

The Exploration of Adjustment during the Retirement Transition from Collegiate

Athletics: A Qualitative Study

by

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ABSTRACT

The challenges that face student-athletes when they retire from formal sport participation coincides with their loss of their athletic identity (how much they identify with their athlete role), often geographic upheaval, uncertainty of the future regarding alternate roles, and change in social support systems, which make this period more difficult to adjust to. This study explored the experiences of the retirement transition of graduating student-athletes. The current study aims to examine this unique experience through qualitative investigation into the collective experiences of student-athletes to identify overarching relevant themes common throughout this experience. The participants were 13 student-athletes who graduated in the Spring Semester of 2017 (May- June 2017), played their sport at a National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Institution at the Varsity level, and were not continuing to play their sport at the elite level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants between five and eight months post-graduation. Thematic analysis was used to categorize participants' responses and allow for an in-depth investigation of different factors affecting personal adjustment throughout this period. The five overarching themes identified were: the need for social connection, the impact of a goal-oriented mindset, preparedness for the transition, translatable skills from being a student-athlete, and the perspective of their own identity and purpose. The ability to shift perspective to retrospectively appreciate the student-athlete experience, while incorporating it as one part of their overall life journey, is discussed as a protective factor for positive transition outcomes. As the large majority of collegiate athletes do not continue to play their sport professionally, this population is in high need of continued guidance. The present work can inform interventions to aid

student-athletes in this difficult transitional period. Mentorship from previously graduated student-athletes, coaches, or administrative programs are suggested as a tangible positive intervention strategy based off of the results.

I dedicate this to everyone who believed in me and pushed me outside of my comfort zone to be my best self. I appreciate the genuine connections fostered through this endeavor to become a better scientist and more informed in effective treatment practices. This project was inspired by many of my teammates and fellow student-athletes who dedicated their collegiate careers to their school, their team, and their sport.

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INTRODUCTION

Once student-athletes use the entirety of their 4 years of NCAA eligibility, only approximately 1% continue on to play at the professional level for their sport (NCAA Research, 2017). This leaves approximately 432,00 of the 480,000 student athletes each year from teams at 1,121 participating NCAA institutions across 24 different sports facing retirement with the college to career transition simultaneously (NCAA Research, 2017). The challenges that face student-athletes when they retire from formal sport participation includes the loss of their athlete identity, often geographic upheaval, uncertainty of the future, and change in social support systems, all of which make this period of transition more challenging.

Student-Athlete role

The student-athlete role is unique in that it demands balancing both roles with dedication in order to maintain performance in both arenas. This dichotomy can strain the limited resource of time and emotional investment, ultimately leading to psychological distress. The conjoining of the two roles could help athletes re-navigate their identity after the transition from their sport by providing an immediately available and familiar role which can replace their athlete identity (Lally, 2007). The role of being a student first and athlete second, as promoted by the NCAA, could allow for a more positive transition within this population versus elite level athletes. This is due to the immediate availability of the student-role to replace the athlete role once they retire from formal sport.

In addition to the student role, career development can also be hindered. While student-athletes as a whole are not as mature in their career development as their general

student counterparts, this discrepancy decreases as student-athletes move into being upperclassmen (Lally & Kerr, 2005). As they become juniors and seniors, they divest from their athletic identity and focus more within their peer groups on their future after either athletics and/or college graduation (Lally & Kerr, 2005). The development of identity beyond sport within upperclassmen highlights an opportunity for them to mentor underclassmen student-athletes in order to expose them to this shift in perspective and impart helpful advice towards long term goals. Indeed, as noted later (see Results, Subtheme: Mentorship), the findings reported here suggest this could be one part of a solution for promoting a more positive adjustment.

As a result, a mentorship model could also be helpful to combat the common finding within the literature that the exclusivity of the athletic identity can be detrimental psychologically, socially, and emotionally (Grove, Lavalley & Gordon, 1997; Lally, 2007; Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014; Melendez, 2009). For example, Melendez (2009) investigated the psychosocial influences, such as relationships, on adjustment outcomes of student-athletes. There is definitively an increase in leadership and interpersonal skill development, institutional attachment, and increased satisfaction with the college experience among student-athletes. However, the additional stress due to athletic participation can lead to issues such as increased strain on relationships, performance-based stress and a transitional threat to their self-esteem. In effect, the research suggests that when someone over invests solely into one aspect, it leaves them vulnerable- especially due to the unpredictable nature of life.

Due to the fragile state of a student-athlete's identity, counseling programs can help guide the athletes to achieve positive well-being despite uncertain conditions. Assistance programs therefore need to focus on fostering a balance within the student-athlete between dedication to their sport and success in the academic and social setting of the university, alongside career-development to increase self-efficacy. By focusing on all of the aspects that contribute to athletic identity, athletes can be mentored to better prepare for the transition of retirement and normalize difficulties faced. Normalizing challenges that arise can help the student-athletes work through the problems with an open dialogue versus feeling alone or invalidated with their negative experiences (see Results, Subtheme: Mentorship). Integrating intervention programs that expose student-athletes to experiences of those who have already made the transition can stimulate self-reflection and not only improve career maturity, but also autonomy and perceptions about aging (Phoenix, Faulkner, & Sparkes, 2005).

