of students than would otherwise be reached. Our plan is to have every student at Haskell take an active part in some form of helpful, healthful physical exercise (Haskell Institute 1933, 14).

Ironically changes at Carlisle and Haskell were partially a result of Senate investigations regarding athletic scandals. The program at Carlisle was criticized for laxity in academic programs, over-emphasizing athletics, abusing athletes, mishandling athletic funds, inflating school attendance records to acquire federal funding, and a general lack of discipline (Oxendine 1988, 192). As a result of this student-athlete initiated investigation, Carlisle's athletic program declined rapidly and the school closed its doors in 1918.

Haskell gained national prominence as a result of Carlisle's closing. Haskell Institute's athletic success and recognition in the 1920s and early 1930s led to its new title, "The New Carlisle of the West." In the 1928 Meriam Report, Haskell was encouraged to follow both private and public colleges and schools to clean up athletics:

Haskell and other schools should as soon as possible adopt the standards of other schools in respect to eligibility. Many desirable and practical methods are now available for carrying on athletics without the old abuses, such as, for example, a program of athletic participation of all students, boys and girls; physical education under competent medical and athletic direction;...and other outside activities (Meriam 1928, 396).

The junior college program at Haskell was abolished in 1932, but their tradition of athletic excellence continued at the high school level (Oxendine 1988, 200).

With Navajo day and boarding schools recruiting former Carlisle and Haskell students as teachers or aides, and Navajo parents sending their children to Western boarding schools, the federal policy of implementing physical exercise and team sports continued. Additionally the enforcement of the Compulsory Indian Education law in 1887 requiring school attendance, resulted in the establishment of small mission schools throughout the reservation: St. Michael's Mission School in 1902 (Catholic), Rehoboth Mission School in 1903 (Christian Reformed), Ganado Mission in 1906 (Presbyterian), and the Navajo Methodist Mission in 1912 located at Farmington, New Mexico. Additionally, the construction of new boarding schools located at Fort Wingate, Chinle, Crownpoint, Toadalena, Shiprock, Tuba City, Leupp, and Tohatchi on the Navajo reservation were completed by 1925. Consequently participation in American sports increased in local schools:

The Navajos' keen desire to prove his manliness and courage, once put to the test on the battlefield, was

now being satisfied on the sports field. As more boarding schools were established throughout the Reservation, an inter-school sports program was developed. It soon became a most popular facet of the over-all educational program and played an exciting role in community activities (Link 1968, 42).

In October, 1913 the Fort Defiance Boarding School beat the visiting San Juan team 19-5, and during the 1920s Saint Michael's Mission School challenged other schools on the football field as well (Link 1968, 42). School sports were becoming prized community events on the Navajo reservation.

From 1951-1961, the Bureau of Indian Affairs operated six different types of schools for Navajo students: boarding schools, day schools, trailer schools, reservation dormitories, border-town dormitories, and off-reservation schools (Witherspoon 1983, 662). All emphasized physical exercise and sports. During this time, day and trailer schools on the reservation had playground equipment and/or a home-made basketball hoop on the school grounds (Young 1961, 32-35 pictures). The impact athletics has on Navajo people, the basketball players of NHS, their relatives, as well as the the community of Redrock is based on the historical premises that sport is an equalizer, and builds character.

#### Redrock and its Athletes: Pressure or Support?

With the historical marriage of formal Indian education

and athletics, and the importance of Navajo culture in everyday life, Redrock's total commitment to its athletes and athletic teams is not surprising. Basketball players consistently cite playing with relatives or participating in Pee Wee sports as their first memory of sports, and parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters were the biggest influences on their participation in athletics. Across the Navajo reservation, children have always played with family members at an early age. Bernadette Yazzie\* stated: "We have a big family. We've always gotten together and played softball or basketball. Not so much volleyball. We usually would choose up sides, oldest to youngest. Everyone plays."

With a family history of education and athletics, children were expected to participate. In Redrock, children begin Pee Wee sports at age eight, with the option to compete throughout their middle and high school careers. Initial success brought instant recognition, praise, and reinforcement for Summer Long\*: "I really liked the way I felt about myself. I felt really proud. I didn't realize how, I didn't think I did all that good, but I guess people [saw] something [they liked]." With the competitiveness and success of Pee Wee and middle school sports, family members and school supporters constantly cheer and critique players' skills. Relatives often serve as personal coaches in building necessary skills for high school success. With the family's personal commitment to the basketball player's

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development, relatives like Jackie Little's\* provided both support and pressure:

My father was always comparing my game and performance to other people. It totally hurt me, and I couldn't concentrate. That's why I was not shooting very well. Instead of trying to excel in other areas, I was constantly trying to fight what he was saying all these years...but my brother was my biggest supporter.

Additionally, the community and school join players' families in supporting their success or failure on the basketball court.

With the implementation of the Pee Wee program, success followed at the middle and high schools. With success comes expectations, and the community definitely had expectations. Teams were expected to win the conference, defeat arch rival Blue Mesa\*, and win the state championship. Jackie Little\* explained:

I didn't really understand that this game was so important until I began playing on the varsity team. [Then] the game was do or die. Whenever we played Blue Mesa, there was always a sense of something that you didn't like about that team. You didn't know what it was, but you let everybody else build up your motivation. Some people hated them a lot. To a point where they accused a lady of witchcraft from Blue Mesa. Accusations like that led players to think, 'yeah, this really is a bad team. We gotta beat them.' When things are being said about a certain team, the community gets involved. When the game is played, there are a lot of things said in the stands. Then the players take it onto the court. The [community] brings so much discomfort and misunderstanding to the court...A lot of tradition [witchcraft and jealousy] gets involved. Your emotions pile up. You must win; you must do this. It comes down to that one game and everybody gets caught up in it. It's a rivalry, but it becomes more. Trying to impress yourself and the crowd too. I don't know if you're trying to win the game for yourself or what. It's something you just get caught up in. It's more of a

feeling, it's nothing material or anything like that. You don't win anything at the end.

Coupled with the expectation of winning was the depth of integration of basketball into community life. Everyone goes out to eat before the games, attends the games, celebrates the win or criticizes the loss. Basketball receives a great deal of attention throughout the entire year: the air is filled with predictions for the upcoming season, comments on the team and individual players progress through the season, and reflections on the past season. It's a year-round obsession, and parents want their kids to play. According to former player Claudia Laughter\*:

Everyone associates basketball with being able to accomplish things...They hear about Ryneldi Becenti, Gwen Hobbs, and Clifford Johns who all [played college basketball] made it. They think sports gets you through college. They forget about keeping your grades up. You still have to go to school. The way they see it is if you're playing ball then you're doing something good. You're going to make it. It's a life for [the community] because there's really nothing else that you can do out on the rez. So go out and try to live your life through some else whose gonna go out and do something. And basketball is a lot easier to follow than academics. I don't get too many people asking 'how's your English class going?' But during the season, they'd say 'how many points did you score?' and stuff like that. They just think of the NBA, they don't realize how hard [students] have to work to get to where they are.

Media attention perpetuates the community and the school interest and consequent commitment to basketball. The President of the Navajo Tribe publicly thanks "all the high schools of the Navajo Nation for an exciting and memorable

season," the school administrators and teachers, parents, students and fans "who supported these talented youth," and congratulates the seven high schools for "honorably representing the Navajo Nation in the Arizona and New Mexico State [Basketball] Tournaments" (Cameron 1993, 28) in the local Navajo Hoops newspaper. Additional articles in Sports Illustrated and Reader's Digest on the success of girls basketball on the Navajo reservation are positive, but add to existing expectations. Former player Lisa Begaye\* played one year of junior college athletics, but chose to concentrate on academics her sophomore year:

They [high school coaches] were happy when I played ball last year, but when I told them I wasn't playing ball this year their face kinda fell. It hurt me bad. They probably think I don't have a chance anymore, but I got a 3.8 G.P.A. my first year at college.

With expectations come responsibility. Girl basketball players are responsible for a minimum 2.0 G.P.A. to remain eligible for interscholastic competition. Each player is responsible for contributing to her team's success and indirectly the community success. Yet all of these basketball players were in the college preparatory track with ambitions of attending college, earning a degree, and returning to the reservation to help their community, and the Navajo Nation. The expectations of teachers and family members as well as themselves were drastically different than those cheering and criticizing them on the basketball court. Jackie Little\* was taught A's and B's were good and expected.

"My family always encouraged me, and I had teachers who praised me a lot. That encouraged me to do better each time." Basketball players like Karen Smiley\* set their collegiate goals early:

I got it into my head that I had to go to college in the second grade. I heard a parent talking about his daughter going, and I thought 'wow there's college; I want to go too.' Up until then all I saw were Navajo women working as secretaries, cafeteria workers, or dorm and teacher aides. That was it. I didn't see any women who were doctors and dentists. So I knew in my head I was gonna go to college. I didn't know I was smart. I always did my work in middle school and graduated at the top of my class. In high school my goal was to graduate valedictorian. It didn't occur to me that I had to get straight A's in order to do that. My hardest class was Advanced Placement English. I worked so hard in there...but I got an A.

The players refer to self-imposed pressures to achieve high GPA's, secure (academic and financial) scholarships, and gain admittance into colleges with their proposed major. Pressure to live up to these academic expectations was also exerted by the family in different ways. In Jackie Little's\* family, her father taught the value of education. Reading out loud thirty minutes before school, and writing essays in the summer, which included an outline, and rough and final drafts, were expectations at an early age. Cutting corners was not acceptable, and monetary rewards were given for outstanding performances in the classroom, and on the basketball court (Little\* 1997).

Other parents took athletics and other privileges away if grades were not at an acceptable level, or home

responsibilities were not being met. Lisa Begaye's\* parents would not let her go out to play until all her homework was done. According to Debi Crank\*, "I had to quit Pee Wee basketball in third grade because I had to go home and do the chores."

One specific incident demonstrates the incredible pressure "successful" student-athletes face in Redrock. Jackie Little was the ultimate student-athlete. She was smart: taking college preparatory classes, maintaining a high G.P.A, applying to colleges, and receiving academic scholarships. She was an excellent basketball player: a member of the varsity team for three years, all-conference and all-state selection, and valuable team member. She was a leader: participating in various clubs, representing her class as a Student Council officer, speaking to children at the Redrock Intermediate School about the dangers of drugs, and smiling all the way. The problem was Jackie\* did not see herself as the great role model others did. Instead she felt:

I couldn't handle it anymore. I couldn't live with it. I wanted to commit suicide. It was the pressure. The expectations all built up into a big huge snowball that wanted to just burst. I wanted to get out of that big snowball. Everything was being held to tightly together and it was just frozen.

Jackie fought through the feelings with the help of two significant supporters in her life, an academic teacher and a coach she trusted: "They helped me realize I was special. [My] expectations were high, but I didn't need to be number

one, just one of the best." Today, Jackie is married with children, received her Associate's degree, and plans to return to school and continue work on her bachelor's degree.

This fear of failure permeates the successful drive of many of these college students. Yes they feel some pressure, but they have turned it into a positive, motivating factor to succeed. Because they were viewed as "successful high school student-athletes," they feel they must live up to expectations, both their own and others, according to Eileen Benally:

A lot of people got pregnant in high school. Others went off to school and came back to the rez without a degree. I'm happy for the people who made it through [college] quickly. I would rather stay here and just keep on plugging away until I get my degree. Then go home. I'm afraid to go home because I expected to have my degree by now.

Karen Smiley\* also expressed her fear of failing:

I know I have to finish school...It's not just for me, but all those people back at home; like all this pressure. If I dropped out or got pregnant, they can say, 'oh Karen...' I know my family wouldn't be disappointed. But if you don't finish, you give up on it, or you just fail, people back home are going to talk. It makes me push myself. People expect me to succeed based on what I did in high school, "most likely to succeed." That's pressure there. You can't escape something like that. Redrock is too small. Everybody knows who you are. Everybody knows about you. Even at college people know what I'm doing.

Summer Long's\* pressure was self-imposed, but reflects her vision of the future:

The community was supportive, it wasn't them that pressured me. It was me. I kept thinking about where I was headed. Not just me, but my people in general. What our ancestors went through for us to be here, and the

sacrifices they made. Where we have been and how far we've come. Seeing all those things that were done to us, that's what made me want to go on to college. It wasn't the community or anyone else. It was what I know from my heart that I needed to do.

Despite pressure from family, school and community, all the athletes vehemently expressed experiencing community support much more than pressure. The community expressed support in the supermarket or after the game, but rarely became as critical as those emotionally connected to the player. The support came from different groups, at different times, and in different capacities.

Teachers advocated high academic standards, but were willing to put in extra time to help the basketball players achieve their goals. Teachers were driving forces in assisting players to complete college entrance essays. Additionally teachers and coaches provided sounding-boards for the players to vent their frustrations with family, friends, academics, and athletics.

Coaches were predominantly concerned about the players during the season, but exceptions existed. Several coaches taught college preparatory classes and were viewed by the athlete as a serious teachers too. In these situations, student-athletes were expected to excel equally in the classroom and on the basketball court on a daily basis. The entire athletic staff asked athletes on a regular basis how they were doing personally and in the classroom, thus providing a solid support system.

The support offered by family members varied. All the athletes felt their parents loved and supported them, despite some of their actions. Every individual cited a specific parent, brother, sister, or relative who gave positive support throughout their formative years, as well as during their high school and collegiate years.

With strong support from teachers, coaches, and family members, the student-athletes kept the community's expectation to succeed on the basketball court in perspective. None of the girls see themselves as only athletes, waiting for their next game. On the contrary, they see themselves as strong, motivated young Navajo women with a vision of their goals, contributions and place in Navajo society.

CHAPTER 5.  
NAVAJO HIGH SCHOOL

To understand the female basketball players at Navajo High School, one must understand where they come from and their experiences. These young women are multi-dimensional within the school setting. In addition to their academic and athletic roles, they are also an extension of their unique culture and the community of Redrock. This analysis of Navajo High School provides the necessary information to fully understand who these women are, where they come from, and where they are going.

Educational Setting

Navajo High School educates approximately 1,000 students grades nine through twelve, in a geographically isolated area on the Navajo Reservation. Ninety-six percent of these students are Navajo with the remaining four percent consisting of Anglos, other Indian tribes, and other ethnic groups. The teaching staff is predominately Anglo (86%), but the number of Navajos now teaching college-preparatory courses such as math and science courses have increased substantially. Three Navajo math teachers have joined the staff in the past two years. Most of these Navajo teachers

are female, who previously attended NHS and who have returned to teach.

Over time NHS students have not experienced the same success other American students have on standardized tests and in the classroom setting. Therefore, the school district administrators hired consultants to help find answers. Several solutions were devised and implemented: an improved instructional model for teachers and a four-period day. Based on Robert Rhoades' (1988) study recognizing Native American students as holistic learners, the district identified "characteristics of an effective teacher of Navajo students."<sup>15</sup> Anglo teachers come to Native American classrooms and are uncomfortable when faced with silence and perceived student apathy. In actuality, this perceived apathy is a result of the students' distrust of strangers and ignorance of the specific teacher's expectations in the classroom. Recognizing this dichotomy, teachers were given suggestions to facilitate the learning process for Navajo students. Such suggestions include: varying teacher/student proximity, increasing eye contact, smiling, and expressing warmth towards students, promoting emotional closeness between student and teacher, encouraging students to learn for personal reasons, and not embarrassing students but encouraging class participation. The most effective suggestion is the teacher's demand for academic performance.

