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Athletic Identity and Career Transitioning of Former Collegiate Athletes

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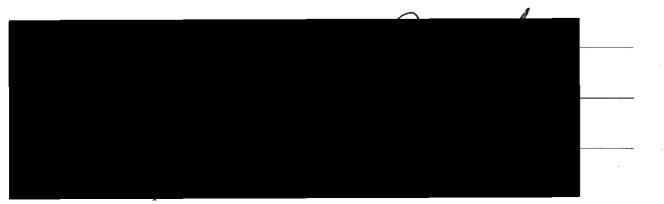Graduate Faculty Advisors Directing the Theses

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Athletic Identity and Career Transitioning of Former Collegiate Athletes

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Cameron Jimenez

THESIS

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Athletic Identity and the Career Transitioning of Former Collegiate Athletes

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to try and advance the understanding of athletic identity (AI) and its specific effects on former athletes. Previous studies in the area seem to focus on the relationship between AI, exercise habits, career maturity, and career transitioning of professional athletes. For example: Erpič, Wylleman, and Zupančič, (2004) examined former professional Slovene athletes. While those are important aspects of life former athletes encounter, the primary investigator (PI) felt it was important to understand the effects AI presents upon employment status of collegiate athletes who did not play professionally. Eighty-five former collegiate athletes participated and completed the basic demographic survey and Athletic Identity Measurement Survey (AIMS; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Gender and AI mean scores were examined using an independent sample t-test. An analysis of mean scores revealed that there was no significant relationship between gender and AI scores within the population. Although there was not a significant result, it is interesting to note there were higher AI mean scores in the female population. A one-way ANOVA analyses was used to examine a possible relationship between AI scores and current employment status. Results of the one-way ANOVA were also not significant. Although results for both research questions were not significant, future research focused on revenue generating sports (i.e., football or men's and women's basketball) which may provide a different result. More research and understanding can allow those in constant contact with athletes to assist in their transition to a meaningful career after sports.

To My Mom and Brother

Acknowledgement

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Chapter I

Introduction

Participation in collegiate athletics continues to rise. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Johnson, 2014), in 2013 472,625 athletes participated in NCAA sponsored athletics. Not only has male participation increased year by year, but female athletes continue to bridge the gap in participation numbers. The NCAA participation report shows that female athletic teams continue to grow and so do participation numbers. "There is a 54.7% proportional women's to men's sports teams" (Irick, 2015, p. 7). The NCAA expects that overall participation numbers will continue to climb. As athletic interests continually rise in American society, it is important to understand how participating in athletics can help or hinder athletes.

Competing on a collegiate athletic team requires a significant time commitment. Beyond just the athletic participation, there is a written and/or implied expectation that academics should still remain a priority for student athletes, because the ability to participate in professional sports is not guaranteed (NCAA Opportunity, n.d.). NCAA core values included: Balancing academic, social and athletics experiences, and the pursuit of excellence in both academics and athletics (NCAA Core Values, n.d.). The NCAA limits hours for participation to allow students to focus on the academic portion. NCAA bylaw 17.1.5.1 requires that participation in team related activities are limited to a maximum of four hours per day and 20 hours per week during the athletic season (NCAA Twenty Hour Rule, n.d.). Student athletes are also required to receive a minimum of two off days per week. Bylaw 17.1.5.1 only takes into account team related activities. A 20-hour week does not include the individual time athletes undertake attempting to perform at a highly competitive level.

Considering the high level of time commitment, it is imperative to have an understanding of teams as important social groups. Social groups are constructed groups joined through social interactions (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Tajfel, 1982). It is important to examine the role that collegiate sports participation plays in relation to an individual's overall personal identity. Interaction between athletes and their athletic peers and/or teammates can affect an athlete's overall identity (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). In terms of identity, athletic identity (AI) can be considered a formed identity that is sports specific or geared towards athletic achievement. AI can be easily understood as an athlete's formed identity throughout participation in athletic social groups, or teams. "It is the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and looks to others for acknowledgement of that role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p.237). After extensive participation in sport, it is worth exploring the effect of AI.

Career transitioning marks the completion of competition at both the amateur and prospective professional sports ranks. Conflicts with AI may occur promptly following retirement from collegiate athletics. "Retirement refers to the process of transition from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities (Coakley,1983, p.1). Collegiate athletes are faced with the reality of transitioning at such a relatively young age and having to reinvent themselves.

> Retirement marks the first time in an athlete's life when he is deprived of the satisfaction which sports has always given him. It is in his adjustment to a lifestyle in which he cannot rely upon sport to provide these satisfactions that the athlete experiences difficulties in retiring gracefully. Such a compounding of difficulties is not encountered in the retiree of 60-65 years (Hill & Lowe, 1974, p. 6).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the strength of an athlete's formed identity (AI). The primary invesigator (PI) examined the strength of AI scores comparing differences based on genders, and the ability to transition after sports retirement. The PI examined the potential downfalls related to higher athletic identity scores and the ability to successfully transition to the professional job world. Previous research in this area has focused solely on career maturity and exercise relationships after collegiate athletic participation and/or after retirement from professional athletics leading to little understanding of life after collegiate athletic participation (Coakley, 1983; Erpič et al., 2004). The research examined two important questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between male and female athletic identity proceeding collegiate athletic participation?

2. Is there any difference between higher AI mean scores and employment status (full time, part time, and unemployed)?

These two research questions were developed in order to gain insight regarding the strength of AI and the ability of former Division I athletes to reinvent their career paths up to four years after athletic competition. Rationale for such a time period will be discussed in chapter II. Identifying a possible relationship could allow athlete's support staff to implement programs and educate young athletes allowing for a more potentially successful transition upon the conclusion of athletic participation.