College to career transition

Lally and Kerr described identity foreclosure as a stage in which one identity, in this case the athlete identity, takes precedence and neglects the development of other facets of one's identity (2005). This is pivotal for the lack of career preparation seen from student-athletes because the same process that accompanies identity exploration coincides with career development and maturity, as future careers coincide with personal interests and aptitude. The exclusivity of athletic identity not only limits other forms of development, but also impacts young athletes' perceptions regarding ageing. Because their physical capabilities are part of their identity through the athlete role, they are more

likely to have negative views about ageing which can decrease their longevity and life satisfaction (Phoenix et al., 2005).

Consequently, career transition and education programs need to foster autonomy for the athlete and assist with career planning. This can allow for a successful transition and overcoming the dysfunctional common belief that your choice of career is permanent rather than fluid, which adds to the anxiety surrounding this decision (Martin et al., 2014; Mateos et al., 2010). Indeed, research suggests ‘non-voluntary retirement’ athletes, where retirement is caused by team deselection or injury, are the most at risk for adjustment difficulties and depression (Webb et al., 1998). Therefore, intervention and assistance programs that have the largest potential for positive impact should increase the athletes’ perception of control regarding the transition; even for unpredictable ones like injury. This can be achieved through allowing the athletes to set their own career goals to increase their confidence in their own ability to adapt after retirement (Martin et al., 2014). Overall, career exploration is important in developing self-efficacy and confidence going into the transition period. This was supported by the findings with student-athletes who completed internships and therefore felt more prepared to transition out of sport (see Results, subtheme: Career Preparedness).

Athletic identity exclusivity

Identity is the combination of beliefs and qualities that uniquely mark an individual or group (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Identity can incorporate fleeting aspects that are constantly evolving as we transition through the various stages of life, including routines, behaviors, roles and ideals. Athletic identity specifically is “the

degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p.237). The unique model of collegiate athletics in the United States furthers the exclusivity of athletic identity through exalting collegiate student-athletes and emphasizing their athletic performance as a basis of value. The exclusivity of athletic identity can be detrimental through the underdevelopment and limited exploration of other roles, and the effects of overemphasis of performance and physical ability on self-worth, which can leave many athletes vulnerable to difficulties moving away from this role (Grove et al., 1997; Lally, 2007, Lally & Kerr, 2005; Phoenix et al., 2005). These issues can be especially impactful because the athletic identity is formed early in one’s life, which leads to the internalization of this role at the expense of other social roles (Webb et al., 1998). The current literature examines these possible outcomes in relation to the self-concept of athletic identity. There is room within the current field of study for research into the efficacy and implementation of such interventions and both their long and short-term effects on athletes.

Further in the literature, the increase of athletic identity found using the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) correlates with the coping strategies of behavioral disengagement, denial, mental disengagement and emotional venting (Grove et al., 1997). The more exclusive, or higher, the athletic identity is within the athlete, the more vulnerable they are to career transition difficulties, regardless of the circumstances of the transition being voluntary or involuntary (Grove et al., 1997). Strong athletic identity is linked to increased anxiety related to the exploration of future careers as well as poor social and emotional adjustment (Grove et al. 1997; Lally, 2007; Martin et al., 2014;

Melendez, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative to emphasize career preparation prior to retirement from sport, as noted in the results (see subtheme: career preparedness). Lally further explored the levels of athletic identity during this transition period to retirement and found that retirement from sport coincides with a decrease in athletic identity and postulates that this correlation could be a self-protection mechanism used by athletes to distance themselves from this identity (Lally, 2007; Martin et al., 2014). The retirement transition not only commands a lifestyle shift, but also a re-definition of oneself outside of the athletic role, which can lead to a feeling of loss for that former self as well as a loss of purpose (Lally, 2007). While this transition can be a vulnerable time, cognitive shifting of perceived control to a more internal locus of control can be beneficial in adjusting as well as shifting towards a more problem-focused coping strategy (Grove et al., 1997). As a result, utilizing problem-focused coping strategies and shifting perspective to an internal locus of control could be beneficial strategies to implement when counseling student-athletes and providing effective interventions to create more positive transitions out of sport.

While the transition period can be a vulnerable time for athletes with a strong athletic identity, overall life satisfaction is not correlated with retirement difficulties experienced by the athlete (Webb et al., 1998). This suggests that while there is a period of turmoil and uncertainty for the athlete, they are overall well-equipped to adapt to post-athletic lifestyles. The context of retirement makes a difference in immediate outcomes such as self-esteem and adjustment difficulties, with retirees deselected for competition at the next level experiencing the most difficulties in those areas due to lack of perceived

control and individual disappointment (Webb et al., 1998). Conclusively, there is no overall decrease in life satisfaction despite transition complications or high athletic identity (Martin et al., 2014; Webb et al., 1998). While overall adjustment outcomes are positive, further exploration into this specific transitional period is needed.

Gaps in literature

The current literature establishes well-defined correlations between increases in athletic identity and psychological as well as social difficulties. Some researchers believe that the transition out of an athletic career is synonymous with issues faced with any career retirement. However, the nuances of the athletic identity demonstrated throughout the literature, which include its physicality, public nature, and early onset are problems that are unique to this circumstance (Grove et al., 1997). Therefore, this construct should be separated in order to most accurately determine positive interventions and preventative measures to aid athletes. There is room for future research within this field to establish a protocol for successful career and leadership development programs in order to help athletes transition their skills learned throughout their competition with real world application (See Results, Translatable skills). Preparation of the student-athletes for this transitional period is paramount in their positive adjustment into the workforce. Further research looking into how the athletic infrastructure can work to make athletes more successful outside of competition can be the most impactful because they are exposed to the interactions of their coaches and teammates more often than attending an additional program.