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<sup>15</sup> All information regarding the Improved Instructional Model and the four period day were common knowledge among teachers and administrators at NHS.

All these suggestions support the traditional Navajo process of learning: cooperation, support, love, and high expectations. Therefore, when these values are also exhibited in the school setting by teachers, students become more comfortable in their surroundings and consequently perform better.

In addition to the improved instructional model, Navajo High School changed the school schedule from a seven period (45 minutes each) day to a four period (90 minutes each) day in the early 1990s. The primary reason for this change was to allow students more practice time in the classroom with teacher guidance, and to allow teachers more time to plan appropriate instruction for the three remaining 90 minute periods. Hence students were able to complete a course in one semester, instead of two, and schedule eight classes within a year.

Increased interaction along with the improved instructional model hopefully would increase student scores at the state and national level, as well as better prepare students for post-secondary success. As a result of the substantial increase in student-teacher interaction, classrooms were expected to become more interactive environments characterized by multisensory instruction, less teacher-led lecture and more student-oriented activities, a high degree of reciprocal interaction between teacher and student, strong interpersonal relationship between teacher

and student, small group activities, free student movement, tactile-kinesthetic appeal of activities around the classroom, informal classroom design, and strategies that incorporate cooperative learning activities. Other advantages arose as a result of the four period day: more cooperative activities could take place and the teachers potentially could become mentors as a result of rushing less and getting to know the students better.

Negative aspects of the four-period day included not covering the necessary material in prerequisite courses (Algebra I and II), and core classes (English, social studies, math, science, and foreign languages) that were only a semester in length rather than a year. Physical education courses found it difficult to maintain high levels of performance in class for 90 minutes. One of the most interesting complaints, from students and teachers, was that a student could take a core (math) class in the fall of their freshman year and not take another math class until the spring of their junior year. This constituted a serious problem in establishing a solid foundation and maintaining necessary skills for success. Although there were problems with the four period day, a general consensus among teachers was that it increased student-teacher interactions, and had a potential for increasing student success.

Navajo High School has two distinguishable educational tracks: one college preparatory and the other general, or

vocational. The college preparatory track is intended to prepare students with the necessary skills to be successful in an institution of higher learning. The general or vocational track led to a job or vocational training upon graduation. Both programs met state requirements, which include: four years of English and Social Studies, one year of Physical Education, two years each of Math, Science, and a Foreign Language, and a total number of credits. The student chose based on the number of credits necessary to graduate, and their interests. Electives available to all students were primarily vocational: agricultural science, typing, drafting, building trades, computers, home economics, electronics, and auto mechanics. Non-vocational electives included: art (ceramics, drawing, and painting), band, weight lifting, lifesaving, beadwork, weaving, Navajo studies, psychology, and office aide. A Stanford University admissions representative questioned the quality and quantity of Navajo High School's college preparatory electives in a discussion with senior counselor, Mrs. Gray\*. The Stanford representative stated a senior with Advanced Placement English, U.S. Government, Free Enterprise, Physics, Chemistry II, Navajo language, and psychology courses "is not receiving the necessary courses to succeed at a institution of higher learning such as Stanford" (Gray\* 1996). All of these NHS courses are Arizona state requirements except psychology and physics. The Stanford representative also noted in most

American schools, psychology and physics would be requirements, not electives in a college preparatory track.

The school district's struggle to provide excellent instruction in both tracks is partially a result of changing to the four-period day. The number of courses students take per year increased by one, and student enrollment rose, yet school administrators did not hire additional teachers to cover the load. Therefore, when courses have to be cut, the college preparatory electives are sacrificed for state required general education courses. As a result of cutting college-preparatory electives, many college-bound students are forced to take academically meaningless courses such as office aide. Ironically, a significant number of seniors, in the college preparatory track, earn an "A" grade serving as an office aide two out of the four class periods.

#### Social Setting

Navajo High School's student culture is quite separate from, yet dependent upon the educational system. Schools provide a degree of social interaction many students would not receive at home. In addition to their academic experiences, students are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities including athletics, band, cheerleading, and clubs. Clubs such as the Future Business Leaders of America, and Future Farmers of America promote

competition at both state and national levels. The Chess and Science clubs also compete against other high schools. National Honor Society, Student Council, and Student-Athletes Detest Drugs Association promote community service projects. Extra-curricular activities provide an opportunity for students to participate in positive activities outside the classroom.

An important aspect of participation in extra-curricular activities is that they are governed by a state organization, Arizona Interscholastic Association (AIA), and regulated by the local high schools. The most important rule is: for a student to participate in high school activities, the student must remain eligible. Students must pass all their classes with a minimum grade of a "D". If the student's grade drops below a "D", during the grading period, the student becomes ineligible for all extra-curricular activities until the grade is raised to a passing one. Other sanctions regulate illegal recruitment of skilled-students, such as basketball players. Transfers require extensive documentation on the appropriate form, or the student may not participate in extra-curricular activities at the new school. All band and Chess club members, cheerleaders, and athletes are governed by these state sanctions. Hence participants in extra-curricular activities receive more attention than the rest of the student body, but must meet additional requirements.

The reality is, the students at Navajo High School who

participate in athletics are recognized as the "popular" crowd. According to former student-athlete, Karen Smiley\*, "most of the popular people are people in sports," and according to Stephanie Holiday\* basketball was the most visible:

In middle school, basketball allowed me to be part of the school that few people are part of. . . I felt like I belonged there, [but when I transferred from the boarding school to the high school] I didn't feel like I belonged there. I was an outsider. NHS had a lot of emphasis on sports so it was like I was on the outside of it.

Being a member of the varsity basketball team brings status, prestige, formal rewards and positive recognition from adults. Basketball players are allowed to leave classes early to travel to opposing schools, receive extensions on class work as a result of games, and wear a letter jacket with pins displaying their prowess. Additionally, newspaper and magazines run stories and pictures promoting players as heroes: "A Woman of the People - Ryneldi Becenti" (Smith 1993, 1).

That "popular" designation often carries additional responsibilities, or prestige. For fellow students it means their friend is cool and a star basketball player, which brings recognition and benefits. A non-athlete may be able to hang with the "cool athlete" or attend "cool" functions they otherwise would not have been able to. By interacting with the "cool basketball player" in the classroom, one gains notoriety.

In addition to the "popular crowd," other student groups exist at Navajo High School which illustrate the caste system within the high school. Students who live primarily outside of Redrock in more traditional areas, are negatively labeled "johns." This term connotes uneducated, traditional, hogan-living people. On the opposite end of the spectrum are those students whose parents work at the mine or school district, live in the trailer court with their new satellite dish and van, and have the latest in clothes, music and technology. Add the stereotypical "schoolgirls", and "partyers" to the mix, and the NHS student body is fairly represented, according to student perceptions.<sup>16</sup> In spite of these stereotypes and classifications, the majority of the female basketball players proudly identify themselves as student-athletes, including Jackie Little\*:

Some days when the season was on, that's when I woke up as an athlete. I was noticed more as an athlete just because we were in season, and the school knows who you are. During the off-season, I constantly worked at being a student. But overall, I saw myself as a student, having fun, and playing basketball as an extra activity.

Ironically we do not hear equivalent terms such as student-artist or student-musician in institutions of learning because these non-athletes do not rival the athletic department's control of the school and community's attention,

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<sup>16</sup> These labels reflect my personal experiences at NHS. This information was provided and explained to me on several occasions by NHS students.

support, and commitment to excellence.

Athletics is central to bringing student cliques together in a socially acceptable environment, according to both the school and the community. School activities, such as homecoming and the winter ball, are major social occasions marked on the school calendar. Pep assemblies, and decorating the school and lockers are part of pregame preparation. Athletes dominate homecoming royalty coronation at half-time of the game, and are the topic of conversation at the post-game dance. Add the importance of the actual sporting event, in terms of school recognition and community pride, and one understands the social significance of basketball in the lives of many students, and the potential student-athletes have for influencing positive behaviors among students.

Basketball at NHS becomes the common, unifying goal for all of the school's constituents: the community members, the administrators, the teachers and the students. It builds moral and esprit de corps: "Except for sports, schools have no collective goals, only individualistic, scholastic ones" (Miracle 1994, 68). With this shared goal of commitment to basketball excellence, there is mutual reinforcement among various members of the school and community. The effort of the individual benefits everyone. When the team wins, the school wins, and the community wins. Every one feels better about the school and themselves, because they are part of the

school. With this unifying goal, comes heightened respect for the status quo - athletics is important to Navajo High School and the community of Redrock, as Mary Bennett\* states:

The kids of this school belong to the community. One of the biggest mistakes white people make is trying to impose their values on other people. So, here's a community that's telling you basketball is what we want first, you have to respect it. It may not work for you, but that's what the community is telling you and it's not one or two people being real vocal in the community. It's 5000 of them. You have to respect what the community wants. It's not what you necessarily believe, but if you want to work at NHS, that's what you do.

A potential problem arises when athletes are "used to solve the problems of how to draw the energies of adolescents into the school, [then] we run the risk of making athletics, not education, the school's central concern" (Miracle 1994, 68).

Administrators and coaches believe basketball supports the educational mission of the school by involving students in positive activities and increasing their interest in academics. Sport builds responsibility, achievement orientation, teamwork skills required for adult life, fitness training for the athlete, and stimulates interest in physical fitness among the student body. Basketball promotes school spirit and unity necessary to maintain the school as a viable organization. Additionally it promotes parental, inter-generational, alumni and community support for all school programs, and provides the opportunity to develop and display skills in sports that are valued in the society at large (Coakley 1994, 388). Mrs. Bennett\* supports this point:

You get up everyday and you do your job, and you do

your job on time. If you don't do your job, there's a penalty for it. It's discipline. You've got to be there everyday mentally, and physically. You work and there are no shortcuts. You never give up when you get behind or injured, you don't give up. When you go to college, you don't just cry and go home. Or when you're in a bad marriage or have trouble with your kids, or all the other things you can face in your life, they're trained through athletics to work. You don't turn around and run and hide. You work and get through it.

Interestingly enough, research shows that sport in and of itself is not educational, but if participation is organized in a way "so young people are taken seriously and valued by those important in their lives" (Coakley 1994, 393), it can be beneficial. Basketball is an integral part of the NHS, and offers opportunities for athletes to develop and display competence; recognition and rewards follow.

Contrary to the positive aspects of sports participation, some educators at Navajo High School believe the advantages of playing basketball are superficial, and unrelated to the achievement of educational goals. They also contend basketball distracts the students' attention away from academics, relegates most students to a role of spectator, creates superficial school spirit that subverts educational goals, and deprives the educational programs of resources, facilities, staff and community support (Coakley 1994, 388). The sport may also apply excessive pressure on basketball players, and lead some adults to educate and value youth for their athletic skills, not other qualities. One would think these contrasting viewpoints on the educational

value of athletics at Navajo High School would create pressure among the athletes to choose one over the other, but it does not.

These female basketball players have both academics and athletics in perspective in a school and community that actively promotes athletics. The academic role the female basketball player exhibits is quite different than the males'. These young women have a strong sense of commitment and obligation to their studies, their families, and themselves. Their families have instilled in them the importance of cooperation, hard work, responsibility, and education.

#### Athletic Setting

In addition to the educational and social setting, Navajo High School athletics has evolved into a power in the Arizona 3A ranks. In the 1960s, there was one coach for all girls' sports, all the teams wore the same uniforms, and the athletic teams played a 5 game schedule as compared now to a thirty-five game schedule (Bennett\* 1996). But even before Mrs. Bennett\* arrived in the 1960s, she explained basketball was extremely popular:

The kids just never understood football; they didn't have T.V. The school offered football, but the kids had no clue as to what it was. But basketball, you just stick up a hoop and play it by yourself. It's always been around. When I lived over at the Redrock Trading

Post, there used to be a hoop with just dirt. It was packed, and they'd play all night. Even when there were no lights, they were still out there playing.

In the 1980s, the new physical education teacher from Indiana began teaching at the intermediate school, and implemented the Pee Wee sports program. The program was originally designed to introduce Navajo children to organized sports at an earlier age. Fun was a motivating factor for the children according to student-athlete Claudia Laughter\*, "way back in intermediate school, it was just for fun. It wasn't very competitive." Karen Smiley\* and Summer Long\* joined for different reasons: "I didn't know what I wanted to do but I saw all these other kids playing sports so I signed up for basketball," and "all my older brothers and sisters all played sports. So they influenced me to play." Over time, the Pee Wee program became more competitive providing two coaches, team uniforms, league championships, most valuable player awards and pride. Summer Long explained:

They had high school girl basketball players come down and help the coaches with practice. I felt like the team that would win the championship would be the one that had the best coach. My sister and one of her teammates were helping coach different teams, and they brought their competitiveness to their Pee Wee teams. That's when I felt competition for the first time in my life. . . We lost the championship by a point or two, and I got All-tourney and Most Valuable Player, but I didn't understand why. . . I was so proud of myself.

After graduating to middle school, sports grew in importance with the addition of summer basketball camp for the girls. High school coaches were promoting the importance of off-

season conditioning and skill development as a necessity for success in sports at the high school level. Summer camp cost was minimal compared to basketball camps off the reservation, and high school players served as camp coaches and role models.

As a result of the Pee Wee program and the middle school summer basketball camp, girls basketball at NHS began to improve steadily in the 1980s. As a result of their basketball skills, NHS players received all-conference, all-state, and all-star awards. In the 1990s, the girls' basketball teams began winning consistently at the state level: in 1991 the girls made it to the elite eight, in 1992 the semifinals, in 1993 and 1994 state runner-up, and in 1990 again the state semifinals. The community of Redrock expected continued success against reservation and non-reservation teams, and the "We're #1" mentality permeated the school and community. These student-athletes became role models for the children of Redrock. Initially these "heroes" were sought out by autograph-seeking children, but their effort in the classroom was also common knowledge. Success in the classroom and on the basketball court was expected, and demanded. If you did not pass your classes, you were ineligible. If you could not play, you were not helping your team, school, and community.

As a result of this commitment to basketball in the school district, and to winning at the state level, girls

basketball participation increased, school pride increased, and the attention and resources given to athletics increased. My questions then became: Does this commitment to excellence in basketball, and athletics in general, hinder the fundamental principle of education, and is academic excellence sacrificed for the sake of athletic eligibility? With the help of those interviewed, I will attempt to answer these questions.

## Chapter 6:

## THE ACADEMIC/ATHLETIC DILEMMA

If the goal of our schools is to educate all students, then NHS students should be able to learn lessons in the classroom and on the basketball court. Research conducted by the Women's Sports Foundation has shown the value of athletics, and first hand accounts by Navajo women basketball players, such as Ryneldi Becenti, only strengthen these findings. Unfortunately, the idea of big-time athletics and college preparation existing equally at NHS is questioned by teachers and former students. As a result, an academic/athletic dilemma has arisen for the teachers and administrators of NHS, and the community of Redrock to solve.