Limitations

The most crucial limitation concerning the study was the availability of participants. The ability to reach out to former collegiate athletes was time consuming and heavily reliant upon

second and third parties which is a common limitation involving the use of snowball sampling.

The use of online data collection can also be listed as a limitation due to the unknown.

Participants were provided a link and data may have been skewed. Participants may have been

ineligible or could have potentially participated more than once.

Delimitations

Due to the scope of this study, the PI received a majority of the data from athletes who

participated in six NCAA Division I sports (Baseball, Softball, Women's Basketball, Track and

Field, Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving). The aforementioned athlete participation

may have occurred due to accessibility to former athletes who expressed willingness to

participate in the study. The researcher placed a major focus on the athletics programs at a small

Midwestern Division I university as participants for this study were readily available and

accessible.

Significance

This research aimed to assist current and former athletes, coaches, parents, and

administration to gain an understanding of AI. The hope was that research results would provide

information to assist in educating all involved in collegiate athletics on the topic of AI and how it

relates to professional opportunities beyond athletics. Unfortunately, results did not provide

answers the PI originally sought after. There were areas in which future researchers could

improve upon to assist with the understanding of collegiate athlete's career transitioning.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter review examines previous research involving two important aspects of this study which are athletic identity (AI) and career transitioning (CT), an overview of Identity will be introduced. It discusses in further detail the importance both concepts play in the development of college athletes. As athletes mature through their college career life, different experiences play a part in the development of identity and future career prospects.

Identity (ID)

Before going into detail pertaining to AI and CT, there must be an introductory explanation of ID. Tajfel (1982) defines social ID as," A self-concept derived from their knowledge of membership of a social group together with value and emotional significance attached to membership" (p. 2). Benson, Evans, Surya, Martin, and Eys (2015) suggested that identities hold transitory values. As individuals mature, certain identities change due to a shift in perceived importance of certain values. Change in ID can also be adjusted as membership in social groups change. Donnelly and Young (1988) mentioned changes in social group IDs can be influenced by differing aspects. Donnelly and Young (1988) considered ID to be consistently dynamic and is shaped by an individual's and/or social group's maturity and placed importance on different aspects of life. Alder and Alder (1991) noted basketball players who had devoted themselves fully to the athletic role neglecting other responsibilities that are required of the student athletes. Participation on the team called for the assimilation to the athlete role as the common goal was considered to be consistent performance, winning.

AI can be developed and perpetrated by what Donnelly and Young (1988) referred to as the sports subcultures. Subcultural groups can often be thought of as team units or sports

programs that create the foundation for social groups. Sports subcultures hold importance to an athlete as acceptance requires membership to a group (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). Subcultures provide a set of standards or exceptions which are required to develop a preferred identity. Identifying with a subculture can be evident at an early age as athletic talent is clear at an early age (Webb et al., 1998). The pursuit to develop such talents may come at the expense of developing other aspects of identity, such as the social aspect (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Both researchers believed athletes deliberately tried to conform to the norms of that subculture in order to gain acceptance to a social group.

Development of subcultural norms is considered an aspect of the athletic role. The primary concept of AI is the degree to which athletes associate with that athlete role. Conformity to the sports subculture strengthens the AI relationship. As individuals continually form varying IDs throughout life, AI is a major form of ID that collegiate student athletes have to be cognizant of before and after college. An individual's view concerning the importance of sports, and sports subcultures, may affect ID once they no longer have access to former social groups.

Athletic Identity (AI)

Baillie and Danish (1992) theorized that the ID can be formed through extensive time commitment. AI is a shaped ID which appears to be a byproduct of continued participation in athletic social groups (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Continued social group interaction involves individuals with similar mindedness and function within a team unit. In a simpler sense, these groups are units of individuals who have to collaborate to accomplish a set goals.

According to Grove, Fish, and Eklund (2004):

For individuals who are involved in sport, the extent to which they identify with the athletic role and define themselves in terms of similarities with other athletes (i.e., their

athletic identity) is a salient and potentially important dimension of the self-concept. (p. 75)

The label of collegiate athlete becomes an important bond that a team shares. Interaction with teammates is constant when taking into account practices, games, team meetings, study tables, rooming assignments, and miscellaneous activities involving free time. In theory, social groups are defined as a team unit which provides a primary sense of achievement and support (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Sports social groups are units likely to be characterized by collective aspirations and perceptions of camaraderie (Roccas and Brewer, 2002). Overall strength of the teammate bond occurs or is created as individuals sincerely chose to "buy in," or assimilate, to a set of general expectations. General expectations are defined in the ability based scholarship contracts that athletes sign in exchange for athletic participation (NCAA Scholarship, n.d.). At times, scholarships can reinforce perceived notions that athletics are more important than academics at the collegiate level. Scholarships are obtained in part to excelling on the field of competition while maintaining minimal academic standards.

According to Adler and Adler (1991), male basketball players invested a majority of their selves to the athletic role. A major role ignored was the academic segment. Sole attachment to the athlete role became an expected norm placing a greater importance on competing in a specific sport. Extensive sport participation may lead to aspirations that involve participation after the collegiate level. Although AI itself is not harmful, when such norms override the primary aspects to the student athlete role it can place athletes at risk for other insufficiencies as Houle and Kluck (2015) alluded to, a strong identification with AI potentially placing an athlete at risk for insufficient career planning and academic development. While they consciously

invested in the athlete role, other roles commonly seen at the collegiate level were not explored. Thus, there was limited exposure to potential career opportunities.