Current study

The current study aims to illuminate this unique experience through investigation into the experiences of student-athletes to discern overarching themes throughout this time period. By utilizing thematic analysis of qualitative interviews, a rich data source was collected to allow for more in-depth investigation of different factors affecting personal adjustment throughout this period. This study aims to detail the collective experience of the retirement transition of graduating student-athletes.

METHOD

Thematic analysis was applied to data collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews. This rich data source allowed for more in-depth investigation of different factors affecting personal adjustment throughout this period and discernment of relevant themes throughout this transitional time period. The study was approved by the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board.

Participants

The study included 13 participants recruited through professional connections with athletic administrators, coaches, social media and listservs within the sport psychology academic community. The participant population included student-athletes who graduated in the Spring Semester of 2017 (May- June 2017). The participants were required to have: played their sport at a National Collegiate Athletics Association Institution (NCAA), played for their institution at the Varsity level, and not have continued to play their sport at the elite level. They were also required to be at least 18

years old at the time of recruitment for the study. Participants were from four different Division I (n=2) and Division II (n= 11) NCAA Institutions. In terms of demographics, 46.2% were males (n= 6), 92.3% were Caucasian (n=12), with an overall age range of 22 to 24 years old (M = 22.69) reflecting the population targeted.

Participants spanned 8 different sports including Soccer, Track and Field, Cross Country, Swimming, Rowing, Baseball, Softball, and Basketball (for further details of participant demographics see Appendix C). Due to the varying seasons of play, all participants were interviewed within five to eight months from their commencement date.

Interview protocol & rationale

Semi-structured interview guidelines were utilized to illuminate the experiences of this population during this time period with the phenomenological approach. This approach was utilized due to the current lack of literature surrounding the psychosocial impact of this transition on personal adjustment. Due to the personal nature of the experience, the open-ended questions allowed for individual variance to be captured within the structure of the overall themes.

Initial demographics include their current life trajectory and role they have transitioned into. Further probing about their past and continued involvement with team and athletic administrative staff illuminates the importance of that team environment and connection to their teammates and that identity. It is important to include demographics to account for results due to constructs outside those in question. It is also important to illuminate the salience of their athletic identity and how that might impact their

transitional period. This was included based on the literature emphasizing the impact of identity on positive outcomes.

By exploring the age of specialization in one sport, enjoyment while participating in youth sports and age at which they began identifying themselves as an athlete, we can gain a clearer picture of the impact athletics had and continues to have on their lives. It is important to further explore their level of social support and the level of social activity that revolved around athletics as these can create lasting health behaviors surrounding the familiar structure of exercise. If sports continue to remain an impactful leisure activity either through recreational participation or leisurely viewing, this could influence their transition out from their own sport participation.

Gauging their prior familiarity with the process and possible mentors available to help them navigate this transitional period aimed to evaluate if there is an advantage to having mentors in the family whom have gone through a similar transition. While family dynamics can vary, having someone who understands their transition at some level might impact their ability to move through the process either negatively or positively. It is important to explore further if they continue to reach out to others and what their social support network consists of.

Current expectations might differ from the reality of the transition and that lack of continuity could impact their perception of the transition and subsequent adjustment. As such, it was considered relevant to explore how they have prepared outside of the sport realm and have been either encouraged or discouraged to explore career aspirations while an athlete.

There is a lack of translation of health behaviors beyond the highly organized and structured environment of team athletics into individual health behaviors (Sorenson, Romano, Stanley, Schroeder & Salem, 2014). It is therefore important to explore how athletes upkeep their physical activities, if at all and their feelings about it.

The skills developed through the platform of athletics in general and being a student-athlete more specifically include teamwork, leadership, effective communication, time management and dedication. While they are fostered through coaching staff in this environment, they are beneficial skills to have as life-skills in one's repertoire and further in the work force. The translation of these skills is crucial for a positive adjustment and success later in life.

Regarding the specific programs mandated and hosted by both the NCAA and the athletic department at the institution, they are required to have a culminating workshop for each year of schooling. While many programs include career building workshops, we wanted to see what those entailed, if they were efficient and positive experiences, and what types of programs were accessible.

Ending with an open-ended question allowed the retired student-athlete to provide any culminating thoughts about their experience once they had seen the scope of the study. This is important to provide them with a chance to talk about their experience openly without coercion or fishing for answers. Some athletes were further probed with inquiring about any advice they would give to the newest cohort of graduating student-athletes as this emerged as a beneficial question once some of the first interviews were conducted. The analysis of this section could be telling of many overarching themes present and aid in future program development or refinement.

A Priori Themes

Based on the interview schedule (Appendix A), a priori themes asked and hypothesized as impactful included the availability of a next step, importance of the athletic identity, and translatable skills from athletics. Exploring the exclusivity of athletic identity and attachment to that role, as well as the availability of a tangible next step to focus on with certainty, such as a career or continued education, offers invaluable insights into the perceived impacts on student-athletes' adjustment through this period of transition.