The Roles of the Student-Athlete

The term "student-athlete" reflects the awkwardness of academics and athletics coexisting in our school system. Interestingly enough, this awkwardness is perpetuated by teachers, administrators, and coaches. College preparatory teachers stress academics first, whereas coaches and administrators promote athletics. The athletic and academic belief systems reflect each group's priority, place, and self worth within the school and community.

If a girl basketball player is a successful student in the Advanced Placement program, then she serves as a role model for the importance and value of academics. She possesses more power with her peers than adults do as authoritarians. The same is true for athletics. As a devoted member of the girls state runner-up basketball team, her involvement encourages other students to participate in sports and reap the rewards associated with athletic success within the community and school. In a typical American high school, students maintain academic, social, and athletic roles, but at NHS these roles are exaggerated due to the relatively small size of the community.

Navajo High School's athletic program models itself after "Big-Time athletics." Navajo radio and television stations regularly broadcast basketball action across the Navajo Nation. In addition to this media coverage, high school athletics often operate as separate organizations from the school district, with much of their funding coming from outside sources: gate receipts, community contributions and sponsorship. The Community Center seats 5,000 people. The only cost incurred by the athletic department is event security, since high school employees volunteer to run the ticket office and concessions. The school district pays all operating costs of school facilities. If the game is sold out, the athletic department net income would be close to \$15,000 (5,000 x \$3.00) for one evening. This money buys new

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uniforms, equipment, improves athletic facilities, and hires a full-time athletic trainer. All of these "improvements" are necessary to promote athletic excellence. In a school district with no tax base, money means power and security. Administrators attach themselves to successful programs to demonstrate the school's "success" to the community and state. Based on my observations and the experiences of those interviewed, administrators join the athletic bandwagon, and often lose sight of the big picture - educating our youth for the future.

Additionally, some believe administrators and coaches have become overly concerned with winning championships, and presenting an organized, high profile, successful program to the community, rather than providing educational needs to all students. At Redrock it is no longer acceptable to have a winning record and win your conference. Basketball success is evaluated in terms of state championships, according to Claudia Laughter\*: "I started out the season having fun. But I still wanted to win state and prove the community wrong because all the emphasis had been on the boys. Tell them 'hey' you know us girls are better than the boys." After six years of searching for the elusive state championship, the school district did not plan on rehiring the girls basketball coach. During that same time, the boys team won two state championships. In Redrock, state championship basketball is the expectation, and anything less is unacceptable. Coaches

are hired and fired for the number of championship titles won, not their teaching abilities.

As a result of this "athletic mentality," coaching and teaching become contradictions. Coaches essentially are teachers of their specific sport, but when winning becomes more important than the educational process, then education takes a backseat to athletics. Theoretically, coaches are hired and sports are offered to provide youth with a more well-rounded educational experience:

Athletics, band, drill team, cheerleading - all ... contribute to the total growth of a young person, providing these activities are conducted from a balanced educational perspective. Athletics is only one slice of the pie...Yet it is an integral part of the pie (Coakley 1994, 386).

According to district policy, individuals are hired as teachers, and receive a small addendum if they chose to coach. Yet there are several individuals hired as coaches first, who are paid off the district-approved pay scale (according to union officials), and teach an exceptionally easy course load as compared to other teachers/coaches with similar extra-curricular responsibilities. These inconsistencies create frustration and resentment among teachers and coaches at NHS.

Basketball responsibilities at Navajo High School are often not compatible with academics. Students are expected to commit time and energy to basketball, and not only during the season. In the summer "open-gym", team camp and league play are expected, along with fund raising and practice

during the season. Weight lifting is another crucial element, and a student is expected to take a class during the school year, or lift before or after practice. Players are also required to analyze video tape of their performances and the opponent's strengths and weaknesses for the up-coming competition. According to former National Basketball Association (NBA) player and member of the U.S. Congress, Tom McMillen:

The overall message being drilled into our kids is clear and dangerous...Superstars sign 5-year contracts for \$20 million. Teachers sign 1-year contracts from \$20,000. In those circumstances, to whom will you listen, your teacher or your coach? Where will you spend your time, in the library or the gym?  
(Coakley 1994, 386)

#### Academic Standards?

Has Navajo High School compromised the integrity of a quality education at the expense of athletic excellence? During my six years as a teacher at NHS, many teachers (including myself) experienced administrators encouraging them to change grades allowing seniors to graduate with their class, despite not completing the required course work; coaches and administrators requesting teachers to "recalculate" their grade to see if a mistake was made, or

not putting an athlete on the tutoring list, instead allowing them to turn in their work at a later date so they would be eligible for the big game that week. Other students were not afforded these "options." Ironically the "tutoring list," as it was called, never provided structured tutoring for any students, but was used to regulate extra-curricular participation. When the administration allows this "pass 'em mentality," the value of a high school diploma and college preparation is seriously questioned by teachers and students. Is NHS providing an education or are students getting a "piece of paper?"

Navajo High School's educational philosophy is a direct reflection of the teachers' and administrators' beliefs and experiences who teach there. Many teachers have taught at NHS for an extended period of time, have seen administrators come and go, and tend to go with the flow. It's easier to have a sheep mentality and "push 'em through", rather than do whatever is necessary to educate these adolescents. Instead of being accountable for their actions, (or lack of actions) many teachers and administrators take the easy way out. This "educational philosophy" is exacerbated by institutional racism regarding Native students which contributes to the teachers' lack of academic expectations, according to John Brown\*:

The school feeds low academic expectations into the kid's heads. A lot of classes aren't serious, academic classes and don't move the kids very far academically. They have this "these kids" attitude. Meaning Navajo, or Native American, kids are low achievers because

that's who they are. [Teachers] create boundaries . . . Saying "these kids." It's saying I'm not with these kids. By saying "my kids" shows your connection to them, and they are not somebody else's kids. I was always suspicious of teachers who used that phrase "these kids;" they were presenting some reason why they couldn't do something. As opposed to some reason why they could do something.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are passionate teachers within the school district. They tend to possess the belief that all students, regardless of ethnicity and economic status, deserve a quality education, and take it upon themselves to establish and maintain high expectations in the classroom. At the beginning of the course, these teachers convey class goals and expectations; teach prerequisite skills while moving towards more complex skills through constant practice and feedback. Exams and assignments are used as a barometer of the students' performance, much as coaches do with their athletes. Of course, all teachers do not neatly fit into these two categories. Most fall somewhere in the middle, varying in their degree of personal expectations and commitment to educating Navajo youth.

In the American Heritage Dictionary, coaches and teachers are defined in similar terms, yet the reality was both battled for student-athletes' time, priority, and commitment. Certain teachers and coaches clashed more often because both had extremely high expectations of the student-

athletes. The Advanced Placement classes and various athletic teams regularly had encounters. Recognizing the community's commitment to athletics and the number of athletes in his class, the AP English teacher, Mr. Brown\* used the athletic model, applying it to his own classroom: "I figured I'[d] borrow from the athletic fields in terms of the way they set their standards and motivate kids to achieve those standards." Athletic teams set goals and perform successfully in Redrock; the goal for the AP English class was to successfully perform on the National Advanced Placement English Examination and earn college credit. To accomplish this feat, Mr. Brown's\* teaching role evolved into more of a coaching mentality:

[Teachers] need to be able to talk the talk and manage the classroom with the same kind of team spirit, the same high expectations, the same intensity, and the same preparedness and encouragement as a practice. You have to get beyond the 'it's all about me' and see it's larger than yourself and get up for the big performances that you have: poetry readings, discussions of a novel, AP test, or semester final. Live those moments the same way you play your best game, the state championship. That's when all your shots have to fall.

He treated his students as valuable team members. This was paramount if the class was to believe in and commit to their goal. He referred to the AP exam as "their state championship game," and used phrases and terms such as "how did the class or individual grade out" when referring to assignments, exams and class discussions.

To perform well, students had to practice under

pressure-packed game-like conditions. Four weeks before the AP exam, students were expected to participate in evening study sessions. On Sunday afternoons, Brown conducted three hour practice exams under test-like conditions: "You gotta have it on game day. You gotta do it at the most difficult times. The best reach the highest level at the most critical moments." Brown also reinforced the notion that all AP students were on the team and others were relying on them: "If you're doing group work, you gotta come through with your part of the assignment."

These student-athletes, including Karen Smiley\*, rose to his expectations: "That was the hardest class I ever took. I stayed up until like two in the morning writing my sentences; studying my vocabulary, but I got an A." Before Mr. Brown\* took over the Advanced Placement English course, no NHS student had ever passed the test. Despite disbelief by fellow teachers that students would commit extra evenings and Sundays to prepare for the exam, the final push was instrumental. After teaching the class for three years, seven of Mr. Brown's students have passed the Advanced Placement English National Examination.

In addition to these high academic expectations, student-athletes missed class once or twice a week to attend away games. During the state playoffs, athletes missed an entire week of school. Students were responsible for requesting assignments ahead of time and making up work.

However missing the interaction and critical thinking skills required in an AP class are lessons that can not be made up. The serious student-athletes knew the importance of performing academically. Many basketball players performed exceptionally well considering the time demands and expectations placed upon them by academics, athletics, and family members.

### Synergy vs. Sacrifice

Synergy vs. sacrifice, is the ultimate game the student-athlete faces: balance athletics and academics or risk losing both. A typical day meant waking up at 6:30 am, and being to class by 8:15 am. In the morning, students attend two 90-minute classes, and rush through lunch while completing unfinished homework for the two afternoon classes or attending a club meeting. School is dismissed at 3:15 pm, practice begins at 3:30, and ends at 6:00 pm. If an athlete must meet with a teacher, she does it on her own time, or she must bring a note explaining the circumstances. If not, she will be punished for violating team rules. After practice, household chores are performed, dinner is eaten, and homework typically begins around 9:30 pm. Bedtime ranges from 12 midnight to 2:00 am, depending on the teacher's expectations and the assignments due (Begaye\* 1966).

On a day when the team travels to a game, time demands

and expectations increase substantially. The varsity team usually misses fourth hour to travel 90 minutes to three hours one way to the site of the game. During that bus ride, the girls attempt to finish as much homework as possible. If they do not finish, they must do it when they return home after midnight or before class the next morning. After arriving at the gymnasium at approximately 4:30 pm, the team prepares for their game which starts at 6:00 pm. After the girls' game, they watch the boys' varsity game, eat dinner, and depart for home at approximately 10:30 pm. After returning in the early morning hours, players sleep for a few hours before classes begin again at 8:15 am.

School policy allows students three make-up days for each day missed. The problem is that missing class for a game does not excuse you from being prepared for class the next day. Additionally, if the due date of an assignment falls on a game day, it is the student-athlete's responsibility to turn in the assignment. The three day grace period only applies to new assignments given while the student was absent. This is a realistic expectation that most athletes, coaches and teachers handled very well.

Post-season problems may arise between coaches and teachers, that put the student-athlete uncomfortably in the middle. With the team's success, individual and team adoration is inevitable. All-conference and all-state award winners are invited to meet with the Navajo Nation president

and get their photographs taken for the newspaper. Additionally, with the NHS boys winning the state championship and the girls securing the runner-up trophy, team pictures were scheduled at an off-campus location during school hours. This is an extremely awkward situation for a serious student. Coaches and teammates expect everyone to be in the picture, but the athletes have already missed extended periods of class time due to the length and success of the season. In these situations, student-athletes may choose to miss their AP class, and suffer the consequences later.

In addition to teachers, coaches and counselors also expect student-athletes to make the grade, but for different reasons. Counselors want students to pass their courses, maintain a high grade point average, earn a scholarship and attend college. Academic scholarships are awarded to individuals who have proven throughout their high school career that they can balance academics and other activities. They must prove they are well-rounded, and not just academically sound. Extra-curricular activities are a showcase of a student's interests, and expectations. Athletics requires time management skills, commitment, hard work, and coping with additional pressure from various sources. According to counselor Mrs. Gray\*, many universities consider these experiences similar to pressure students will face in college.

Despite the students' ability and desire to push

themselves academically, some counselors and coaches discouraged students, like Stephanie Holiday\*, from taking too many academically challenging courses:

I wanted to take AP English, AP chemistry, trigonometry, and U.S. government and my junior counselor said "you can't do it. That's too much of a course load; you're taking too many AP courses." She thought I was incompetent, but she didn't know me at all. She never took a look at my grades or looked back into my history in school. I think I changed her mind when I got a 4.00 grade point average.

Coaches were primarily concerned with keeping their athletes eligible. Claudia Laughter\* and other athletes understood this: "If [athletes] didn't keep [their] grades up, [they] didn't play." The girls and their families valued a quality education for other reasons, but both agreed education was important. Angie Black\* explains: "My family encouraged me to finish school. That education was very important, and I'd need it later."

When comparing non-athletes to student-athletes, both maintained a grade point average of 3.40 (see Figure 6.1), but test scores on the ACT were different. Non-athletes scored higher, averaging 22.7 on the test, with student-athletes averaging 19.4 (see Figure 6.2).

It is important to recognize grade point averages are calculated based on grades determined by teachers, and may be affected by the student/teacher relationship. Standardized tests, such as the ACT, are independently administered and graded. Consequently the student/teacher

relationship has no impact on the score of standardized college entrance tests.