Career planning, related to overall career maturity (CM), encompasses the exploration of potential career opportunities or interests. A collegiate athlete's career maturity is attributed to an individual's plans to pursue a professional career beyond an athletic playing career. Exploration of non-athletic opportunities, known as a "back up" plan, is crucial in the event that athletic aspirations are unattainable (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). Back up plans provide athletes a potential career safety net. CM affects how individuals view the role of sport participation in their lives. According to Linnemeyer and Brown (2010), engaging in plans to potentially explore career options that extend beyond the athletic realm may damage an athlete's aspirations to participate in professional athletics. Such actions could be construed as a lack of commitment, especially if certain student athletes are being used as a marketing symbol for universities (Houle & Kluck, 2015). Athletes reported to Linnemeyer and Brown (2010) certain coaches used athletic scholarships as leverage to discourage the deviations from the athlete role.

Confusion or contradiction may occur when actions such as leveraging of an athletic scholarship are used as avenues to prevent growth of the student role. Being a student athlete is supposed to afford individuals opportunities to pursue academic and athletic avenues granted through higher education. Forms of discouragement, such as lack of playing time or potential loss of an athletic scholarship, could possibly play a part in the reluctance of student athletes pursuing said "back up" plans. Inadequate "back up" plans may negatively affect athletes who did not develop the necessary skills to assist in current job market, which would appear to be counterproductive as time spent in college is supposed to provide individuals a transitional phase to prepare for future career opportunities.

Lally and Kerr (2005) reviewed the relationship between CM and AI scores. While examining athletes and their career planning upon graduation, it was noted that immaturity in athletes entering college was not uncommon. Non-student athletes entering college with career planning immaturity was also not uncommon. Certain athletes in the study held unrealistic expectations about life goals proceeding collegiate participation. The strength of the AI relationship was clearly evident by a lack of planning beyond athletic careers. Lack of planning may stem from not only the lack of ID oversight, as discussed earlier, but may be contributed to the lack of support to explore other potential interests.

A majority of athletes reported aspirations of competing at the professional athletic level in their sport (Lally & Kerr, 2005). A segment of athletes, in which lack of a backup plan might be evident, are those competing in revenue generating sports. Participants in revenue generating sports, namely football and basketball, scored lower according to the Career Maturity Inventory (CMI; Crites, 1965) than their non-athletic counterparts (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). CMI was developed to evaluate the career maturity of college students.

Linnemeyer and Brown (2010):

Revenue producing sports such as football and basketball as compared to non-revenue sports…are traditional pathways to professional careers. As such, student athletes participating in football and basketball may perceive greater opportunity for professional careers and consequently be ill prepared for career choices outside of the sport milieu and also evidence early foreclosure in their anticipation of a professional sports career (p. 630).

As previously anticipated, athletes may have perceived themselves to be different than regular students. Athletes in this study defined themselves and their ID roles by involvement in sports. It

was not until the final year of athletic eligibility in which growth occurred in the student role while AI reliance started to decrease. "Subsequent descent of their athletic identities of their athletic roles, particularly the student role" (Lally & Kerr, 2005, p. 284). Findings might suggest that identifying with the athlete role might not change until forced upon the athlete and/or realization that such future path may not be attainable.

Brewer et al., (1993) introduced the AIMS survey in an attempt to find a measuring marker to assist in examining perceived strength of athletic identity. The survey, a Likert scale survey in which answers ranged on a scale of one to seven, appears to be the gold standard for researchers investigating strength of athletic identity. In a Grove et al., (2004) study, elite female athletes were examined using the Athletic Identity Measurement Survey (AIMS; Brewer et al.,1993). Grove et al. (2004) examined whether a role change, strength of AI relationship to the athlete role, would occur in youth athletes following team tryouts. AI scores, calculated by AIMS responses, were used to assess the strength of a participant's overall athletic identity. The AIMS was administered three different times before data were analyzed. The first time of administration was the first day of tryouts, a week before decisions were made. The day after participants were informed of the results of the tryout researchers again administered the survey. Two weeks after decisions had been announced the final survey was administered.

Grove et al. (2004) examined possible changes that occurred in self-enhancement and self-protection, whether positively or negatively. "Self-enhancement defined as the use of cognitive and behavioral processes to strengthen positive outcomes and an athlete's perceptions of themselves, or are viewed" (Grove et al., 2004, p. 76). Self-protection functioned in an effort to diminish negative outcomes. According to the data analysis, changes in player's athletic identity only occurred when they had not been selected. Self enhancement scores, those selected

to participate on the team, presented no significant differences. Similar results from the base line scores can be explained as there being no loss in athletic identity. Grove et al., (2004) speculated that the self-protection process may have more of a significant relationship in coping. Self-protection was theorized to be a usable coping mechanism to reconcile the loss of identity (Grove et al., 2004). A change in ID created a forced change in thinking. According to Lavallee et al. (1997), A loss in identity can be considered a traumatic event in an individual's life. Retirement is equivalent to a life changing event for certain athletes and may cause similar irreparable damage (Lavallee et al., 1997).

Career Transitioning (CT)

Receiving an athletic scholarship provides a form of financial support for a college education. Financial relief ranges from partial portions of tuition to a fully funded education. The NCAA statistics for 2015 participation and graduation numbers revealed a majority of Division I athletes graduated, 84% of athletes graduated the five percent of all athletes who drafted to play professionally sports (NCAA Sports Sponsorship, 2015). Athletes who competed at the highest level of elite collegiate competition were the populous for this study. Student athletes who had competed at the professional sport level were not considered. A major interest of the PI; former collegiate athletes who were in the process of transitioning or have transitioned out of sport, into the next phase of their life. The transitional process being discussed is career transitioning (CT).