Procedure

In response to a recruitment e-mail (see Appendix D) sent to recently graduated student-athletes, participants were provided the opportunity to set up an interview with one of the research members. Interviews were conducted via Skype, a video calling platform or a phone calling platform based on participant's preference. All participants were informed of and consented to recording of the interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 main open-ended questions as further discussed in the measures and detailed in Appendix A. Further probing was utilized based on answers to guided interview questions which were open-ended to encourage further conversation. Interviews lasted between 11 and 29 minutes. Participants were then sent an e-mail with compensation for their participation through a gift card.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, identifying personal information removed, and each interview allocated a unique identification number. A thematic analysis of the data was then undertaken using the steps described below. Each interview

transcript was read through twice to allow the researcher to further familiarize themselves with the content. Once these initial readings were concluded, the data were coded into the a priori themes and the emerging thematic codes that were identified (see Results) using the constant comparison method utilized in thematic coding and analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Data could be coded in multiple ways looking at different aspects of the interviews, and we chose thematic analysis to discern phenomenological similarities throughout this transition period across participants. Codes were created based on either a priori themes (see below) and clustering the interview data based on themes across participants. While it could have been coded in multiple ways, these themes revealed the most information in terms of probable applied steps for intervention programs.

Four overarching/main themes were identified: Social Connection, Goal Orientation (emergent theme), Translatable Skills (an a priori theme), and Preparedness for the Transition. Each of these had a number of sub-themes. For the first theme, Social Connection, there were three subthemes: Camaraderie from team (a priori), accountability for health behaviors (emergent), and mentorship (emergent). For the second theme Goal Orientation, there were three subthemes: Having a clearly defined next step (a priori), structured routine (emergent), and Fitness goal (emergent)..The third theme, Translatable Skills, there were four emergent themes: work ethic, team-orientation and effective communication, competitiveness and drive, and time-management. For the fourth and final theme, Preparedness, there were three subthemes: Career preparation (a priori), emotional readiness (emergent) and a need to continue sport as a motivating factor for collegiate athletics (emergent) (See Appendix B). The codes were then

clustered based upon similarity and cohesion to keep separate, unique constructs. The data for all interviews were further analyzed and coded based on the above coding scheme.

RESULTS

Four overarching themes were identified in the data using Thematic coding and analysis. The four main themes were 1. Social connection, 2. Goal orientation, 3. Preparedness for transition, and 4. Translatable skills from athletics with subthemes as follows (see Appendix B). All data were analyzed and grouped according to the established themes and sub-themes with one overall reading through the interview data set.

Four overarching themes across the data with thematically relevant subthemes were identified to include: 1. **Social connection** including three subthemes 1a. Camaraderie, 1b. Accountability, and 1c. Mentorship; 2. **Goal orientation** including three subthemes 2a. Having a clearly defined next step, 2b. Structured routine, and 2c. A fitness goal to look towards; 3. **Translatable skills from being a student-athlete** including four subthemes 3a. Work Ethic, 3b. Team-orientation and effective communication, 3c. Competitiveness and drive, and 3d. Balance with time-management of tasks; 4. **Preparedness for the transition** including three subthemes of 4a. Career Preparation, 4b. Readiness to move on from sport, and 4c. A need to continue sport as a motivating factor for collegiate athletics. (Coding exemplars and analysis details for themes and sub-themes can be seen in Appendix B.)

Theme 1: Social connection

Social Connection is important both as a support system and a lifestyle change that need to be considered. Student-athletes spend countless hours with teammates bonding over shared experiences through practices and games or races. Coinciding with the transition from sport, is this transition out of this in-group. It was therefore not surprising that camaraderie from the team was a major theme identified with the lack of that team causing a negative aspect to the transition. Furthermore, the subtheme of accountability comes from the fact that you function as a team and have actions motivated by others as well as yourself. Lastly, the mentorship aspect proves important and a possible solution for student-athletes to help normalize the transition and feelings throughout. Student-athletes are habituated to thinking and acting based on group dynamics and the loss of that team environment leads to the themes discussed below.

Sub-theme: Camaraderie

The participants described the importance of team involvement and that sense of camaraderie with teammates while participating in their sport. The multitude of hours and difficulty of challenges faced with the same intimate group of people shaped the unique experience into a bonding platform for all team members. Therefore, the loss of that structured team environment and resultant close relationships, leads to a desire for that same level of fellowship through different outlets. For example, Participant 7 noted, “*the difficulty, is just to not have that camaraderie*” subsequently expressing relief that they were able to find that sense of a team culture in their new career role: “*Then again, at the same time, when I started my new job- I’m lucky it’s a really cool environment that is—I feel that.*”

The closeness of the team environment also leads to positive adjustment outcomes when graduated student-athletes stay in touch with current and former teammates. They are attempting to fill the need of transitioning the role of teammate to that of a friend whom is still involved and important to the success of the team as well as maintaining those impactful relationships in order to stay connected. This was apparent in Participant 11's description of the difficulty of adjusting from that team culture:

“the biggest difficulty for me is not having my friends there day in and day out that you had going to practice every day. Because honestly, my best friends, besides the ones I had from home, are from my [sport] team [....] I think the biggest transition is just not seeing those people every day”

“it's kind of heart breaking. I feel like a piece of me is missing. So that has been challenging too [...] I wish it was even easier to stay connected”. (Participant 6)

This emphasizes, from a social perspective, the significance of the loss of routine engagement with teammates multiple times daily through athletic commitments.

“leaving the team itself was probably the hardest part because it was really the people there that kept me going.” (Participant 4)

When talking about their earlier voluntary transition to retire. It is significant to note the bonds between athletes on teams are especially relevant here as they are not just a big loss (as revealed above) but also comprise part of why athletes may remain in a sport. For example, in participant 4's case, they had elected to retire from the team before the entirety of their NCAA eligibility was utilized. This indicates that this individual may

have been ready to leave the sport for other reasons, but that commitment to the other athletes was what had *“kept me going”*. This is also relevant as the voluntary or involuntary aspect of retirement. The preparation that is likely to have occurred as student-athletes process decisions and prepare for voluntary retirement, are likely to impact preparedness, acceptance of transition support, and other elements that may result in a smoother transition.