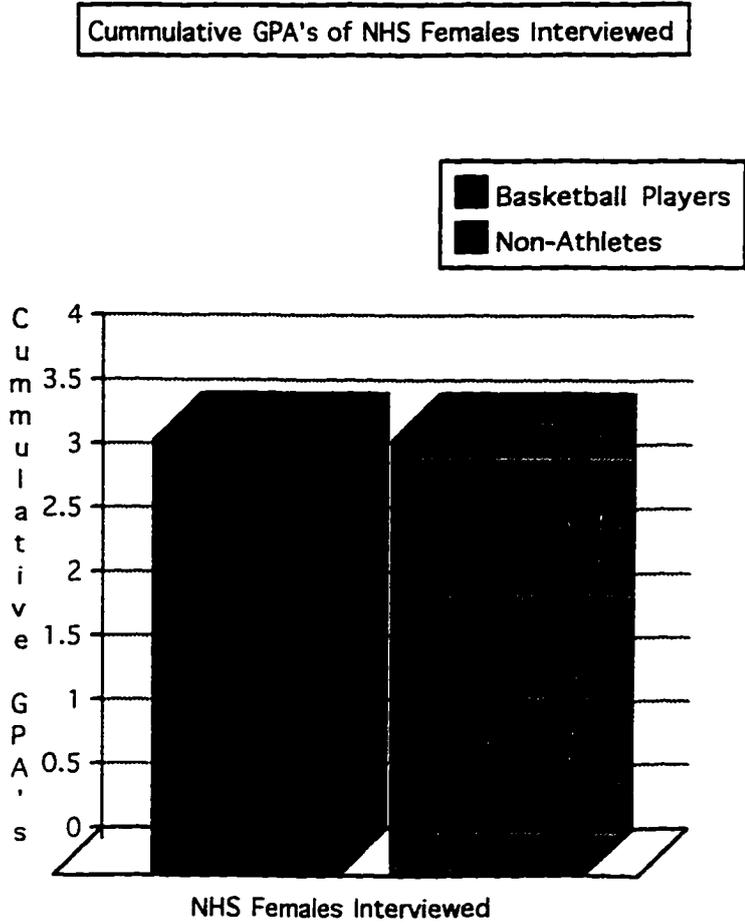


Figure 6.1

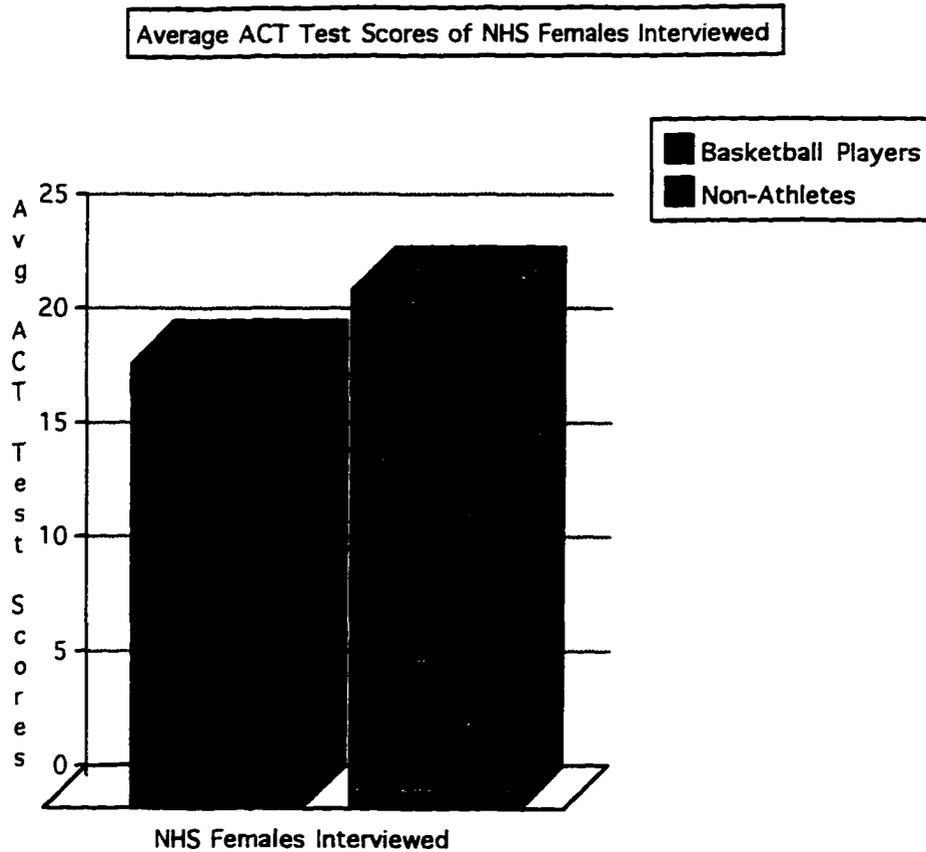


Figure 6.2

This difference in ACT test scores may be a result of time demands placed upon student-athletes who have less time to study than non-athletes for this standardized test. Acknowledging there are twenty-four hours in a day, student-athletes spend 11 hours at school, either in class or at practice; three hours doing chores or interacting with family; four hours studying; and six hours sleeping. At some

point sacrifices must be made, and they usually involve school and sleep.

All students must successfully manage their time and stress. Student-athletes have more demands placed on their time and more stress as a result of their exposure in the community. They are forced to maintain balance or lose both. All student-athletes and non-athletes stated their families valued education, maintained high expectations, and supported academic achievements. As a result of these academic expectations, players developed positive relationships with their teachers, and other students who encouraged academic success as well as day-to-day support. The students found balance by maintaining a diverse support group: family, friends, teachers, teammates, and coaches.

This assessment of girl basketball players at NHS is supported by B.B Meyer's (1988) study on how female college athletes make choices related to sports, school, and social life:

Unlike the men, the women gradually become more interested in and concerned with their courses and academic lives. They do not expect special treatment in classes; they talk with academic advisors and friends about their course selections and majors. They also received support for academic achievement from their parents and their teammates; they thought their classes were interesting and useful; and they saw participation in sport as having an overall positive effect on academic achievement. Even though they were good athletes, other people treated them as students and reaffirmed their academic identities instead of their athletic identities (Coakley 1994, 399).

The basketball players at NHS also see themselves as serious

students, but have they been able to successfully balance academics and athletics. In a more academically-minded setting, such as a college preparatory school, would these students have had to sacrifice athletics to make the necessary grades? As a result of missing extensive classroom instruction, discussion, practice, and interaction, did these basketball players receive a sub-par education? Or as a result of their athletic experiences and success, did these athletes gain valuable lessons other students did not? The basketball players were successful student-athletes, but what did they sacrifice in the process and at what cost?

Chapter 7:  
INDIAN EDUCATION:  
STATE OF SURVIVAL OR REAL ACHIEVEMENT?

Diminishing Returns: The Problem of Unpreparedness

Over the past fifteen years, a college education is slowly gaining acceptance in the community of Redrock. As several Redrock residents have stated, it was perfectly acceptable to stay home, herd sheep or find a job. Times have changed and twenty-five percent of the adult population in Redrock now have received a college degree, compared to 33.2% in Arizona and 33.8% in the nation. Despite this relatively new commitment, barriers to post-secondary success remain. Redrock's poverty rate (37.5%) is three times higher than the national average (12.7%). Many family homes lack plumbing and telephones, and residents haul wood, coal and water to meet their basic needs. With only fifty-three percent of the adult population receiving a high school diploma, and limited local employment opportunities, the value of a quality high school diploma and college degree are rising. High school teacher Mrs. Jackson\* explains:

In the early 1980s, people didn't talk about going to college. It wasn't an expectation for the students, not by the school or the family. It wasn't what people were striving for. But now that's almost flipped around. Now, everybody thinks they're going to college. They're

not even sure why or for what purpose. Some of them don't really have what it takes [to make it]...They just heard the line, 'you're going to college,' so they are too.

In this ever-changing international, multi-cultural and technological world, a quality education is a prized commodity for success, states Mr. Brown\*:

In terms of inequality and privilege in our society, the best education that people have access to and get for themselves is one of the most effective [tools] in producing a good life for themselves. Not only are they literate - they can read, they can write, they know what's going on - but they also can access better job situations, and stand up for themselves better.

Exposure to this message is reinforced by teachers, coaches, college recruiters, and family members. This belief parallels the Navajo cultural belief that knowledge is a prized possession, endlessly expanding, rarely diminishing, that can never be taken away (McCarty et al. 1991, 51). As a valuable resource, education must be shared with others.

In Redrock, female basketball players are rising to this challenge, and are the exception to the college dropout rule. Since 1988 at the University of Arizona, Indian enrollment has increased 60%, but 69% of the Indian students drop out within four years (Hardy 1997, 1). Nationally, 52% of Indian students graduate from high school, 17% attend college, 4% graduate from college, and 2% attend graduate school (Russell 1994, 52). At NHS, 97% (N=28) of former basketball players initially attended a college or university upon graduation, and of that percentage 73% are still in school or

have earned a college degree. With this astonishing statistic, impoverished conditions and barriers to college success, the question becomes - why and how are these Navajo women conquering the odds?

One of the leading problems facing Native American college students is lack of academic preparation for the rigors of a demanding college curriculum. Most college students never anticipated the amount or kind of academic work (analytical reading and writing skills) necessary to succeed in their chosen pre-professional majors: business, art and sciences, engineering, and medicine. Typically one college class requires reading three to four chapters every night for each class; full-time students carry four to six classes every semester. At NHS, reading three to four chapters in one night was a student's homework for all four of her classes, according to Claudia Laughter\*.

Despite exceptional college retention percentages, many students interviewed, both athletes and non-athletes, question the quality of their high school education, and their preparation for college. Recognizing a geographically isolated public high school must educate all of its students, vocational and college preparatory classes are offered. Unfortunately, college preparatory courses are taking a back seat to state required general education courses. The administration cites the four period day which resulted in the addition of two courses in a year, but not an increase in

attendance as the main culprit. The district needs more teachers, but cannot afford to hire them.

The students see the effects, not the rationale. Overall class expectations and content have dropped significantly. Backed by 3.40 cumulative high school GPA's, and an average score of 21 on the ACT, these college students now understand academic expectations. "In high school I was smart enough to not study and get away with it, and still get decent grades. So I didn't do it," Eileen Benally\* stated. As a result of lack of expectations, the problem becomes unpreparedness according to a former student, Lucy Cly\*:

The thing I regret about high school was that the teachers really didn't prepare me. Even though they kept saying, 'this is how college is and told me to look forward to it.' I got my education here. I deserve my [college] degree, but my high school diploma is just a piece of paper...In high school your teacher tells you how to do everything, the topic of your paper, the thesis, and 3 pages in length. But in college, a paper is 12-15 pages and the professors doesn't tell you anything, the topic, the structure. Preparation for a college test takes at least two weeks, not the night before like in high school...I thought I was a good writer until I got to college. I was a good student in high school, got A's and B's, and my papers hardly had any marks on them. The teacher told me my writing was great. Sometimes I'd see a question mark on my paper, and I just assumed she wanted me to elaborate or clarify something. I didn't realize until I went to the [on campus] learning center that my writing was confusing and not concise, had grammar errors and sentence fragments, and went around in circles. My professor explained I was writing like English was my second language, even though I learned English first. The [high school] teachers don't really prepare you for college. They don't tell you what you need to work on, but when you go back to NHS to visit - they want to take credit for preparing me. 'So all that stuff I showed you helped you in your classes.' I didn't want to be mean and say 'no, you didn't help me at all. I'm learning things you

never taught me.

Some have lost academic scholarships because of the inability to maintain the required GPA, usually a "B" average. As a result, the student's status changes from full-time student to part-time student and full-time employee. Time management is magnified, and study and sound academic skills become even more critical to their success. The struggle becomes constant often resulting in increased stress, failed classes, and longer amounts of time to finish their major. The student then begins to question her "right" to be on a college campus. Once a mistake is made, it is extremely difficult to gain control of the situation again.

Despite this harsh criticism, most of those interviewed who attended junior college felt their high school education was adequate; those attending state universities strongly disagree. Recently students have seen glimpses of increased academic expectations and challenges at NHS. The implementation of Advanced Placement English, math and science classes provide college level content and expectations. If a student passes the national AP Examination, she receives college credit; seven NHS students have passed the AP English Exam in the past two years. The AP English class emphasized analytical reading, writing and thinking skills, and challenged NHS students like Debi Crank\*:

I got a B in my AP class. I was happy about that. That's the only class that mattered to me because it prepared me for college...He never gave us any slack.

When the paper is due, it's due. And that's how it is. You have to study for your tests or you'll bomb it. Bad grades made me fearful.

With the implementation of Advance Placement courses, most people would assume academic expectations for the school would rise, but they did not. Administrators did not observe AP classrooms and teachers anymore than they observed others, which was once a year for tenured teachers. Lack of student expectations mirrored lack of teacher and administrative expectations with little accountability. Films and ten year old worksheets were common forms of mindless consumption. Mediocrity was the norm, not the exception.

Thus the four-period day and the Improved Instructional Model were supposed to miraculously raise student expectations and performance. They did not, but with time, experience, and motivated teachers, positives began to surface. Teachers became more creative and skilled at communicating with their students, and classrooms involved less teacher-dominated lectures and more student-teacher discussions. The teacher became more of a mentor for students. The biggest problem with these innovative strategies was the lack of lectures, note taking, and recalling information in a test situation, which is how most freshman college courses are taught. Ironically that is exactly what NHS wanted to get away from. The teaching strategies were designed to stop regurgitating information, and promote students becoming actively involved in their own

learning. Teachers and quality college preparatory electives and expectations are needed for a high school diploma from NHS to be worth more than "just a piece of paper." Navajo High School's inability to consistently prepare students for the rigors of college, means the chances for post-secondary academic success diminish substantially.

#### The Positive Impact of Basketball Participation

Yet the fact remains that 73% of former female basketball players at NHS have received college degrees or are still in school. All of the basketball players, non-athletes and teachers interviewed agreed that participation in athletics positively affected high school academic success, and college preparation. According to teachers because of basketball players' popularity, they experienced a feeling of belonging to the school. This resulted in the athlete buying into the educational system, and performing better in academics, according to Mrs. Jackson\*. Additionally, Mr. Green\* explained that they possess certain skills necessary to be a successful student and athlete: responsibility, self-discipline, motivation, commitment, time management, and respect for authority figures:

They understand the idea of choices and consequences...It's not that they have a higher I.Q., they just have the skills to push themselves closer to achieving their goals. They're not letting their potential just sit there. Instead they use skills of

responsibility and discipline to find out they can do it and succeed...Involvement in athletics and clubs provide leadership skills. The problem is the athletes are the well-rounded kids involved in everything. Those involved are deeply involved. They work and that's a reflection of their parents. It really balances them out.

Mrs. Jackson\* concurred with Mr. Green's\* assessment of student-athletes:

Alot of it comes from the family. It was already there to start with. I think the sports experience and the relationship with the coach is like icing on the cake. Those kids already know how to work. They've been taught to do chores at home. They've taken responsibility for younger siblings, for livestock, for driving the car around before they even have a license. For the most part, it's a strong family.

Basketball players balanced both academics and athletics successfully during high school, but knew their academics would provide the foundation for post-secondary success.

#### Summer Programs as a Bridge to Preparedness

With the school's inability to provide consistent academically sound expectations and courses, many basketball players participated in supplementary summer programs. The goal of these programs was to provide positive college-type experiences to potential first generation, low income college students. Basketball players attended medical, business, science, research-oriented, journalism, and Upward Bound programs all over the United States. Students were encouraged by counselors, teachers or family members to

attend summer academic programs based on their grades and career interests. Former basketball players attended medical, business, science, research-oriented, journalism, and Upward Bound programs all over the United States.

Two regionally close universities conducted Upward Bound programs at NHS. During the school year, monetary rewards were given for earning good grades. The grade of an A was worth ten dollars. Later the program replaced rewards for good grades with a points sheet, which documented the student's use of time. Points were given for efficient time management skills: good grades, time spent studying, involvement in extracurricular and community service activities. Participants were rewarded with the right to travel to the university twice a year and during the summer.

While at the university, students attended freshman-like seminars covering a variety of topics: date rape, alcohol, ACT preparation, and learning the financial aid and college entrance application process. Upward Bound also paid for the student to take the ACT. During the summer, students attended college courses in English, math and science, with the option of earning college credit. Part-time jobs were provided ideally with a mentor in the student's proposed major. A minimum of two hours of studying time was expected nightly, according to Karen Smiley\*. Interestingly enough, 73% (N=11) of the basketball players and the non-athletes interviewed attended an academic summer camp during high

school which provided a bridge to post-secondary academic success.

### The Dilemma of Navajo Public Education

The question Navajo High School (and other Native American schools) must ask is: Are native people just surviving or are they actually making progress through their achievements? As the Navajo tribe moves towards the 21st century, who will influence and control Navajo education and by what means? Several perspectives permeate these discussions: Public education should prepare Navajo students to compete successfully on college campuses and in the dominant society, public education should incorporate Navajo concepts, values, and history into the state mandated curriculum, or a combination of the two previous viewpoints, which allow Navajo youth to function successfully in both worlds. Navajo and Anglo teachers', parents', and youth beliefs fall somewhere along this continuum. The community of Redrock needs to become more actively involved in their school, and the decision making process of providing a quality education for all students at Navajo High School.