Under the broader umbrella, CT is the process of an athlete transitioning out of sport. For the purposes of the study, CT is the process of a career path reinvention in which athletes have to cope with following retirement from collegiate athletic participation. A reality of CT which must be overcome is AI no longer functions as the prevailing identity. According to Cabrita, Rosado,

Leite, Serpa, and Sousa (2014), those still highly invested in AI may have trouble pursuing anything outside of an athletic related profession.

CT for student athletes provides a unique set of circumstances compared to that of the average individual.

According to Hill & Lowe (1974):

Retirement marks the first time in an athlete's life when he is deprived of the satisfaction which sports has always given him. It is in his adjustment to a lifestyle in which he cannot rely upon sport to provide these satisfactions that the athlete experiences difficulties in retiring gracefully. Such a compounding of difficulties is not encountered in the retiree of 60-65 years. (p. 6).

According to Hill and Lowe (1974), the average age of retirement 60-65 years old, is a much earlier retirement comparative to 20-25-year-old athlete population of participants. Retirement at a relatively young age provides specific challenges. The ability to reinvent themselves and pursue a new career path is a major challenge.

CT involves a comprehensive knowledge of the elite college athlete's career during and post-graduation. Erpič et al. (2004) described a "sports career" as an athlete's participation that spanned multiple years and involved athlete's high level of participation while striving for accomplishments and sport skill enhancement. A career was described as being composed of different stages defined by distinctive demands that require athletes to adapt (Erpič et al., 2004). Adapting to those stages occurred during different transitional periods. The ability to transition from that final stage of a "sports career" to retirement can be affected by AI and circumstances pertaining to the transition.

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) presented the conceptual model for CT. Tyler and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model was presented to assist with understanding the factors that could potentially affect CT. Those five stages are: 1) causes of CT, 2) adaption to CT, 3) resources for adaption to CT, 4) quality of CT, and 5) intervention for CT.

According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), causes for CT included chronological age, free choice, injury, and deselection. Age was considered to be the primary reason for CT. As athletes aged, they lost attributes needed for peak performance, but may also be comforted in the fact that they fulfilled their athletic expectations (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). A sense of goal fulfillment of was dependent upon their values (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Blinde and Greerdorfoer (1985); Taylor, (1983) categorized CT as Normative (retirement that is freely chosen) v Non normative transitioning (retirement that is forced by external circumstances).

Stage two consisted of developmental contributions, self-identity, perception of control and personal/social ID (Taylor & Ogilvie's, 1994). Self-identity was described as the perception of self-worth beyond athletics (Blinde & Greerdorfoer; 1985). According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), an athlete whose self-worth is solely tied to AI may be unable to bear with the loss. The inability to bear with the loss was considered by Lavallee et al. (1997) to be a traumatic event. Normative and non-normative transitioning involved the ability to cope with perception or control and personal/social ID (Webb et al., 1998). Psychological control appeared to be the undying factor to an athlete's ability to grasp with the transition (Webb et al., 1998). Webb et al. (1998) referred to psychological control as autonomous or independent control to govern one's actions. With psychological control athletes possess command over their potential careers.

Normative transitioning involves individual athletes exercising their autonomous right to retire (Taylor, 1983). Their autonomous rights entails having a direct say in their own careers.

Athletes with psychological control in which Webb et al. (1998) referred too are able to control

their decision involving continued participation in athletic competition. Numerous athletes in this

study fell under the normative category (whether due to their understanding of deselection,

diminished passion for the game, eligibility expiration, or other self-selected reasons). What can

be troublesome for athletes is even minor injuries may have lasting ramifications on an athletic

career as it may compromise their performance ability (Tayler & Ogilive, 1994).

Hatamleh (2013) reported

Athlete's reflection about unplanned retirement can lead to a negative and more

emotional reaction...Athletes would feel more committed to the sport have a higher

athletic identity and therefore, more negative and less positive feeling about the end of

their sport career (p. 350).

Deselection can be seen as both normative and non-normative. Athletes may choose to

discontinue participation for a multitude of reasons. The determination of freely chosen versus

forced retirement is what distinguishes the nature of deselection. Exercising one's autonomous

right to transition, due to foresight of lack of talent or possessed athletic ability to compete at the

professional level prior to deselection provides the athlete with normative control. The strength

of defining oneself as just an athlete can possibly lead one to a false narrative that their athletic

potential is greater than others perceived. If such is the case, career transitioning may involve

non-normative circumstances. A non-normative transition involving deselection occurs when

athletes are not afforded the opportunity to continue their career professionally. Non-normative

transitioning involves occurrences, foreseen or unforeseen, that is of no control for the athlete

(i.e. deselection, injury, etc.).

Available resources for adapting to CT were the third stage of the conceptual model. The three resources that Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) mentioned athletes using during their transition are coping mechanisms, social support, and career planning. As mentioned previously, self-protection was a usable coping mechanism to reconcile the loss of identity (Grove et al., 2004). According to Stoltenburg, Kamphoff, and Bremer (2011), athletes who reported positive social support considered their transition to be easy compared to the negative impact that a lack of support presented. Lack of social support existed as athletes had ignored or were unable to develop social connections aside from their team unit (Stoltenburg et al., 2011).