Based on these sentiments, it is prudent that there is an available program protecting against the loss of connection such as through alumni relations, since this group of people have a mutual understanding of their lifestyles based on sacrifices made and team culture. It therefore seems vital to institute such social support through different avenues, either through coworkers, friends, or family. Indeed the participants did outline some ways in which they accomplished their desire to stay involved with the team that was such an impactful part of their identity and role as a collegiate student-athlete. For example, Participant 9 attended alumni events and noted that they *“still follow the team”* and *“talk to old teammates periodically”* to continue to stay involved and feel like an integral part of that community. Another participant (Participant 2) *“stayed in touch with [their] coach”* which was initiated by the coach in a group setting and made the transition easier by making them feel that *“he actually wants to stay in touch I’m not bugging him or whatever it may be.”* This was noted to help them feel like a continued part of the team and fostered connection.

Being able to maintain a sense of connection to the organization that formed such a large part of their lifestyle and identity could aid in the transition out of sport by

maintaining a piece of that identity, in a different role. Emphasizing the fluidity of their athletic identity to expand beyond their time as an athlete could be beneficial to transitioning away from formal athletic participation. Being noted as an alum of the team with active involvement could provide an ease of transition away from that active identity and continue to make them feel wanted and valued as part of the culture of the team. Coach involvement and support of that connection is important to make the alumni student-athletes feel valued and foster a genuine connection beyond the team environment. The graduating student-athletes could be utilized as a mentor for upcoming classes transitioning out and provide insight into that process as well as staying involved with their team.

Sub-theme: Accountability

Transitioning from the highly structured and goal-oriented team environment of a collegiate athletic team requires an outside source of accountability, such as friends, bosses, trainers or coaches in order to continue to achieve goals both in the fitness and life spectrum. They often found the most success by staying in touch with and being accountable to either former teammates or friends at home to fulfill the social support role left by their teammates. As an example, Participant 13 sought accountability to combat their expressed lack of self-motivation stating, *“Now that I’m out of college, I’ve found that much harder, to actually step out the door and get the training done”*. They found scheduled training with others (e.g. friends) imposed an external demand and helped them by having to be accountable to others. Other participants sought the

continued external elements with social elements to initiate health behaviors and stay motivated, such as group fitness classes.

Subtheme: Mentorship

Whether it was from a family member who had gone through a similar transition process or a former teammate, athletes found it important and beneficial to be able to normalize the process through the mentorship of others. Athletes had a desire to speak with others who had been in their shoes in order to feel understood and that their process and any emerging difficulties were valid and further, normalized. Athletes either utilized the resources of role models in their own life or commented that mentors in this role would be beneficial to one's overall transition and adjustment coinciding with the retirement from sport and graduation.

The importance and value of experienced mentorship was acknowledged by a number of participants. Participant 4 suggested a seminar to normalize the transitional experience where *“former student-athletes come in and say...everything you're going through it's okay.”* The value of experienced and empathic individuals was similarly noted by Participant 13 who explained that his coach helped him gain perspective despite a career-ending injury, *“It was a little hard for me on that day, but my coach did a good job of swinging me around, at getting me to look forward and look past it and really just move on.”* This in turn allowed them to gain a positive overall perspective where *“Looking back at it, it's a great experience to have even if you run into something that's a career-ending injury like that.”* Likewise, Participant 3 identified a parent who had been a collegiate athlete as well as a role model for being a student-athlete and

transitioning out of that role. The parent was acknowledged to have “*already been there and done that, so I always took what [they] said*” when referring to their guidance.

That student-athletes acknowledge and value the role of mentorship is not surprising given the explicit training and coaching elements of sport, but it also means they are quite possibly well positioned to accept and benefit from such provision. Within such provisions it would be important to have access to different perspectives of those with prior experience in order to help reframe negative thoughts, encourage acceptance of the challenges that arise throughout the experience, and prevent isolation throughout the transitional period.

Theme 2: Goal orientation

Student-athletes function in the team environment as discussed previously. They function with having goals to work towards whether it be a personal record, team win or championship title, and improving their skills as an athlete. This goal-oriented motivation is ingrained in them and therefore is a large factor in them moving on from that team culture. Student-athletes have to continually balance schoolwork, social obligations, team commitments, and possibly a job. This requires them to have a very structured and planned out schedule, so it is important to continue setting up a sense of structure and routine once they graduate. Having a clearly defined next step or goal to work towards is helpful in providing not only certainty of the future, but also continuing that goal oriented behavior that they engaged in as a student-athlete. Lastly, having a fitness goal to work towards which is specific and attainable is helpful to maintain fitness with a routine and plan to achieve that goal, much as they did when they were student-athletes.

Sub-theme: Structured routine

The goal-oriented culture of athletics made the unstructured life after transition more difficult by promoting feeling aimless or lost. This is in many ways not surprising given the common goal shared and worked for by all members of a team or institution that provides a major sense of purpose and drive for student-athletes. Therefore, when they graduate and transition away from this environment, the loss of and desire for a sense of continued structure and routine was evident. The sense of being busy created a sense of productivity which created a sense of purpose when continued beyond athletics.