As an Anglo teacher with six years of teaching experience on the Navajo reservation, I am confident that the young women who are successfully achieving their goals on

college campuses are qualified to be part of that decision making process. Navajo culture has endured the Long Walk and the United States' governmental policies of assimilation. The Navajo people have survived and continued to maintain a vibrant culture through their ability to synthesize various skills that serve the needs of the Navajo people, yet make them uniquely their own. Navajo education is no different. Summer Long\*, a former basketball player and college student summarizes:

Look at what's going on now on the reservation. Look at what's being done to our land. We have radiation, trash dumps burning. Contamination of the land. Contamination of our water. Look at the alcohol rate. Look hard at the reservation and the people, and tell me what you think. How can you help? What can you do? You may live in the city, but your blood lives there. Your grandmother. Your grandfather. Your mother. Your father. The future kids of the reservation. They're the ones that are gonna be affected by it. We are the ones out here. We are the warriors. We control what will happen in the future. The people that are serious about it will pick up and the ones that aren't - won't...I want to be a healer, a teacher, a provider of [health care]. There's so much I want to do.

Chapter 8:  
IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF

Research and experience clearly show that the potential benefits derived from sport and education are not guaranteed based on participation alone. Scoring 21 points in a state championship basketball game, or sitting through a United States government class do not insure learning and success in adulthood. How many times have we heard, "Oh she had so much potential." Past sports research tells us the key to "character development" is the quality of adult leadership during those activities. By reflecting upon and analyzing the college success of these female basketball players, my research reveals three themes essential to their success: the significance of Navajo values, the significance of the support group, and participation in basketball providing a reinforcing structure for previously established values and skills.

Seeing, Knowing, Remembering:  
The Significance of Navajo Culture & Values

Learning is defined as "the lasting change in behavior that occurs as a result of practice or other experiences" (Engle and Snellgrove 1989, 181). All children go through distinct stages of human development: physical, motor, language, social, intellectual, emotional, and moral. A child's culture influences this development. The development of self is a process of evolution, growth, and renewal, much like the learning process supplied by Navajo culture and society. Navajo children observed Sissy carrying wood to the stove, and understand the importance of the skill by asking a question: "Sissy why did you carry the wood to the stove?" Once this information is processed, then children model the behavior. By teaching Navajo tradition and values, the people attempt to maintain customary cultural ways. With the world around them constantly changing, the ideals and beliefs of the people must remain constant. Navajo culture and philosophy provide the foundation for an individual's self-concept, place in Navajo society, and in the world.

The basis for all things in Navajo culture is *Hózhó*, "the intellectual notion of order, the emotional state of happiness, the physical state of health, the moral condition of good, and the aesthetic dimension of harmony" (Witherspoon 1995, 15). These basketball players understand the importance of *Hózhó* in their lives, balancing good and bad by living in harmony. Some have maintained those beliefs since they were little, while others have come to realize their

importance while away at college. The ability to escape stressful, and in one case abusive, home environments is an example of Hózhó. The students knew they had to get away, if they were to survive, to remain in balance. A college education was the key to knowledge and a life for themselves. Nancy Blackhorse\* applied educational diversions until graduation:

I was desperate to get out of there. I was physically punished by beatings or a slap across the face for asking questions. My dad would get mad about frivolous things, like a loose jam lid. I was blamed for everything, given a lecture, and beaten accordingly. I wanted to get away...as far away as possible. Educating myself was my only chance. So I did well in [high] school. Nobody knew my motive behind it.

Karen Smiley\* knew athletics would take her away from the dysfunction in her home:

I was responsible for the whole family. I cooked for them, took care of them, and looked out for them. My dad bitched about everything. "There's no food in the house. You guys should have eaten at school." We grew up on noodles and hot dogs. There was nothing there...When my dad would come home from work, he would sit down and watch television all evening long. One night I was studying late and my dad was still watching TV. He got mad at me because "the light is glaring off the TV." He didn't want me to study anymore. That time I put a piece of paper in front of the light so it wouldn't bother him. That's when I started doing my homework under my blanket with a flashlight. I was taking AP English and we had to read all these books. I went through so many batteries. That's part of the reason why I wanted to be in sports, to get away from my dad. I was gone a lot with away games and practice.

The importance of maintaining health and fitness in Navajo culture is reflected in Summer Long's\* explanation of running

at dawn:

It goes back to my dad being raised traditionally. He told us to get up before the sun and get the morning blessing, then go run. That's how the morning gods can bless you in their way. So that's what I did.

Exercise provided a strong belief in maintaining health, and basketball was fun too (Black\* 1996). Basketball player Summer Long\* summed up her athletic experiences in terms of Hózhó:

Sports balanced me out, and taught me that balance is the way. My father always said "be balanced." I'm like "yeah I'm balanced." But now, the whole concept [represents] everything in my life. From finger to finger when I extend my arms. If I hold them straight out in front of me, or on the sides. Everything I can touch I'm in balance with. I may be closer to the bed or farther from the wall. Everything is balanced, and I know I'm okay wherever I'm standing in the room. In basketball you have to be balanced. If you're gonna shoot, you have to have both feet under you. Defense is the same way, balance. Track too. If you're off balance one time that's the whole race. That's just how life is to me, if you're off balance in one place, it takes you right over. Being balanced goes back to my dad's traditional teachings.

This psychological foundation is represented and interpreted in many ways. Hózhó is balancing good and evil, maintaining health and fitness as a means of preventing laziness, and representing the very essence of an individual's life. The whole is more important than the parts, and it is an individual's responsibility to find balance, and "walk in beauty."

Navajo culture provided other positive attributes during the basketball players' childhood. Responsibility and hard

work were expected of Claudia Laughter\*:

Way back in intermediate and middle school, my parents made us do all our homework before anything. If we didn't have our homework done, we couldn't watch TV. We couldn't talk on the phone. We couldn't run over to my aunts, we couldn't do anything. By the time I got to high school, it was just instilled in me: you get home, do your homework, and then you get to go out and do things. That's carried over to college - I come home, do all my homework before the weekend comes, then I go out and do stuff. Have fun.

Expectations outside the classroom were cited most often as providing a spring board to success in athletics and academics. Lisa Begaye\* said:

You can't be lazy. My dad would tell me to get off my butt and work outside. It was hard doing man's work: hauling coal and water, working at sheep camp riding horses or herding the sheep on foot. If I didn't do anything he would yell at me, chew me out...I learned discipline by my dad telling me that unfinished work needs to be done. "You don't have to be told to do it, you can still do it if you know something needs to be done." I learned responsibility from my family. When they would go away, I had to take care of my nieces and nephews. You gotta be responsible for them because they don't know what they're doing. My grandparents are here too so we have to prepare all the meals and make sure they get their medication...The way I learned time management was when we had visitors. I had to clean the house, get my chores done by a certain time.

In Navajo culture, children learn valuable life lessons during childhood. Their assistance is both necessary for group success, and their success later in life.

Another prominent Navajo cultural belief is the importance of the group over the individual. All of the basketball players defined a successful NHS basketball player as not complaining, working hard in practice, contributing

her skills to the team, and encouraging her teammates. Claudia Laughter\* explains the importance of working hard all the time, "you always gotta give 100 percent. You can't go 70% one day and 99% the next day, and then on game day you decide to go 100%. But you realize you can't because you weren't paying attention in practice." Jackie Little\* also noted successful players thought of their teammates first. Players knew their own strengths and weaknesses as well as others, and led by example, not demanding much attention. All of these characteristics are process-oriented. They also reflect the values of family and helping others, while still maintaining individual autonomy. Players, such as Claudia Laughter\*, also believed the community's view of a successful basketball player at NHS was quite different than their own:

The ones who score the most points, the one who handles the ball, the wings that shoot the three's are very successful players to them. It's not the ones who end up getting rebounds or passing the ball in to the posts. It's basically the ones who get the points.

The community was more concerned with the end product - Did the team win, who was the leading scorer, and is the team ranked in the conference and state polls? They only saw Friday night's game; they did not see the endless hours of preparation (practice) necessary for the victory.

The respect and admiration for women in Navajo society is a result of the deity, Changing Woman. She gave birth to twins who destroyed evil. She also created the Navajo clans from her own body. With the ability to create life comes the

responsibility to love, care for, and raise children the Navajo way. A mother must face all adversity and continue along her path. As a result of this power and responsibility women are recognized as family, community, and tribal leaders.

The basketball players all referred to strong women within their families' as positively impacting their lives, by fighting through adversity to reach success. Summer Long\* explains:

In Redrock, people get pregnant, drink alcohol or do drugs, and drop out of high school all the time. It happened to some of my relatives. So I made a checklist in my head of the do's and don'ts of living in my house. My sister Jolene\* excelled in sports and school. She was in National Honor Society, got an academic scholarship to college, and finished. I stayed with her in the summer, got to see what it was like to live off the reservation, and see a relative go to college.

Basketball players have seen their mothers, sisters, and aunts demonstrate their commitment to education, both locally and at the university level. "My mom's very traditional, but she values education," according to proud daughter Karen Smiley\*. "When I was nine, I watched her sit at the table and study for the G.E.D. test by writing in this little booklet." When mothers left home to continue their education at college, daughters not only assumed the household duties, but saw first hand the obstacles. "I wanted to do well for myself, and my parents," said Angie Black\*.

Navajo women are driven by the cultural expectation to provide for the family. Education is one step on the ladder.

In a visit to Mr. Brown's\* AP English class, Navajo author Rex Jim confirmed the importance of women in the Navajo culture: "If it wasn't for Navajo women, then our culture would not have survived" (Brown\* 1996). Navajo women always step up and take responsibility for whatever needs to get done. Mary Bennett\*, a NHS staff members says:

In Navajo culture women do a heck of a lot of work. They're not demure little things. The women are expected to chop wood. Whatever else. They're always working. You know, there's no wood to chop anymore so now maybe basketball's taken its place?

The fact is at NHS, the athletes dominate homecoming royalty during football and basketball seasons. In many public schools that would never happen, but on the Navajo reservation women are looked at differently. They are feminine, athletic, hardworking, mothers, daughters, care givers, supporters, wives, and students. These roles are not clearly delineated, but interwoven. These traditional values and belief explain the basketball players' positive self-image and self-identity which has led them to greater self-understanding and self-confidence in their pursuit of a college education.

#### The Significance of the Support Group

With these cultural lessons, basketball players understand themselves better: where they come from, whom they come from, who they are, what they are, why they are here,

and where they are going. Studies on coping strategies for minority students show "positive feelings of self-worth, belief in inner control responsibility, realistic aspirations as to what education may offer, a strong motivation to achieve, and confidence in the ability to succeed are all powerful indicators of ultimate academic success" (Pluchinota 1996, C7). Schools constantly stress the importance of positive self-esteem. A child's self-concept is the most important significant factor in the development of her personality, her ability to work and play with others, and her academic performance. This positive self-concept is directly reflected by the support system available to these students.

For basketball players at NHS the support system is more extensive than for non-athletes. Basketball players not only have teachers and the counselors in their corner, they also have coaches. These coaches may create pressure to perform in the athletic arena, but the players are always asked by one of the many coaches in the school; "how's it going, how are your classes?" As a result of this short conversation, the basketball player knows she is expected to perform in the classroom, someone cares enough to take time out of their day, and ask a teenager a personal, yet non-threatening question.

The other mentors mentioned in the school system are teachers who stressed academics, supported the basketball

players' dream, and eventual expectation of college. Claudia Laughter\* explains her experiences:

I was fortunate to have good teachers who turned me on to subjects that I really enjoyed. I took classes I wanted to take. I knew I needed to take English courses because I knew I had to write in college. I knew I needed basic math skills because I had to take at least one math class in college. Mr. Young knew I was bad at math, but still encouraged me. Mrs. Stevens made me realize that there's other things in life. She opened up [my mind], and made me realize that people are very different. I guess the whole Lord of the Flies did it for me. It was very metaphorical. When we read that book, it did something for me. It was a lot of what she talked about in class, not the school work. The teachers knew I worked hard, and I knew I worked hard. They always encouraged me to go on and do things. They weren't cheap in rewarding me either: "she's got a reputation as a schoolgirl, so just give her the grade," like some teachers do. They marked me for my bad points, but they also marked my me for the good things I did. That's why I say, I've always been real lucky with my teachers.

Karen Smiley\* also reflected on her English teacher as a positive force in her life:

Mr. Brown\* helped me a lot. We had to write all these papers and read all these hard books. I got my sister turned on to books, now she's a bookworm. I told her, "you gotta read this book if you're gonna take Mr. Brown's class." Mr. Brown really supported me. He helped me write essays when I applied to universities. He believed in me and made me work hard.

Occasionally, this mentor was also a coach, who demanded daily preparation and exceptional performances in both arenas. Karen Smiley\* notes her experience:

Most people thought I should play sports in college because I was good in high school. The only way I could play sports in college was at a junior college, but there was no way I was going to go to a junior college. I had straight A's in high school. Miss Roberts\* was

one of two teachers who told me not to go to a junior college, and I knew it would be better to go to a university rather than a junior college. I knew once I got to college that academics was a big thing. She told me how college was, and how fun it was. I told her everything that went on in high school, like getting into trouble, and "my dad this, my dad that." I knew I had to go to school, I just did it, and here I am.

Miss Roberts\* also provided support for players who wanted to use basketball as a springboard to achieve a college education, according to Summer Long\*:

When I was little, I saw college women playing basketball at this gym in Phoenix. I was like, "this is what I want to do." And I'd sit there and watch them play. It was really neat. Then Miss Roberts\* became my coach. When I got to talk to her, she told me she played college basketball. I was like, "wow she played college ball." The first thing I did was go home and tell my family: "Guess what, my coach used to play in college," and I went on and on. They're like, "well that's good." I was always looking for signs to see if what I did was okay. She came into my life and I took it as a sign. She made it seem so real because of what she told me, and what she taught. It all made sense. She knows what she's talking about, she played, she went to college and got a degree. Everything she said I totally believed.

Mentors saw these basketball players as student-athletes, just as the basketball players saw themselves. Their views were in sync, which resulted in a stronger, mutual bond built on honesty, high expectations, hard work, responsibility, and a commitment to be successful.

Outside of the school, family members were consistently cited as providing unconditional love and support, but again the importance of Navajo values were reinforced. Lisa Begaye\* states this point:

My uncle motivated me to succeed at college. He'd tell me his story about life, and that I should go to college. He'd give me all these lectures about education being important. I should stay in school and he believed in me. Even though he has passed away, I still truly believe what he said. Sometimes when I feel like I don't want to go to school anymore, I can look up to what he and other people have said. I have a chance to make something out of myself. That makes me more motivated. It makes me want to continue in challenging the world. I don't want to fail them. Sometimes I feel like I'm doing it for them not myself, but in a way I'm doing this for a better life - to get my life started and situated.