AI can be formed though the connection with the team unit (Bailie & Danish, 1992; Hill & Lowe, 1974; Webb et al., 1998). That connection is nurtured by the underlying subculture created by the team unit as discussed earlier. Athletes and their team unit form the strength of their social group. The termination of an athletic career also means lost access to the prevailing social group. Loss of that social group can function similar to aspect of loss individuals have to encounter (Sparkes, 1998). Individual sport athletes may also develop a strong ID with the athlete role. A strong relationship with the athlete role may not be exclusively credited to a social group, but as Hill and Lowe (1974) noted the strong satisfaction that the game and/or association to the role provide.

Research provided by Cabrita et al. (2014), provides evidence that high AI scores may cripple possible opportunities outside of athletic venues as the correlation between high AI scores and career maturity deficiencies is significant. As discussed in the CM portion, a strong identification to the athletic role may suggest an immature CM. With a lower CM score, opportunities for career advancement may be relegated to the athletic career venue (coaching etc.).

Although such prospects sound stark, dependence on AI is not final. Athletes can overcome and outgrow their reliance upon AI as they begin to develop new IDs. According to Lavallee et al. (1997), AI scores could possibly diminish over time. Fluctuations in AI scores could be attributed to the idea that ID is ever changing (Lavallee et al.,1997) as identities hold transitory values (Benson et al., 2015). Fluctuations in AI, between years one through four, were found as AI's highest peak occurred during that time period. We see this fluctuation due to a change in values as athletes mature and fulfill their athletic achievement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Stage four of the conceptual model involves the quality of CT. As athletes retire the culmination the process is dependent upon the athlete's overall reaction to the transition (Stoltenburg et al., 2011). Stage five involves interventions for CT. A strong ID to the athlete role may prove to be problematic during CT (Cabrita et al., 2014); Grove et al., 2004); Webb et al., 1998). A change in the social environment or reality that a "sports career" is terminated requires the athlete to cope with such a loss (Cabrita et al., 2014). The loss of that identity or social unit to which athletes are accustomed with throughout their participation in an athletic program presented a major detriment to CT (Webb et al., 1998).

Athletes may not understand that athletics does provide potential (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). "Athletes often fail to give credit to the lessons and skills acquired through their sporting career" (McKnight et al., 2009, p. 64). As athletes age and gain varying skills, a loss of ID, may present a change in maturity and or personal values (Taylor & Ogilvie). Brown and Hartley (1998) stated, "It is possible for a student athlete to express a high athletic identity while also possessing a strong commitment to his/her student role identity" (p. 60). Study results found that the lack of CM may be prevalent in athletes entering college, but may change athletes associated

with the student role (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Lally & Kerr, 2005). The dynamic formation of

ID allows athletes to explore other roles and provide athletes a sense of self-autonomy as to

where CT is not potentially damaging.

After reviewing the conceptual model, a reoccurring theme was the loss of identity, AI,

and how individuals dealt with such a loss. Non normative circumstances like injury can play a

part in feeling loss of AI is a major loss. Major loss involves the personal and/or symbolic

devaluation of identity (Harvey, 1995). Negative feelings related to a career ending injury

required an adjustment period, but were perceived as less devastating if it entailed recurring

injuries, life threatening injuries, or lifelong impairments (Stoltenburg et al., 2011). Stoltenburg

et al. (2011) theorized that athletes were able prioritize what was important in life. Sparkes

(1998) also presented different stages in which injury and/or retirement forces athletes to

encounter the loss of ID. The five stages are similar to the stages individuals encounter during a

grieving period. Those five stages are: 1) emergence of a high performance body, 2) feelings of

loss and fragmentation, 3) demise of disciplined body self, 4) demise of the glorified self, and 5)

holding on to the past selves.

Emergence of a high performance body was characterized as an individual succeeding at

an elite level. Performing at that level was considered to be automatic. After serious injury, the

body was no longer able to perform tasks that were previously seen as automatic. In the sage of

feeling of loss and fragmentation the previously perceived ideal of self was broken. What had

come naturally was taken for granted. There was a termination to sense of identity. Demise of the

disciplined body-self was characterized as the loss of control. Loss of control can be exacerbated

after the considerable time commitment that allowed them to become elite level athletes

(Sparkes, 1998). Demise of the glorified self was the fourth stage. Adler and Adler (1991)

defined role engulfment as the exclusive development of the athlete roe while ignoring other roles. Within the demise of the glorified self the athlete no longer had access to the recognition or role acknowledgement (Brewer et al., 1993). Sparkes (1998) reported an athlete stating she did not receive the same satisfaction from other roles. As Hill and Lowe (1974) noted deprivation of sports satisfaction combined with underdeveloped roles may leave athletes feeling lost. Holding on to past selves was the final stage. The body had betrayed the athlete yet the athlete still may have aspirations of continuing their career. It would not be unheard of if negative psychological effects existed immediately following a non-normative CT. Those negative effects dissipate after duration of time. Such concerns can be negated if an athlete has explored or become interested in pursuing another path. Concerns are also alleviated provided a normative transition.

After reviewing the literature, it is quite clear that a successful CT for former collegiate athletes can be affected by certain underlying factors. The hope is gain an understanding to assist former collegiate athletes in all stages of CT. Expanding upon the current research can assist with the development of plans and intervention methods to prepare athletes for the inevitable transition from athletic participation. As Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) mention the creation of a healthy culture can provide athletes to function autonomously while creating an environment in which they thrive in various situations. Those involved in collegiate athletics can promote and emphasize the skills that have been obtained throughout their "sports career, while also trying to recognize the lack of skills which may predict an unsuccessful CT.

Chapter III

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the AI relationship in former collegiate athletes and investigate aspects of that relationship. In order to assess the perceived strength with "athletic role," the PI needed to collect data from former Division I collegiate athletes. This studies methods section will introduce the participants, procedures and protocols, instruments, and data analyses.