However, it is difficult to identify new roles for which to fill these time commitments and having an external scheduled routine was acknowledged to be helpful. Participant 12 was continuing further education and noted *“enjoy[ing] having a different type of busy schedule.”* Similarly Participant 11 related her new work role as *“similar in the fact that I am almost on someone else’s schedule in terms of work.”* further explaining that they *“miss the process of everything...I am someone who gets in my routine.”*

Sub-theme: Having a clearly defined next step

Having a clear and well-defined next step helps the student-athletes transition into a new role with a sense of purpose and accomplishment previously filled with athletic accomplishment. Having a clearly demarcated role to step into in which they felt excited eased the adjustment of transition and provided a new goal to work towards and invest their energy into. For example, Participant 3 appreciated the new role available *“because I had already come to the realization that I wasn’t going to continue pursuing*

professional soccer, and it was good because it kind of transitioned into my profession as a person.” They acknowledged that they now *“had another goal that [they] set which was school, so that kept me busy”*.

Equally Participant 9 stated that the transition into the new work role was a quick adjustment which made it more positive given that they *“enjoyed the transition away from studying long hours and into just work.”* In contrast, Participant 4 concluded that *“feeling so stagnant is difficult for me because [sport] was always working towards a goal.”* Indeed while Participant 4 noted having time-sensitive and attainable goals helps continue to transition that goal achievement skill utilized throughout sport into general life scenarios, they also noted that *“Setting up those little goals for myself is definitely a lot harder when it’s not someone else doing it for me.”* Overall, the setting of attainable goals provides a similar structure to what they are used to and allows them to translate their knowledge from sport in how to attain those goals to their overall life performance.

Subtheme: Fitness goals to work towards

The previous sub-theme noted that an important part of a successful adjustment is taking advantage of that goal-oriented nature and continuing to utilize it beyond the athletic realm. However some student-athletes found incentivized motivation to upkeep their health behaviors and overall fitness levels through specified fitness goals with deadlines and factors to work towards. These were beneficial for maintaining/achieving health and imposing external structure to manage their goal orientation. As such a number reported they found it easier to upkeep their fitness behaviors when they had specific goals to work towards and continue to achieve and push themselves. This is

evident in Participant 2's discussion of the change in health behavior motivation which *"is a little bit more of an open-ended health and fitness kind of thing, which is a little difficult to adjust to sometimes."* This reflects the loss of external goals of training *"in order to do well at a race or something like that."* to the more abstract motivation of fitness. Further this participant further recognized the overlap of this with external structure noting that

"it has been hard transitioning to just working out on a whim because I have always just had practice or some sort of scheduled activity since I was little."

The imposition of setting goals was noted by Participant 1 who continues to upkeep positive health behaviors through making *"a goal that I wanted to run and then...in a month I'm going to run a half marathon here and so that has been another goal...So I was motivated."* This participant further stated, *"For myself I have a time period where I can just casually workout, but then I do hit that point where it's hard to motivate myself, so finding different things to make small goals"* is helpful. Similarly, Participant 13 got back into physical activity through setting a goal in a team relay which provided short-term motivation to upkeep a training regimen while Participant 10 acknowledged the difficulty to motivate oneself to maintain health promoting behaviors as *"harder I'd say, because like you don't have other people pushing you and you're not really held as accountable"* outside of the team environment.

The combination of a less specific health goal when exercising, such as improved performance for their sport, alongside the decrease in social accountability presented through teammates or coaches, creates obstacles to upkeep positive health behaviors and

the need for intrinsic motivation to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The setting of attainable goals capitalize on their goal-oriented mindset fostered throughout athletics, and provide motivation to upkeep positive behaviors.

Theme 3: Translatable Skills

Student-Athletes were able to maximize their experiences in athletics when they were able to view the skills they learned through sport as translatable life skills for the next steps in life including a career or further education.

Subtheme: Competitiveness and drive

Many athletes found success in the sales environment due to the similar sense of a team-oriented environment and their competitiveness to succeed.

“sales and what I’m doing, it’s very competitive and it’s very goal-oriented.

Everything I do, like the team in my office, it’s very—it reminds me very much of a team.” (Participant 7)

Beyond the sales environment, many student-athletes found their competitiveness to be an advantage which fueled their overall determination to succeed.

Participant 6 capitalized on various qualities utilized by student-athletes and gained perspective to translate those specific skills into the career realm to make them better and more effective employees.

“qualities found in Varsity athletes...like the ability to work on a team, to follow directions, think critically, think critically, reflect on not only how you failed, but

how you can improve. And also just the grit that is associated with athletics and not giving up when things get tough...are so broadly applicable to every industry”

Subtheme: Team-orientation and effective communication

Many athletes utilized their experience communicating to their teammates, coaches, and athletic administrators to their advantage. It is an important skill to be able to effectively communicate with others in a constructive way, even under pressure. Participant 12 discussed how the job demands of being a team captain and effectively communicating with various personality types helped them become an integral employee in their current workplace.

“learning team building skills, communication, talking to people to understand them...building relationships with other people too”

Participant 2 elaborated on the importance of interpersonal skills learned throughout their time in a leadership position on their team which *“helped with a sense of leadership and a sense of knowing how to interact with different people.”*

Participant 11 identified how they were able to capitalize on *“many leadership experiences”* alongside *“communication skills working towards the [client’s] overall goals, rather than individual team goals...has helped and prepared me for what graduate school and a professional career would require.”*

Subtheme: Work ethic

Many athletes realized the ability to translate the dedication and work ethic in their sport onto the broader platform of life as a beneficial skill to have. They were able to gain perspective that their achievements through hard work, overcoming adversity, and dedication to a common goal was needed outside of the athletic realm in order for them to be successful in life. They found that being able to persevere through difficulties both in the work realm and in life in general was mirrored upon their previous experiences in athletics.