The truth was told, responsibility was stressed, and hard work was demanded, according to Karen Smiley\*:

My sister supported me but in different ways. In high school she helped me prepare for college. She brought home one of those schedules: "What to do your Junior year," and put it up on the refrigerator...She was always mean to me, but she probably thought she was looking out for me. She didn't want me hanging out with certain people because they had bad reputations, or they might get me in trouble. But I looked up to her. She graduated near the top of her class and went to college. I wanted to do that too.

Monetary support was often not present, especially in college, but the emotional support was consistent in the basketball players' pursuit of excellence.

These young basketball women are the future of the Navajo Nation, they are first generation college students. Most of these Navajo women did not have parents or relatives who attended college. Other basketball players did go to college before them and completed degrees, but not at today's pace. Interestingly, most of the basketball players

interviewed named two former NHS student-athletes, Margery Johnson\* or Paula Redmoustache\* , as positive role models in their lives. They openly praised their positive achievements in basketball and in academics. Summer Long\* explained her relationship with Margery Johnson\*:

There were a couple of Navajo girls who went to college and played sports. Margery Johnson\* is the one from Redrock who really went out and did it. She played basketball and volleyball at a junior college. She came back and gave me her practice gear, and a card that said, "just to get you in the state of mind for your first practice of the season." I was like, "cool." I took it as a compliment.

Lucy Cly\* also noticed these role models:

Paula Moustache\* was one of the few basketball players who went on to college and got their degree when I was in high school. She attended NHS, played basketball, was very popular, and did well in school. She went to a [university in Arizona], graduated with a political science degree, and now is finishing up law school. A lot of people are not aware of that...Basketball players have to realize that you can't live in the past. You have to move on. You have to have that education. Once you leave the reservation nobody really cares. You don't realize that until you get to college. Nobody cares if you're from a small reservation school. Maybe if you're a big star athlete at Georgetown or U.C.L.A.,<sup>17</sup> but otherwise nobody cares.

These two role models were close the high school players in age and paved the way for others; Navajo women could go to college and earn a degree. The players saw it happen right before their own eyes.

With this family and school support, and the positive image of successful former student-athletes, these basketball

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<sup>17</sup> University of California at Los Angeles.

players graciously accept the responsibility to become positive role models for others in the community. Players participated in community service projects to interact with local Navajo youth. A basketball clinic/drug awareness clinic was organized, and conducted by basketball players in the Student-Athletes Detest Drugs Association (SADDA). This student-run organization emphasized a positive drug-free environment for all student-athletes in Redrock. In addition to the clinic, a big brother/big sister program was developed with intermediate school basketball players. High school basketball players wrote positive notes throughout the year encouraging these youngsters to work hard in the classroom and stay away from drugs. Basketball was not the emphasis, but most of the follow up interaction happened before and after intermediate and high school basketball games.

As a result of their first generation college status, the female basketball player knew they were role models for younger relatives and youth in the community. Again the importance of sharing your wealth, and knowledge for the good of the group is revealed by Summer Long\*:

I wanted to be a good role model for them. Not just for my younger brothers and sisters, but for the younger kids that I knew through teammates I had. When they were in primary and intermediate school, and in junior high, they just followed me around. It wasn't so much that I thought the community had high expectations of for me, but me expecting myself to be a good role model for the younger kids.

In retrospect, these basketball players' self-confidence

grew as a result of their support group. This safety net provided strength and support during good and bad times. If problems at home were overbearing, then the girls found support from a teacher or coach. When basketball became all consuming, teachers and family members supported the student-athletes, but still held them accountable. When basketball players felt the pressure of high academic standards, coaches reminded them of their goals and encouraged them to continue working. These student-athletes learned how to efficiently and effectively adjust to, and cope with various obstacles they faced. "The will to succeed academically, plus the belief that such success was possible, led students to develop good study habits, which led to better grades, which reinforced their motivation and will to cope with other personal challenges...Successes spawn success" (Pluchinota 1996, C7). Along with the basketball players' desire to continue their pursuit of excellence through a college education, the student-athlete must view education as worthwhile, and the support group must accord prestige for these accomplishments.

#### Basketball as a Structure for Reinforcement

Learning in the classroom and on the basketball court are two distinct situations. Practices are designed to teach

and practice basketball skills for two to three hours, six days a week. Behaviors are rewarded or punished immediately by the coach. Drills are precise in expectations, energy level, and execution. If any of these elements are not meeting the coach's criteria, the individual or group will suffer the consequences. Objective: The team will make 70% of their free throws during practice. If the team fails, they run sprints as a punishment for not focusing or performing up to the expectation. They are conditioned to meet the criteria for success.

The rewards for performing accordingly vary. During practice a coach encourages the skills she values (hard work, team work, patience, good defense, and hustle) through applause or personal congratulations. Her support is valued; she determines who plays and how much. The real rewards are determined through weekly test situations, games. Daily instruction and practice contribute to this moment in time, are the players and team prepared? Win or lose, the players' and team are evaluated, and new goals are established for the next week. It is a continual process. Classrooms do not consistently reflect the process of immediate feedback participation in sport does. Athletes know their status on the team at all times, but often do not know their grades. They know their athletic strengths and weakness, their role and expectations, but in the classroom these are not conveyed daily. More importantly, they are not only evaluated by

their coaches and teammates, they are also critiqued in a public setting, by a community without the knowledge the players' and coaches' have.

This constant and in-depth assessment of athletic skills begins at an early age for Navajo children in Redrock. Pee Wee basketball championships, middle school state championship and the Arizona state high school championship truly take on a life of their own. It is "March Madness."<sup>18</sup> One loss and you go home. Continue to win, and your team is #1. In this country, that person or group which is #1 represents success. Rarely do people remember the runner-up of a championship game. Coupled with the fact that America passionately embraces sports, research now attempts to show participation in sport produces successful youth and adults.

The Women's Sports Foundation is the leader in providing the general public with the "facts." Their reports show us that girls who participate in sports are more successful than those who do not. The Corbett, Griffin, Harris, and Sabo's (1985) report on women in sport surveyed over 1600 former female athletes, but only 1% were Native American. Using former athletes testimony, they found: 88% went to college, 42% believed sports brought their family closer, 93% felt success on the athletic field meant success in life, 47% had female role models, and 91% believed participation with other

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<sup>18</sup> Refers to the craziness that happens during tournament time, and the belief that the underdog always has a chance to upset the favorite in a single elimination tournament.

ethnic groups decreased prejudice. Girls who participated were also more likely to view their adolescent bodies as positive, and continue to participate in sports later in life. Their reasons for playing sports included: maintaining health, relieving stress, and achieving a sense of accomplishment (Corbett et al. 1985, 3-13).

The Acosta, DeFrantz, Farrell, Jones, Lapchick, and Pollock's (1989) report on minorities in sport added to the significant battery of sports knowledge, and opened the door for more discussion. This longitudinal study provided more ammunition for the advocates of sport participation as a vehicle for success. The report surveyed over 14,000 African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic youth as sophomore and seniors in high school, and two and four years after graduation. The report shows the complexity of high school sport participation and success of American minorities. For those of us who participated in sports, the findings are not surprising. Athletic participation encouraged involvement in school and community, increased popularity among peers, and inspired leadership goals. Data revealed the "dumb jock" stereotype as false, and documented minority athletes fare better academically than non-athletes. Additionally the long standing belief that sports provide an avenue for upward mobility for minorities is not true, with one exception Hispanics (Acosta et al. 1989, 3).

The data on Hispanic athletes, and specifically Hispanic

female athletes, confirms participation in sports is advantageous. Hispanic athletes scored higher on standardized reading, vocabulary, and mathematics tests than non-athletes, and rural Hispanic athletes were almost five times more likely than non-athletes to still be in college two years after high school. Hispanic female athletes fared better than their male counterparts. Hispanic female athletes were two to four times more likely than their non-athletic peers to attend and stay in college, those in rural areas were three times less likely to drop out than non-athletes, were more likely than their non-athletic peers to report a high degree of popularity, to seek a bachelor's degree, and make progress toward that degree (Acosta et al. 1989, 4-5). Sports then is a positive activity and vehicle for the social, educational, and career mobility of female Hispanics. Girls basketball at NHS parallels these studies published by the Women's Sports Foundation, according to former players. Basketball provides a structure that has positively contributed to their success in post-secondary academics, and life. Additionally, the significance of the support group is also reflected in these studies on women in sports.

CHAPTER 9:  
CONCLUSION

The Women's Sports Foundation reports' statistics and findings are impressive, but the assumptions are problematic. First, all ethnic groups do not have the same cultural experiences. One could generalize that as an ethnic group, Hispanic people and Native Americans, possess a spoken language different than English, celebrate cultural holidays and events, and abide by cultural rules and expectations different from the dominant culture. All Americans identify themselves in some way ethnically or culturally. On school and job applications we denote our identity. When we introduce ourselves, a stranger may repeat our name and ask, "that's Irish isn't it?" In this racially and economically disenfranchised country, I find it difficult to assume that everyone of us neatly fit into the dominant society, especially minorities. Coincidentally the notion that sports participation, in and of itself, causes success for anyone is absurd.

I do not deny participation in sports can help or hinder an individual, but involvement in sports does not happen in a vacuum. Family, friends, teachers, and culture all play significant roles in the development of a child. Interestingly enough, the female basketball players

interviewed all initially informed me that athletics contributed to their retention in college. Yet upon reflection, their answers changed. When asked what skills were important for academic success in college, all pronounced the obvious: responsibility, self-confidence, time management, cooperation, perseverance, commitment, hard work, and effective adjustment and coping skills. Further questioning revealed all of these athletes actually learned those necessary skills from other experiences, before their serious participation in sport. For the female basketball players at NHS, participation in sports began as fun, but transformed into a positive learning experience that reinforced and provided structure for previously learned values from the Navajo culture, family, and/or significant mentors and role models.

Basketball players reflected on their lessons learned prior to basketball. Exercising and playing with friends reduced stress, and supported the Navajo belief that "Running to Dawn" destroyed laziness, and brought happiness. Cooperation, responsibility, hard work, and perseverance were learned by herding sheep, hauling water and coal, caring for relatives, participating in ceremonies, and sitting down and doing your homework before going out to play. Summer Long\* states perseverance was essential to success in athletics, academics, and later life:

I started running to get back in shape. I ran the lines on the football field, and realized - this is just like life. Here's my line. It's all dried out. Point A all

the way down to where I decide to go. I'm running on this line and then all of a sudden it's all green. It's so green, so much green grass right there. It's so beautiful, but then I gotta work my feet to push it harder and harder. Then all of a sudden there's a dead spot. There's nothing. It's just from running on it. It's smooth. The ground is nice and hard, and I just run. Then all of a sudden the line gets crooked because of all the holes. I'm trying to run around it, and I realize this is my life. There's another patch and it's all mud. I'm like, "ugh!" Twenty yards of mud, and I think, "am I gonna run through this or am I gonna run around it?" The more I ran, everything made sense to me. It told me life isn't easy. Things may appear to be this way, but actually are not. You may come across something that looks so simple, but can be the toughest part of your life.

This belief that self-confidence resulted from the strength and importance of women in Navajo society, and the support of various adults throughout these players' lives confirms Deyhle's (1995) and Bowker's (1992) research. This support is reflected in the basketball players' analysis of how others (teachers, coaches, and family) perceived their success as a student, athlete, and leader (See Table 9.1).

Basketball Players' Perceptions of HOW OTHERS saw them in terms of Successful Leaders, Students, and Athletes

Point of View	Leader	Student	Athlete
Teachers	88%	100%	100%
Coaches	88%	100%	88%
Family	88%	100%	100%

Table 9.1

The biggest impact athletics had on Summer Long's\* life was the joy of a peak performance; the high of being at your best:

Not everybody feels it, no matter how good you are. I was fortunate to be going through a peak and just at that point, I felt like nobody could say or do anything to me. I could do anything I wanted; nobody could stand in my way. One day at track practice it started raining. I always thought ever time it rained I was blessed. No matter how late I had to stay, I was gonna get my workout done if it killed me. That hurdle, that finish line, that time - it was totally me. The high of just me. I had the same feeling my senior year in basketball. That rush - I can achieve anything I want in my life; I can do it. That's how athletics made me feel, that's what it brought me, and that's why I'm where I am today because of that feeling.

Affirmations of the value and impact of sports were prevalent, especially upon reflection by Jackie Little\*:

I realize that the things on the court do help you later in life. Some people don't see it that way. It's just a game full of athletes that don't really have any brains. But for those players that want to prove something, they prove it on the court. They prove they do know something, and they can carry it on later in life. Usually those people that play sports tend to do better. They motivate themselves better; they excel when the pressure is on. Their life is a game. They want to keep on getting better and better. Every day they practice.

Supporting the adults belief that these basketball players were successful student-athletes, 75% of the basketball players viewed themselves as a leader, 63% as a successful student, and 75% as a successful athlete. These basketball players were cautious not to appear better than others, which is expected in Navajo culture. Their percentages were lower than the adults' percentages in Table 9.1. They worked

hard in the classroom and on the court, but felt they could have worked harder. They were their own harshest critic.

The prevalent use of sports metaphors verifies the point sports participation is important to former athletes. These Navajo women viewed their basketball experiences as positive. They made easy connections between athletic skills and skills necessary for academic success.