Participants

Eligible participants were former athletes who: (1) competed at the NCAA Division I level; (2) had competed for a minimum of two athletic seasons; and (3) had graduated or last attended undergraduate classes from 2012-2016. Eligibility criteria were deemed to provide optimal results during the one to four-year time frame. Numerous NCAA Division I athletic programs were represented. Athletes from twelve respective sports (men and women swimming and diving, men and women's track and field; women's basketball, rugby, soccer, softball, and volleyball; men's baseball football, and golf) participated in this study. Eighty-five total participants completed the required surveys in full and fit all aspects of the eligibility criteria. Data collected from four participants had to be omitted from the study. Two participants did not fit the noted criteria and two other participants did not complete portions of the surveys. The mean age of the participants was 22.8 years. Table 1 illustrates the years of participation in Division I athletics and the frequency of graduation years. Table 2 provides the sports that participants had been involved in. One subject had participated in two sports in her career.

Table 1.: *Participation Demographics.*

Years of Participation	N
5 years	9
4 years	59
3 years	4
2 years	13
Graduation Year	N
2012	6
2013	13
2014	20
2015-2016	46

Table 2. Descriptive Stats: Sports Participation

Sports Participation	N
Baseball	7
Basketball	1
Football	1
Golf	2
Rugby	1
Soccer	4
Softball	20
Swimming and Diving	46
Track and Field	2
Volleyball	1

Protocols and Procedures

Emails (Appendix A) were sent to both former collegiate athletes and current National

College Athletic Association (NCAA) head coaches at the Division I level to recruit participants.

Random sampling was used by the PI. Approximately 600 Division I collegiate coaches were

contacted through email. College/university teams were found as the PI scanned the NCAA

database. Coaching information was then obtained through individual university/college athletic

websites.

Convenience sampling was implemented as athletes from a small Midwestern Division I

university were easily accessible. The PI also contacted 50 former athletes who were

acquaintances. Within the recruitment email, recipients were instructed to distribute the survey

via email to their former collegiate athletes or teammates. The survey included a summary of the study for participants (Appendix B), demographics questions (Appendix C), and the Athletic Identity Measurement Survey (AIMS; Appendix D). The link to the survey was provided by Qualtrics. Qualtrics is an online data collection site that allowed the PI create and distribute surveys. The software also assisted the PI to collect and store pertinent data related to athletic identity and career transitioning. Participants were asked to review and provided an option, yes or no, to acknowledge and accept that they had read the informed consent which contained the rights of participants throughout the study. The study summary notified participants to the purpose of the study and contact information for the PI and thesis chair in case there were questions or problems arose. The survey was distributed in January 2016 which was the start of the spring semester and data collection remained open for two months.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study: a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) and the AIMS (Appendix D).

Demographic Questionnaire

A basic demographic questionnaire was created by the PI. It was created in an effort to address certain aspects of the research questions. Inquiries of interest included gender, year of graduation or last year of attendance, competition level, duration of participation, and current employment status. The demographic questionnaire included a multiple choice format and sections that allowed participants to efficiently record necessary information.

Athletic Identity Measurement Survey (AIMS; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993)

The AIMS was the main questionnaire employed for this survey. Brewer et al. (1993) developed the AIMS survey to serve as a measuring marker to assist in the perceived strength of

athletic identity. It is a Likert scale survey consisting of ten questions. Answers range anywhere

from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Brewer et al. (1993) verified that AIMS was a

valid tool that could be used to assess the relationship with ID and the "athlete role." Example of

questions created to address the aforementioned perceive importance of the athlete role included:

Sports is the most important part of my life.; I need to participate in sports to feel good about

myself.; Other people see me mainly as an athlete.; Sports is the only important thing in my life.;

I would be depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sports. The AIMS was found to

have a coefficient alpha of .81 (Brewer et al., 1993).

Data Analysis

The AIMS measurement was used to assess the strength of a participant's overall athletic

identity. Similar to previous research, gender mean differences were examined using an

independent t-test. With current employment status consisting of three categories, a one-way

ANOVA was used to extract the significance of the data. The independent variables investigated

were gender, current employment status, and years of participation in collegiate athletics. The

dependent variable was athletic identity. The PI used SPSS version 21 to run both the

independent t-test and one-way ANOVA analyses. All statistics were tested at the .05 level of

significance.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate AI in former collegiate athletes. AI was considered the perceived strength of identification with the "athletic role" and was measured using the Athletic Identity Measurement Survey (AIMS). The researcher wanted to investigate whether there was a distinct difference based on gender. Was there a significant difference in AI during CT between males and females? Gender difference was assessed using an independent sample t-test. The PI also wanted to examine whether there was a correlation concerning high AI scores and current employment. A one-way ANOVA was run to examine AI scores and participants' current employment status.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 illustrates the gender frequencies of those participants in the demographic survey. Table 4 represents the means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of the two genders. Table 5 represents the employment status of participants along with the M and the SD of those reported scores.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics: Gender and Athletic Identity*

Gender	N	M	SD
Female	47	43.23	10.668
Male	38	41.76	11.173

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics: Employment Status*

Current Employment Status	N	M	SD
Full Time	38	41.06	1.675
Part Time	31	43.84	1.936
Unemployed	16	42.50	3.186

Independent-Sample T-test

An independent-sample t-test was calculated comparing the mean scores of former female athletes to male athletes. No significant difference was found (t (2) = 0.540, p> .05). The mean of females (M= 43.23, sd= 11.173) was not significantly different from the mean of males (M= 41.76, sd= 10.668).