“being a student athlete, you kind of realize that hard work on the field is similar to putting hard work into school, and it definitely carries over” (Participant 3)

“being self-disciplined and knowing that you have to put the work in if you want to get the results. I definitely think that that kind of mindset has helped me in my job and just in life just to be a hard worker and want to get results.” (Participant 8)

Subtheme: Time management

Time management and balance is importance in all aspects of life. Many athletes were able to realize the importance of the time management skills fostered through the multitude of time and role demands of being a student-athlete and see how it could benefit them as an employee and further functioning productively in all aspects of life.

“manage my time very well. I know what it’s like to be stressed and have to put sleep and other priorities in front of hanging out with friends” (Participant 3)

“the organization, time management, and being on time with things...and being able to handle a heavy workload as well.” (Participant 9)

The ability to broaden one’s perspectives on the importance of skills learned throughout sport into a broader context is crucial for a successful transition because it allows them to see the importance of their previous experiences. It also allows them to build off of those skills to achieve success and can help ease the transition by gaining perspective on how they are still utilizing their sport for success in their daily lives.

Theme 4: Preparedness

Subtheme: Career preparation

Athletes elaborated on the importance of career preparation through hands-on experience. Internships proved invaluable to gain further insight into the career choice. Having preparation for the career or next step of further education well before the time of graduation, helped the athletes transition smoothly and with confidence into their next step. This led to a more positive adjustment.

Participant 9 *“Had a couple of internships in college and that helped me kind of really figure out what I wanted to do”* and gained further experience to pinpoint what type of work environment they would be the most successful and happy with.

Participant 6 had internships as well throughout their collegiate athletics career which helped *“spread [their] focus from just [sport] so it was not as much of a night and day shift when I finished.”*

Participant 13 had internships both in high school and over *“two summers, and then [they] got hired on as a full-time employee.”*

Subtheme: Emotional readiness

Further, athletes psychologically and mentally preparing for the transition by gaining a sense of perspective or closure for their overall seasons of play was helpful for an effective transition.

This could be aided from the wisdom and influence from a coach, as in participant 13. It was important to be able to refocus the emotional investment from athletics, into a new goal or chapter, which is highly individualized and impacts the adjustment outcomes for each athlete differently.

Participant 11 felt that in their *“last year, [they] were over [sport] so getting to move on was totally fine... it was like a weight lifted off my shoulders”*. Currently, when they engage in sport, they *“like it again because it is on [their] own terms.”*

Under adverse conditions through involuntary injury, Participant 12’s *“season was cut short...it was very difficult because I felt like I wasn’t able to finish, but at the same time I was ready to be done and accepted it- accepted I was moving forward to this next part of my life.”*

This reframe seems impactful and is echoed by participant 2, whom found peace by *“refocusing myself and worrying about the graduate school applications and stuff like that...where I wasn’t really didn’t allow that kind of time when I was an athlete.”*

Participant 1 *“personally felt pretty prepared for what was next...I felt ready, mentally, to move onto something new.”* They continued by reframing that they are *“not soccer and that’s okay, you can still use that”*. They continued with accepting that their overall team performance did not end in the win they had deserved or hoped for, but reframed that despite that, *“they couldn’t have asked for a better team, better last year, and people to be with.”*

Further, many athletes experience burnout, and a feeling of readiness to give their bodies a break from overuse. Athletes believed that having a counselor or person to speak to them about preparing for the mental transition away from sport would be a beneficial implementation to increase positive adjustment and continue to foster that social connection.

Participant 7 utilized previously graduated teammates whom provided *“the most help I got was because I—was from the older girls on the team, if that makes sense. I had really good friends that graduated before me. That I would still hang out with after. They would always tell me what it was like to transition after.”*

Participant 5 emphasized that *“more one-on-one counseling”* would be more effective in preparing for the transition both from a career perspective and aid with positive coping throughout the adjustment. While *“career-focused events [were] very helpful”*, counseling for the *“post-graduation fields, it wasn’t emphasized enough. It was just kind of an afterthought, it felt like.”*

Subtheme: Motivating factor for collegiate athletic participation

Athletes related this sense of purpose as an important motivator in their next steps. Athletes described a phenomenon of wanting to continue to play in college because they were simply not ready to be done with athletics. While this would seem to be a similar argument which extrapolated beyond collegiate levels, it seems that maximizing their athletic opportunities lead to closure and readiness to move towards a new goal. This tied in with their background in youth sport as developing their athletic identity and further being able to transition from that identity successfully with other roles.

Participant 1 continued to play at the collegiate level because they were not *“ready to be done playing sports at all...I just wanted to play something at the next level. I wasn’t done playing soccer.”*

Participant 2 echoed this same feeling of continuing on at the collegiate level based on a sibling’s positive experience as a collegiate athlete. They were not *“ready to be done being an athlete, I really just like competing in [athletics] and I wasn’t ready to be done with it once high school ended.”*

A common theme presented that there was an emotional need to continue to play sports at the collegiate level, and the ‘natural’ conclusion at the end of the collegiate career helps to create satisfaction of the overall experience and a sense of peace regarding the conclusion.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to illuminate the individual and collective experiences of graduated student-athletes as they transitioned from their athlete role. More specifically,

how health behaviors changed, the importance of social connection, the impact of career preparation, and impact of athletic identity are explored through this phenomenological approach to this transitional period. Overall, the data suggests that many student-athletes adjusted well to this period from the standpoint of continued achievements and advancement into new roles because of the availability of key elements that helped such as structured routine, continued team connection, mentorship for the process, and perspective of how their skills translate beyond the athletic realm. Of course these were not available to all and there are improvements to be made to the experience in aiding the development of these ameliorating factors. Equally there were important elements identified that could be managed much more effectively, namely fostering continued connection to the athletic community, preparing student-athletes with work experience, and normalizing the negative and positive changes throughout this period.