Interestingly enough, the basketball players and non-athletes evaluation of the necessary skills for college success were generally equal (See Figure 9.2). The exceptions were in the areas of time management and cooperation. The basketball players' average score in the area of cooperation was 8.25 (10 = very important, 0 = not important at all) and the non-athletes' was 9.75. When basketball players explained their lower score for cooperation, as a necessary skill for college success, they felt cooperative activities were rarely expected in their classes. Consequently that skill was not important. The other notable difference in average score was the importance of time management. The basketball players' average score was a 10, while the non-athletes' score was lower at 8.5. In their explanation, basketball players cited having to balance academics and other activities (job, exercise, boyfriend, friends, or going home to visit) while in college. The players felt it was the same balancing act they dealt with in high school. Time management was the key in

Necessary Skills for College Success

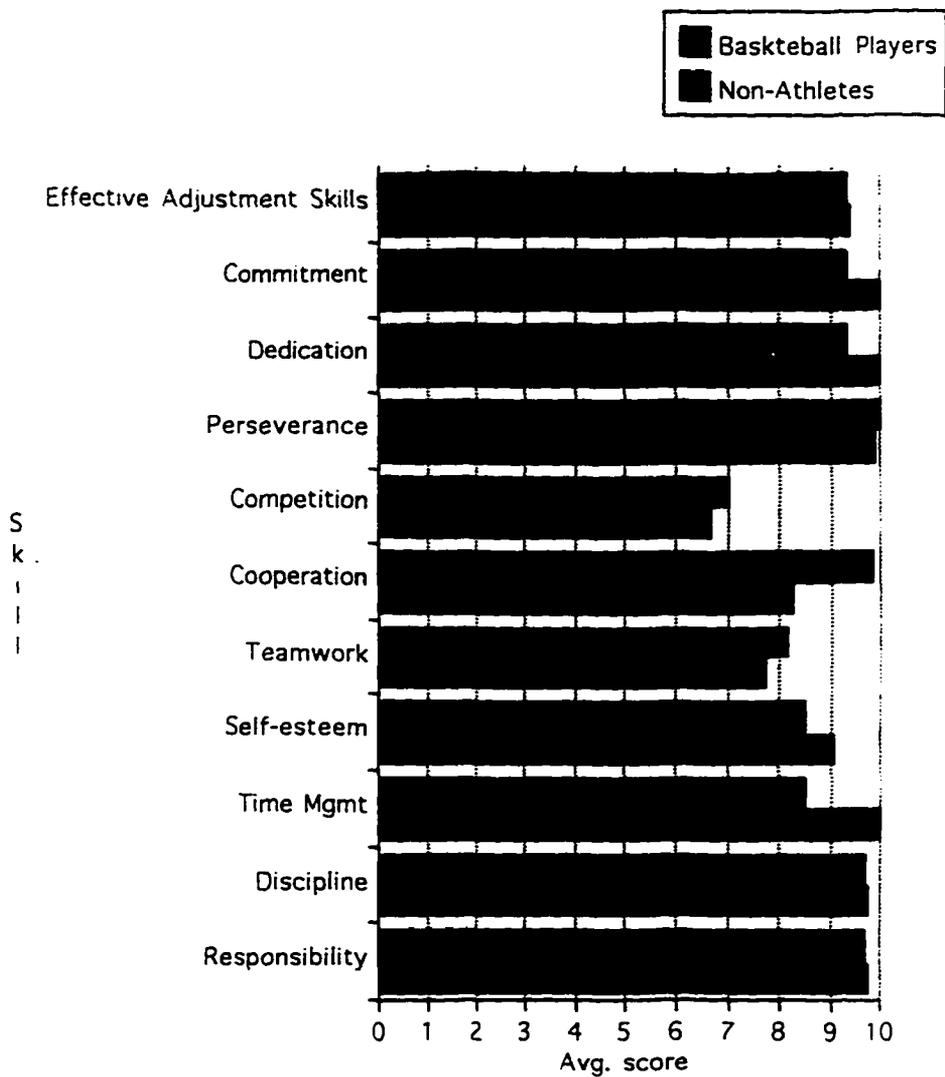


Figure 9.2

determining their success at college. Upon further evaluation, the skills necessary for college success, such as commitment, cooperation, perseverance, time management, and

responsibility, are applicable to all areas of our lives: family, friends, work, school, and sports.

My findings on "Navajo Hoops and Higher Learning" revealed that: the basketball players support group contributed significantly to the students' future academic and athletic success; Navajo cultural values and philosophy significantly impacted the students' post-secondary academic success; participation in basketball began as fun, but transformed into a positive learning experience that reinforced and provided structure for previously learned values from Navajo culture, family, and /or significant mentors and role models.

### Recommendations

Based on the research cited and this thesis, which offers insight into how participation in high school basketball affects the lives of Navajo females, several recommendations have been made. First and foremost, we cannot allow the local community and school to become consumed with athletics at the expense of academics. Recently NHS, Ryneldi Becenti, and others have shown participation in basketball can be a proving ground for Navajo women in the athletic arena. Yet we cannot let NHS become another Carlisle or Haskell, devoured by their

athletic program and permitting academics to come in a distant second. Academic excellence is a prerequisite for preparation for and success at institutions of higher learning, and cannot be sacrificed for the sake of athletic eligibility and success.

Native American college success ranges from 7%-29%, according to Pavel (1994), but the number of NHS female basketball players attending (97%) and staying in college (73%) blow these "recognized" statistics out the window. These students did not become engulfed by their athletic role (Adler), but instead viewed themselves as students (Meyer). Their hardiness (Maddi and Hess), and creative thinking abilities (Annadale) contributed to their college retention and success. Despite the research (Pluchinota) and testimony from former players that rural reservation schools, like NHS, do not adequately prepare Native students for college, the fact remains that 73% of female basketball at NHS have either received their degree or are still in college. Navajo High School can become a "leader in Indian education" if the school develops a vision for the 21st century.

The "dumb jock" stereotype is false; in the classroom, athletes perform as well as or better than non-athletes. Since the school and community recognize these student-athletes as the leaders, then raise the academics standards for athletes. Require student-athletes to maintain a "C"

average to participate in sports. Studies of schools that have raised the academic standards show athletes respond to the challenge by increasing their academic achievement and output. When asked to do more, athletes prove they are capable of doing more (Acosta et al. 1989, 17). After this new "pass to play" standard is implemented for the athletes, it is only fair to institute similar expectations for all the students at NHS. Is it fair to expect Navajo students to be, at the least, average, instead of allowing them to be below average academically, and above average athletically? Academic standards and college preparation should be raised across the board at NHS.

Research shows (Platero) that sports are a positive force in preventing students from dropping out. We must also recognize student-athletes have an unfair advantage over other students. Although this advantage is unintentional, the fact of it remains. As a result of their athletic participation, the basketball players have a much larger and personally involved support group. When an athlete ends up on the ineligible list, three to four adults scramble to get her caught up and back on track so she can play in the next game. Teachers and coaches provide tutoring for the student-athlete. Everyone contributes. But when a similar situation arises with a non-athlete, the student is lucky to have anyone willing to go the extra mile. Usually the only one willing to actually do anything is the teacher, and what they

do depends on their relationship. Monitored study halls need to be provided for all students to assist in learning and meeting academic expectations. Mentors and supporters are extremely important in academic and future success. Navajo High School should analyze the sports model, and find ways to implement similar structured support systems and positive learning situations for all students, in the classroom, and in after school activities, and clubs. Positive experiences between adults and students outside the classroom are paramount in building strong supportive relationships.

Tierney's (1992) criticism of college recruitment and retention still holds true today. The pipeline for Native students needs improvements. Recruitment has increased, but overall Native retention rates are unacceptably low (Hardy; Russell). Based on the findings in this thesis, structured campus programs, and home support systems must be designed and implemented to increase retention at institutions of higher learning.

Understanding that over 300 tribes exist in the United States, it is essential not to assume that all or one component of a program will work for all Native students. Therefore, it is paramount to develop creative and diverse post-secondary program designed to meet the needs of as many students as possible. Structure is an essential element of this program. Although all students may not need it, many do. Older Native students can serve as peer mentors for

younger students, similar to the program run by the Language, Reading and Culture department at the University of Arizona. Mentors can meet with students on weekly basis to discuss problems and answer questions. Structured study groups and adequate facilities can assist students in their time management skills in addition to learning necessary study skills. Biweekly grade checks and conferences with professors provide continual feedback for the student and his/her mentor. Programs such as Upward Bound provide checks and balances, and rewards for Native students, and may have positive components that could be incorporated at the collegiate level.

With strong Native mentors, younger students are provided with a strong support group. Native mentors may also serve in other capacities: instructing faculty members in cross-cultural training seminars, facilitating student and faculty meetings, evaluating the student's academic abilities and skills, developing positive goal-oriented success plans, supporting the student's native culture and building upon its values and philosophy, and encouraging or personally inviting the student to various Indian activities. Freshmen should also be required to reside in dormitories their first year, which provides additional structure.

Faculty mentor programs have not shown dividends with these students from NHS, but their support group from Redrock has. A "Home Base" program is necessary to support

reservation students from their senior year in high school until they graduate from college. A coordinator and assistants should be hired by the school district to provide the necessary framework for post-secondary academic success. These staff members may not be personal members of the individual student's support group, but will provide a system and continual updates of problems and successes.

While in high school, students should receive training in non-academic skills necessary for college success. These skills may include: riding a city bus, living off campus, managing money, scheduling classes, choosing a major and advisor, asking pertinent questions, using available resources (especially fellow-students from Redrock), and finding a part-time job. Many of these skills have no relevance in a community lacks employment and housing opportunities. An 1-800 number must be maintained for constant communication between family, mentors, and role models. Emergency money should also be available to college students. The repayment of this money could come in the form of "giving back to others." College students could return to their high school or school board as a guest speaker, answering questions regarding their college experiences. They could also assume the responsibility of mentor on their college campus, or they could do community service for an Indian community or organization. The possibilities are endless, but we need to change our views of "scholarships"

and "loans." We need to recognize the value and necessity of assistance, and understand the responsibility to give back and help others. To provide a strong support system and necessary skills, the tribe and school district must work together to secure grants, individual and/or corporate funding.

Within the high school itself, teacher and administrative expectations also need to increase. Teachers and administrations must raise their own academic expectations for their students. The students interviewed voiced their concerns with their college preparation. Despite "acceptable" ACT scores and GPA's, these students all struggled initially in college (Benjamin et al.). Although there were exceptions, the rule is students at NHS are not as prepared as they need to be to successful at institutions of higher learning. Teachers and counselors need to encourage students to participate in summer programs to increase their academic skills and bridge the jump from high school to college.

Administrators need to analyze the academic needs of the student body earlier in the school year to better solve the college preparatory classes, class schedule, number of teachers needed, and new hire problems. Administrators also need to reassess the goals of NHS. Are academics and athletics equally important? If they are, then an reevaluation of coaching hiring practices, use of funds,

school commitment to and rewards for excellence is needed. Additionally administrators must visit classroom and teachers more to understand what is working, what is not working, and developing positive active relationships with the students, instead of with just the athletes. Navajo education has always been a leader in Indian education. Rough Rock Demonstration School and Navajo Community College not only were firsts in Indian education, but now publish innovative and relevant Native American literature. With the success of former female basketball players on college campuses, NHS must find a way to implement the positives, and correct the negatives if Navajo people are going to succeed at institutions of higher learning.

#### Implications for Further Research

As previously stated, participation in basketball does not cause former basketball players to succeed in college. All aspects of culture, support group and basketball work together to produce positive results. Nothing happens in isolation. There are areas that require further research though. First, a longitudinal study should be done to study not only the high school experience, but follow the basketball players two, four and six years after graduation to document their status. This would provide a detailed look

at the students' college experience which was not addressed in my research. This longitudinal study also gives credibility to the research, especially with such a small data base, and parallels the study conducted for the Women's Sports Foundation.

Second, we must research the significance of athletics to college recruitment and retention of Native American students. We need to ask college recruiters what they actually look for in native students. Are they well-rounded students, participating in both academics and extracurricular activities? Then we need to hear what native college students say about what college really is about, and their ability to make the transition. With this information, high school teachers, counselors, administrators, and college administrators and recruiters can make better policy decisions for Native American students at their particular institution.

Finally, we must continue to use qualitative methods to find solutions to Native American recruitment and retention problems at institutions of higher education. Of the basketball players from NHS, 97% initially attended and 73% experienced success (retention or a degree) at post-secondary institutions. Statistics do not show this success. On the contrary they consistently cite a 7%-29% college graduation rates for Native people. The University of Arizona actively recruits Native students, but reports a 69% drop out rate.

Statistics do not provide answers, people do. With the use of in-depth interviews, successful Native students can provide insight to the necessary skills, and hope for future post-secondary academic success. Acknowledging that Navajo public education has only been seriously supported in the past 40 years, many of these young women are first generation college students. Their experiences provide a wealth of information for the future success of Navajo college students. Their voice must be heard for future success of Navajo education.

APPENDIX 1

# If you would just let me play...

Studies show that girls who participate in athletics:

- Are more likely to graduate from high school
- Are less likely to have an unwanted pregnancy
- Achieve a higher grade point average in school
- Are more comfortable in social settings
- Are less likely to join a gang
- Have a better self-image

The University of Arizona Intercollegiate Athletics Department is dedicated to promoting participation in athletics for Tucson's youth. To assist us in doing this, we are hosting a day for Mothers and Daughters to join together in learning about and enjoying women's sports offered at the U of A. Participating in the day will be Wildcat coaches and student-athletes from women's basketball, tennis, gymnastics, soccer, golf, track & field, and volleyball. Each sport will conduct an educational session and provide mother-daughter participation!

**The University of Arizona Intercollegiate Athletics Department  
2nd Annual Mother & Daughter Sports Day**

Saturday, April 26, 1997

Check-in: 9:15-9:45 a.m. McKale Center on the basketball court  
10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.  
Cost: Free  
Ages: K-8 grade girls

• In this early space is limited to 100 mother-daughter pairs. Join in this fun-filled day!

*Reservations are required! Call Natalie at 621-2334 to sign up.*





## APPENDIX 2

### Pseudonyms

In order to protect the anonymity of those interviewed, pseudonyms are used throughout, and designated with an asterisk.\* Any real life connection to any of these names is purely coincidental, and unintentional. The community of Redrock and Navajo High School (NHS) are also pseudonyms. Below is the break-down by group:

#### BASKETBALL PLAYERS

Lisa Begaye  
Eileen Benally  
Angie Black  
Debi Crank  
Claudia Laughter  
Jackie Little  
Summer Long  
Karen Smiley

#### TEACHERS/STAFF OF NHS

Mary Bennett  
John Brown  
James Evans  
Jamie Gray  
Mike Green  
Ann Jackson

#### NON-ATHLETES

Nancy Blackhorse  
Lucy Cly  
Stephanie Holiday

#### FAMILY MEMBER

Bernadette Yazzie

**SUBJECT'S CONSENT FORM:**

For interviewees in the thesis research project entitled "Navajo Hoops and Higher Learning: A Study of Female High School Basketball Players and Their Post-Secondary Academic Success."

I AM BEING ASKED TO READ THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL TO ENSURE THAT I AM INFORMED OF THE NATURE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY AND OF HOW I WILL PARTICIPATE IN IT, IF I CONSENT TO DO SO, SIGNING THIS FORM WILL INDICATE THAT I HAVE BEEN SO INFORMED AND THAT I GIVE MY CONSENT. FEDERAL REGULATIONS REQUIRE WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT PRIOR TO PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY SO THAT I CAN KNOW THE NATURE AND THE RISKS OF MY PARTICIPATION AND CAN DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE OR NOT PARTICIPATE IN A FREE AND INFORMED MANNER.

**PURPOSE**

"I am being invited to voluntarily participate in the above-titled research project. The purpose of this project is to identify, describe and analyze female Native American participation in high school athletics and that participation's contribution to the students' post-secondary attendance and academic success. The most important part of this research is the personal accounts of individual participants. Therefore, oral interviews are being conducted to bring the participants' stories to the forefront."

**SELECTION CRITERIA**

"I am being invited to participate because I (a) played varsity basketball at Navajo High School\* between the years of 1990-1995 (b) attended Navajo High School between the years of 1990-1995, but did not participate in any varsity sports (c) had a significant relationship with female basketball players or non-athletes between the years of 1990-1995."

**STANDARDS TREATMENTS**

"I may, at any time before or during the interview, cease to participate in this project."

PROCEDURE

"If I agree to participate, I will be asked to agree to the following:

- I will remain anonymous in the resulting written work.
- I will agree to allow the original transcript of this interview to remain the possession of Traci

Nemechek.

- I will agree to allow the cassette tape(s) and written transcriptions of this interview to become property of Traci Nemechek.
- I will give only information I feel comfortable in disclosing."

RISKS

"I agree there are no known risks involved in participating in this project."

CONFIDENTIALITY

"I agree to the following methods to insure confidentiality:

- Any use of this interview in the written work will be given a pseudonym.
- All tapes, transcriptions, and notes derived from this interview shall remain in the possession of Traci Nemechek."