One-way ANOVA

The mean scores of athletic identity, AI, and former athletes' current employment status were compared using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found (F (2, 85) = .580, p> .05). Former athletes who are employed full time had a mean score of 41.06 (sd =1.675). Former athletes who are employed part time had a mean score of 43.84 (sd =1.936). Former athletes who are unemployed had a mean AI score of 42.50 (sd= 3.186).

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the strength of athletic identity (AI) in former collegiate athletes. The perceived importance that an athlete places upon the athlete role determines the strength of the AI relationship. After assessing the strength of the AI relationship, the PI examined possible relationships based on gender while also assessing current employment status, whether higher scores correlated with inability to obtain full time employment. Study results will be discussed in further detail. Limitations to the study and possible future avenues of research will also be explored.

AIMS, Brewer et al., 1993) was distributed in order to gauge the strength of identifying to the athlete role. AI scores were calculated from the responses to question on the AIMS. Mean scores were calculated in order to determined AI scores. The first research questions: Was there a significant difference in the average male and female AI scores? Results for the independent t-test between AI and gender did not reveal a significant relationship. The PI could not predict that a specific gender would have a greater association with AI. Establishing a link might have assisted in tailoring plans based on genders.

The second research question: Was there a relationship between AI and employment status? The results for the one-way ANOVA between AI and employment status revealed that there was no significant relationship between AI scores and employment status. Results from this test were important to the study because the PI was trying to establish a link between higher AI scores and possible issues obtaining employment. Houle and Kluck (2015) had concerns that AI may lead to an insufficient level of career planning. Cabrita et al. (2014) also mentioned that an extreme investment in AI could prohibit future career opportunities. The PI could draw no such

results from the current data to build upon previous research (Cabrita et al., 2014; Houle and

Kluck, 2015). This process is also known as career transitioning, when reinvention of oneself is

crucial. The reinvention involved different circumstances for athletes as it occurred at a much

younger age.

Limitations

There were various limitations involved in this study. Time was a major limitation. Email

communication and length of time the surveys were left open had to be taken into account as

data had to be available to be analyzed in a timely matter to complete the study. Another

limitation was the overall pool of athletes. Fluctuations in AI, between years one through four,

were found as AI's highest peak occurred during that time period (Lavallee et al., 1997). The PI

hoped to focus solely within this window, but was unable due to athlete participation. Twenty-

five participants were still in college. Of those 25, eight former athletes were in graduate school.

Theoretically, these eight participants attending graduate school had already considered a backup

plan. The remaining participants had not graduated or were still enrolled in school.

There was a major interest in obtaining a greater population of athletes who had

participated in revenue generating sports because that would have shed more light upon AI,

because there are some indications that sports higher on the revenue generating hierarchy may

reveal a difference. A traditional path to a professional sports career might provide those who

participate in revenue generating or producing, sports with a false sense of potential opportunity

(Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). For example, Adler and Adler (1991) examination of collegiate

male basketball players revealed that such devotion to the athlete role came at the expense of

roles like the student role. Unfortunately, rate of response for those athletes was nearly

nonexistent.

Career ending injuries were a source of non-normative transitioning for athletes. There were five participants who had mentioned injuries as a part of their inability to participate in athletics proceeding their termination of collegiate eligibility, but there was no section on the basic demographic survey to specify whether injury was the sole cause for CT. Without that information, it is impossible to identify if an injury was the exclusive reason athletes were forced to retire. Therefore, researchers could not investigate a possible relationship involving injury, AI scores, and employment status. AI scores had to be examined without a baseline, whereas a longitudinal study may have provided insight to changes in AI scores throughout a college career. Use of a longitudinal study may allow for a better understanding of changes in AI scores, or lack of changes, and time period in which changes occurred.

Future Research

Considering the aforementioned limitations, it would be interesting to see future research examine different facets of AI that this study was unable to. Current employment results may assist coaches in the future as future research could be conducted to see if this is just an arbitrary result or a pattern that may prove significant in a bigger sample size. Forty-nine out of the 85 athletes participated in what is considered an individual sport (swimming and diving, track and field, and golf). Team units, as referred in chapter II, function as social groups. Roccas and Brewer (2002) reported that these social groups are likely to share similar aspirations and norms that create a sense of unity. According to Brewer et al. (1993), AI involved not only the strength of an athlete identifying with the role, but the acknowledgement from others in that role. Athletes can obtain such acknowledgment and support from their team units, while additionally having their ID shaped by the views of the social group (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Rocca's & Brewer, 2007; Webb et al., 1998). It is then up to athletes to buy into that shared sense of identity.

Individual sport athletes can also develop a strong relationship to the athlete role. Such a strong

relationship to AI may occur as athletes look for role acknowledgement Brewer et al. (1993) and

attempt to obtain continued satisfaction that sport provides (Hill & Lowe, 1974). An aspect that

was not originally considered was the potential difference of AI scores based on individual sports

vs team sports. After reviewing the data, seven total athletes had an AIMS score of 60 or more.

Six of the athletes participated in what can be considered a team sport, requiring constant

interaction with a team unit. Mean scores showed that this may be a worthwhile aspect to

consider.

Examining a relationship in AI scores between revenue generating sports verses non-

revenue generating sports may provide a sense about athletes at risk. Statistical evidence

provided shows a relationship exists between those participating revenue generating sports and

lower CM scores (Adler & Adler, 1991; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). It would be interesting to

consider if such a relationship exists between athletes who participated in revenue generating

sports and their current employment status. When discussing the demographic survey, it might

have been more beneficial to ask if an athlete had considered a "back up plan" and if so, when

and why. A longitudinal study would provide a baseline to assess these scores and a clearer

understanding of what results could mean.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine AI and possible differences in scores based on

gender. AI and a potential relationship with employment status was also an area of interest.

AIMS was used to sum AI scores while the demographic survey was used to investigate the

necessary study criteria. Both an independent sample t-test and a one-way ANOVA were used to

extract data for each respective research question. The independent sample T-test was used to

assess the possible relationship between AI scores and gender. Upon analyses of the independent sample t-test, it was evident that no significant result was found. Results for the one-way ANOVA indicated there was no significant relationship between AI scores and employment status. Although no significant results were found for both research questions, examining the data established interesting possibilities for potential future research. The hope is to provide collegiate athletic departments and academic staff a better understanding of how to best assist college athletes to prepare for the eventual occurrence of career transitioning.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hello, my name is Cameron Jimenez and I am currently a Graduate student at Eastern Illinois University. I am currently enrolled in the of Kinesiology and Sports Studies program. This email is pertaining to a study currently being conducted that examines the athletic identity of former collegiate student athletes.

I was hoping that you would be willing to forward this email to your current coaches, so that coaches can contact their former athletes and inform them of this study. Researchers are examining former collegiate athletes who have graduated within the past four academic school years. During this study, researchers will examine the strength and exclusivity of athletic identity following retirement of collegiate athletes. Researchers hope to understand the differences in gender as well as changes, if any, in athletic identity after transitioning to life after sport. The ability to transition in life, in terms of employment, will also be explored.

A decline in the perception that sports is the most crucial aspect in an athlete's life has been proven in previous research. This steep decline appears to occur around the third or fourth year following retirement or non-involvement in collegiate athletics. Researchers hope to understand when this change occurs and whether or not strength and exclusivity correlates with ability to transition to the workplace. Research has also shown that certain athletes may be vulnerable to experiencing psychological harm if they are unable to participate in athletics due to injury and various other factors. Participants can assist to providing valuable information that may assist coaches as well as current and former collegiate athletes. Information may assist coaches' identity and implement strategies to assist athletes that may be vulnerable to psychological harm. Participants will be asked to complete two surveys. These surveys will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Participants will also be asked to submit an email address, and will be

emailed a link the questionnaires. Participants will not be asked to provide a name, and all

information provided will be kept confidential.

If you have questions about this study, you may contact Cameron Jimenez (319) 431-5535 or

cejimenez@eiu.edu. You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. John Storsved at (217) 581-

7594 or at jstorsved@eiu.edu. Thank you again for all the help you have provided for this

survey!

Link to the study:

{Link will be inserted once the questionnaire is live, following IRB approval}

Appendix B: Informed Consent

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Cameron Jimenez from the

Kinesiology and Sports Studies Department at Eastern Illinois University. The purpose of this

study is to measure the athletic identity of former athletes after their collegiate careers have come

to an end. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may discontinue participation in the

study at any time without any penalty.

PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Complete a demographic questionnaire that consists of 11 questions.

2. Complete a survey that is anticipated to take approximately to complete. The survey is

   known as the Athletic Identity Measurement Survey.

CONFIDENTIALITY, RISKS, AND PROTECTION MEASURES

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. Your email will be obtained

if you would like to receive the results, but your name will not be collected.

BENEFITS

By participating in this study you will assist researchers to gain a better understanding of

Athletic Identity post career. Researchers are attempting to assess the strength of Athletic

Identity in former athletes. It is a hope that information provided can assist in further educating

athletes in transition upon the end of the collegiate athletic careers.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions you may contact Cameron Jimenez at (319) 431-5535 or at

cejimenez@eiu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office

of Research Compliance Officer at (217) 581-2125. You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr.

John Storsved at (217) 581-7594 or at jstorsved@eiu.edu.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If

you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and

without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study

before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

Click here if you have read the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Appendix C: Initial Questionnaires

1. Gender: Male _____   Female _____

2. Age: (in years) _____

3. Race/Ethnicity (Check one)

___ White, not of Hispanic Origin. Persons having origins in any of the original people of

Europe.

_____ African American. Persons having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

_____ Asian or Pacific Islander. Persons having origins in any of the original people of the

Far East, Southeast Asia, Indian Subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands.

_____ Hispanic. Persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or

other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of language.

_____ Bi-Racial

_____ Other:

4. What was the highest level of athletic competition? Div 1 ___ Div II ____ Div III _____

NAIA (If so what division) _____

5. Did you graduate from college? Yes___ No ____ If yes (Grad Year) _____

If no (last year you attended college) _____

6. What was your college major? _____

7. Primary sport that you participated in? _____

7. Were you on athletic scholarship? (Please check one) Yes _____ No ____

8. How many years did you participate in college athletics? _____

9. Are you currently employed? (Please check one) Full Time ___ Part Time___ Unemployed

____   If so then what professional occupation or job? _____

10. What is the reason you are no longer participating in intercollegiate athletics?

Injury __ Lack of Interest___ Lack of opportunity __ Age___ Eligibility ___ Other (Please

Explain): ___

11. Are you still participating in sport competitively?

Yes_____ No _____

Appendix D: Athletic Identity Measurement Survey

Instructions: For the next 10 questions, please circle the number which corresponds most closely

to your personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. For each item indicate on a scale from (1)

strongly disagree to, (7) strongly agree. Please circle only one response (number) per item.

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree	
1. I consider myself an athlete.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I have many goals related to sport.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Most of my friends are athletes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Sport is the most important part of my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Other people see me mainly as an athlete.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Sport is the only important thing in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7