PARTICIPATION COSTS AND SUBJECT'S COMPENSATION

"My only expenses are traveling to and from the interview, and one to two hours of my time."

"My only compensation is to be part of significant research pertaining to Native American participation in high school athletics and its impact on post-secondary academic success."

"I can obtain further information from Traci Nemechek, B.A. M.A.(97). If I have any questions concerning my rights as a research subject, I may call the Human Subjects Committee office at 520-626-6721."

AUTHORIZATION

"BEFORE GIVING MY CONSENT AND BY SIGNING THIS FORM, THE METHODS, INCONVENIENCES, RISKS, AND BENEFITS HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED TO ME AND MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I UNDERSTAND THAT I MAY ASK QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME AND THAT I AM FREE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE PROJECT AT ANY TIME WITHOUT CAUSING BAD FEELINGS. MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROJECT MAY BE ENDED BY INVESTIGATOR OR BY THE SPONSOR FOR REASONS THAT WOULD BE EXPLAINED, NEW INFORMATION DEVELOPED DURING THE COURSE OF THIS STUDY WHICH MAY AFFECT MY WILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT WILL BE GIVEN TO ME AS IT BECOMES AVAILABLE. I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE FILED IN AN AREA DESIGNATED BY THE HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE WITH ACCESS RESTRICTED TO THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, TRACI NEMECHEK, OR AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES DEPARTMENT. I UNDERSTAND THAT I DO NOT GIVE UP ANY OF MY LEGAL RIGHTS BY SIGNING THIS FORM. A COPY OF THIS SIGNED CONSENT FORM WILL BE GIVEN TO ME."

---

 Subject's signature

Date

---

 Parent/Legal Guardian (if necessary)

Date

## INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT

"I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of knowledge the person who is signing this consent form understands clearly the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation and his/her signature is legally valid. A medical problem or language or educational barrier has not precluded this understanding."

---

 Signature of Investigator

Date

Yá' at' ééh,

According to the 1995 American Indian Digest, 52% of American Indians graduate from high school, 17% attend college, and 4% receive a college degree. These statistics are startling and problematic. But during my initial research at NHS in the fall of 1996, my statistics revealed 83% of females athletes, who participated in cross-country, volleyball or basketball, attended a 2 or 4 year college. Additionally, 84% of those former Navajo High School athletes who attended college either graduated with an Associate or Bachelor's degree or are still in college. As you can clearly see there is a drastic contrast of statistics.

My thesis research is designed to identify, describe and analyze female Native American participation in high school athletics and that participation's contribution to post-secondary academic success.

This research is personally exciting for several reasons. First of all, I was a teacher and coach at Navajo High School from 1990-1995. Second, these NHS statistics drastically contrast national statistics associated with Native American success at institutes of higher learning. Third, this specific area of study, Native women's participation in sports and post-secondary academic success, is virtually untouched by academic scholars.

Your selection (basketball player, non-athlete, family member, or NHS teacher or coach) and participation in a timely and meaningful study is important and will contribute to valuable academic scholarship in the field of American Indian Studies. I hope you are interested in allowing your success stories to be heard. Your voice is crucial for the success of this research.

I will follow up this request with a letter or phone call. If interested, I will also accept collect phone calls at my home.

Ahé hee'



Traci Nemecek



YÁ' ÁT' ÉEH

I, Traci Nemechek, teacher at Navajo High School for 6 years, request your participation in oral interviews for my thesis research, "Navajo Hoops and Higher Learning: A Study of Female High School Basketball Players and Their Post-Secondary Academic Success."

You are personally invited to participate as: a relative of a varsity basketball player, a alumni who did not participate in varsity sports, a varsity basketball player, or a mentor, advisor, or friend of a female basketball player or non-athlete at Navajo High School between the years of 1990-1995.

If you are willing to share your stories and ideas on Navajo High School athletics and college academic success, I will drive to your location or telephone you for an interview. This interview will take approximately 1-2 hours.

These interviews will be anonymous!

For more information, call or write Ms. Traci Nemechek.

AHE HEE'

**NAVAJO HOOPS & HIGHER LEARNING**  
**Questionnaire**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

NHS Class of: \_\_ Varsity Basketball Player? \_\_ Years: \_\_\_\_  
 Other varsity sports participated in at NHS:  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you play sports in Intermediate School? \_\_\_\_  
 What? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Did you play sports in Middle School? \_\_\_\_  
 What? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did / did not you play sports? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

H.S. GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Rank: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_  
 ACT / SAT Scores: \_\_\_\_\_

HS math & sciences classes: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

HS English & social studies classes: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

HS electives: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

College prep track? \_\_\_\_

JC / colleges accepted to after graduation: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you receive financial aid? \_\_\_\_  
 From Where?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you continue to receive financial aid? \_\_\_\_  
 Why / why not?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Since your H.S. graduation, list schools attended, jobs, and periods of inactivity:

1990: \_\_\_\_\_

1991: \_\_\_\_\_

1992: \_\_\_\_\_

1993: \_\_\_\_\_

1994: \_\_\_\_\_

1995: \_\_\_\_\_

Cite problems during college & solutions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Define post-secondary success: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**NAVAJO HOOPS & HIGHER LEARNING**  
**Support Group Questionnaire**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work place: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Years employed at NHS\*? \_\_\_\_\_  
Ethnicity: (Circle) Navajo/non-Navajo

Job responsibilities at NHS: (Circle) Teacher/Coach/Club  
Sponsor/Admin/Other

What classes do you teach/job at NHS? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What sports do you coach at NHS? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What clubs or groups do you sponsor at NHS? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS****1. TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF:**

- a. Start with your family => tradition
- b. Self
- c. School/Life experiences
- d. Athletic experiences

**2. GAMES/SPORTS/ATHLETICS:**

- a. Describe your first memory of games or sports.
- b. Who influenced your interest in sports? Why?
- c. How important are games/sports/physical fitness to Navajo people? Specifically, women?
- d. How successful were the basketball teams you played on?
- e. What was your role on these teams?
- f. What impact has athletics had on your life?
- g. Did you play basketball after HS? On a scholarship? The result/impact? Did the community support you in college athletics?
- h. Did you believe playing college sports was a possibility? When? Were you pressured to play college sports? Why or why not?
- i. How much of an impact did former NHS\* athletic scholarship winners have on your desire to attend college (+/-)?
- j. What +/- lessons or skills did you learn from your sport experiences at NHS?
- k. Did the school +/- or community's commitment to athletics create pressure on you to succeed **OR** did it provide encouragement and support?

**3. SUPPORT GROUPS:**

- a. Tell me about the people who have supported you (HS, athletics, college enrollment & attendance).
- b. People who held you back? Why?
- c. How did they support you **OR** interfere with your HS +/- or college experiences?
- d. What people were most influential in your life? (childhood, HS, college)
- e. Has support for you changed after HS & during college? How?
- f. If you faced obstacles, who or what caused them? Who helped you overcome these obstacles? How?

- g. How important has your family been in your success? (academic & athletic)
- h. Explain the importance or non-importance of Navajo tradition in your life.

**4. EXPECTATIONS, LEADERSHIP & SUCCESS(in High School):**

- a. Expectations:
  - 1) Do you have high expectations of yourself? Explain?
  - 2) Did your teachers/coaches have high expectations? Why?
  - 3) Did your family or community have high expectations? Why?
- b. Leadership & Success
  - 1) In your eyes, were you a leader in HS? Why or why not? Define a leader.
  - 2) In your eyes, were you a successful HS student? Why or why not? Define a successful HS student.
  - 3) In your eyes, were you a successful HS athlete? Why or why not? Define a successful basketball player at NHS.
  - 4) Support group:
    - a) Think of those who supported you.
    - b) Classify members of your support group into the following categories: academics, athletics, family, friends.
    - c) HOW did different members of your support group view you as a:

	Leader	Successful Athlete	Successful
Student			
Athletic Dept:			
Academic group:			
Family:			
Friends:			

- 5) Have these perceptions of your leadership, athletic & academic success **HELPED OR HINDERED** you:
- a) College enrollment
  - b) Post-secondary academic success
- 6) Do you **OR** the community see yourself as a role model? Why?

**5. ATHLETICS & ACADEMICS:**

- a. Describe your experiences as a student-athlete at NHS.
- b. How did you balance academics & athletics? Or could you? Did you value one over the other?
- c. Do you think the school/community placed equal importance on academics and athletics? **OR** did they value one over the other? If so, which one and why?
- d. Where does this priority come from? Why?
- e. Based on YOUR OBSERVATIONS as a Student-Athlete at NHS, which best prepared you for college success, academics or athletics? Why?
- f. Now that you are out of high school and working/going to college, what positive experiences at NHS prepared you for college success? And what recommendations would you make to better prepare ALL students for college success?

**6. POST-SECONDARY EXPERIENCES:**

- a. Tell me about: your path to college.
- b. College experiences (both positive + negative)
- c. Obstacles you faced & solutions?
- d. Your successes & reasons why?

**7. WHAT SKILLS ARE NECESSARY FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS?**

- a. On the chart below, list the necessary skills for post-secondary academic success.
- b. What is the significance of these skills?
- c. Did you have the opportunity to learn these skills? By what means?
- d. What do you attribute these skills to: home, school, sports, culture, teachers, coaches, family, friends?

**SKILLS CHART**

Necessary Skill	Method	Influence/"Teacher"

e. List the skills you do not possess that would have helped your post-secondary academic success? Why not?

f. Rate the importance of the skills you DO NOT have (1=lowest, 10=highest).

**8. SKILLS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS (according to research).**

- a. Rate the following skills necessary for post-secondary academic success & explain (1=lowest, 5=average, 10=highest).

Post-Secondary Academic Skills	Explanation of Score
Responsibility	
Discipline	
Time Management	
Self-esteem	
Teamwork	
Cooperation	
Competition	
Perseverance	
Dedication	
Commitment	
Effective Adjustment/ Coping Skills	

**9. ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNED:**

- a. What lessons have you learned from your HS & college experiences that benefited you and may benefit others in college in the future?
- b. What advice would you have for American Indian youth in general and NHS students in particular in their quest to attend, persevere, and succeed academically in college?
- c. Why would you give this advice? Explain.

**FAMILY QUESTIONS****1. TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF:**

- a. Start with your family => tradition
- b. Self
- c. School/Life experiences
- d. Athletic experiences

**2. GAMES/SPORTS/ATHLETICS:**

- a. Who in your family influenced your relative's interest in sports? Why?
- b. How important are games/sports/physical fitness to Navajo people? Specifically, women?
- c. How successful were the basketball teams your relative played on?
- d. What was her role on these teams? Did she fulfill her role?
- e. What impact has athletics had on her life?
- f. Did she play basketball after HS? On a scholarship? The result/impact? Did the community support her in college athletics?
- g. Did she believe playing college sports was a possibility? When? Was she pressured to play college sports? Why or why not?
- h. How much of an impact did former NHS\* athletic scholarship winners have on her desire to attend college (+/-)?
- i. What +/- lessons or skills did she learn from her sport experiences at NHS?
- k. Did the school +/- or community's commitment to athletics create pressure on her to succeed OR did it provide encouragement and support?

**3. SUPPORT GROUPS:**

- a. Tell me about the people who have supported her. (HS, athletics, college enrollment & attendance)
- b. People who held her back? Why?
- c. How did they support her OR interfere with her HS +/- or college experiences?
- d. What people were most influential in her life? (childhood, HS, college)
- e. Has support for her changed after HS & during college? How?

- f. If she faced obstacles, who or what caused them? Who helped her overcome these obstacles? How?
- g. How important has her family been in her success (academic & athletic)?
- h. Explain the importance or non-importance of Navajo tradition in her life.

**4. EXPECTATIONS, LEADERSHIP & SUCCESS (in High School):**

- a. Expectations:
  - 1) Do she have high expectations of herself? Explain?
  - 2) Did her teachers/coaches have high expectations? Why?
  - 3) Did her family or community have high expectations? Why?
- b. Leadership & Success
  - 1) In her eyes, was she a leader in HS? Why or why not? Define a leader.
  - 2) In her eyes, was she a successful HS student? Why or why not? Define a successful HS student.
  - 3) In her eyes, was she a successful HS athlete? Why or why not? Define a successful basketball player at NHS.
  - 4) Support group:
    - a) Think of those who supported her.
    - b) Classify members of her support group into the following categories: academics, athletics, family, friends.
    - c) HOW did different members of her support group view her as a:

	Leader	Successful Athlete	Successful
Student			
Athletic Dept:			
Academic group:			
Family:			
Friends:			

- 5) Have these perceptions of her leadership, athletic & academic success **HELPED OR HINDERED** her:
- a) College enrollment
  - b) Post-secondary academic success
- 6) Do she, your family, **OR** the community see her as a role model? **Why?**

**5. ATHLETICS & ACADEMICS:**

- a. Describe her experiences as a student-athlete at NHS.
- b. How did she balance academics & athletics? Or could she? Did she value one over the other?
- c. Do you think the school/community placed equal importance on academics and athletics? **OR** did they value one over the other? If so, which one and why?
- d. Where does this priority come from? Why?
- e. Based on YOUR OBSERVATIONS as a relative of a Student-Athlete at NHS, which best prepared her for college success, academics or athletics? Why?
- f. Now that she is out of high school and working/going to college, what positive experiences at NHS prepared her for college success? And what recommendations would you make to better prepare ALL students for college success?

**6. POST-SECONDARY EXPERIENCES:**

- a. Tell me about her path to college.
- b. Her college experiences (both positive + negative)
- c. Obstacles she faced & solutions?
- d. Her successes & reasons why?

**Support Group Questions**

- 1) Why did you come to Redrock to teach? Tell me about your experiences at NHS.
- 2) Role model & Mentor
  - a) Do you consider yourself a role model/mentor to your students? Why?
  - b) Do your students consider you a role model/mentor to them? Why?
  - c) Do administrators consider you a role model/mentor to the students? Why?
  - d) Does the community consider you a role model/mentor to the students? Why?
  - e) Define a role model & mentor.
- 3) Which group of students do you identify with more, athletes or non-athletes?
- 4) Successful Students
  - a) Were the athletes you had in class generally good students? Why?
  - b) What skills did they possess that made them as good students?
  - c) Did missing a significant amount of class time, due to athletic events, present a problem? If so, how did the students handle the problem?
- 5) Strengths & Skills
  - a) What skills do you possess that make you a positive resource for NHS students?
  - b) What skills or lessons have you taught your students that can lead to post-secondary academic success?
  - c) What have you done to promote college enrollment?
- 6) Athletics vs. Academics
  - a) Does NHS prioritize athletics over academics? Why or why not?
  - b) Do you believe that athletes have a larger support group than non-athletes? If so, what can be done to provide that advantage to all students?

- 7) What skills do sports teach student-athletes that prepare them for:
  - a) College enrollment
  - b) Post-secondary academic success
  - c) Life
  
- 8) My initial research of female basketball players from 1990-95, showed that 83% attended college, and of those enrolled 84% graduated or are still in school (success). What do you attribute those high percentages to?
  
- 9) What is your general observation of female non-athletes college enrollment and post-secondary academic success? How does that compare to athletes?

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