In terms of the first theme, the *Need for Social Connection*, the participants demonstrated the importance of maintaining social connection via various routes including teammates, family, coworkers, and friends. The importance of social support as an effective coping mechanism and protective against stressors for more positive health outcomes (Cohen, 1998) is consistent with previous research. Participants often looked for a substitute to replace the camaraderie they once found through their teammates. Through this transition, they found it beneficial to not only stay in contact and involved with previous teammates and the current team, but also fill that void with new of different social connections. They enjoyed the mutual understanding from the shared experiences of their teammates, countless hours spent together, and sharing a common culture and

goal. When they transitioned out of that team environment, they sought to fill that with a different set of people and build a similar sense of connection. Many found this through their work with a team-oriented perspective, or reconnecting with family and friends from before they attended their undergraduate institution. Regardless of where they found their meaningful connections from, all of the participants expressed the need to form and maintain those connections to avoid feelings of loneliness which made their adjustment more difficult.

This translated to the maintenance of their health behaviors as well. Many participants found that they lacked self-motivation to initiate their own exercise plans. However, they enjoyed either the social aspect of group exercise classes, or having a partner with which to exercise. This helped both in increasing accountability and the enjoyment of the exercise which makes the behavior more sustainable. Consistent with current literature, they are more likely to maintain healthy behaviors with positive social support and accountability to help achieve and maintain those goals (Mailey, Huberty, Dinkel, & McAuley, 2014).

For the second theme, *Goal Orientation*, having a clearly defined next step was found to be helpful. Whether this was a career, travel plans, or fitness goals, a defined next step or goal provided a sense of stability during the transition. These external motivating factors fostered that sense of accomplishment through goal achievement. In particular, having a job either lined up or a clear path figured out in order to obtain that job was helpful to the participants as it allowed them to continue to feel productive in their daily life as well as providing financial stability, a new identity to transition into,

and a sense of routine with the people you see daily and having structure to one's time. (This is discussed further in the Preparedness section below).

The imposition of new goals and related external elements – especially fitness oriented – also seemed to assist transition and loss of externally imposed training schedules. Student-athletes have transitioned from a goal-oriented context in both personal and team perspectives within their sport as they try to continually improve their own performance as well as achieve team success to continue onto the post-season levels of play. But the externally imposed athletic demands and training schedules of college student-athlete life was widely reported as a big loss that required effort to re-establish in positive ways. This drive to achieve specific goals can be utilized to translate their success into their overall life performance and an awareness of this specific drive would benefit professionals working with this population to create a seamless transition. This suggests that while having a defined next step is important, the loss of external structure remains difficult for many. As such a next step that also imposes external structure and demands may be the most beneficial transition.

For the third theme, *Translatable skills*, it is important to also be able to translate skills that made them successful student-athletes into their life outside athletics as well as noting their need for routine and structure. Many participants were able to see how the skills they crafted throughout their athletic careers could translate beneficially into their everyday life. Some were able to gain that perspective and insight through introspection, while others were able to draw those conclusions when further prompted to think about that perspective. Student-Athletes face certain demands through their intersecting roles

which require them to manage their time effectively, communicate to other personalities well, resiliently overcome adversity, maintain a dedicated work-ethic, and continue to strive for better performance and achievement throughout their life.

These qualities, when taken to the extreme, can also manifest in unhealthy behaviors through perfectionism and a poor work-life balance. However, with the proper guidance from professionals and administrative staff, these skills can continue to benefit the student-athletes beyond the field of play. It is important to guide athletes to gain their own insight into the value of these qualities and how they can continue to utilize them throughout their life to achieve optimal performance in all arenas. This is a large area for growth and potential interventions to make a lasting impact on this population and how they function in society beyond their athletic abilities.

With the last theme, *Preparedness*, creating a sense of control through preparedness either in the career or emotional realms is helpful to create a more positive transition. Lifestyle changes in general can be difficult to navigate with uncertain and unfamiliar changes, and with student-athletes that is also true with the addition that athletics is part of their identity as well. Many participants echoed the sentiment that they chose to continue athletic participation in college because they were not ready to be finished with participating in sport at the competitive level. The opportunity presented to continue to play at the collegiate level, with approximately 2-24 % of high school athletes (depending on the sport and gender) continuing on to be collegiate athletes seems a more attainable and realistic goal than the 1% that continue on in a much smaller number of professional sports represented (NCAA Research, 2017). It might be that the increased

attainability of collegiate athletic participation versus professional participation, makes it a more socially acceptable stopping point for student-athletes to stop competing formally.

Regardless, graduation from college seemed to provide a sense of closure and completion to these participants' athletic journey, with this perspective lending itself to greater emotional preparation to move on from sport participation. This lends itself to one's readiness to move on from sport, which was seen to be impacted by their perspective gained on their entire athletic career as well as their satisfaction with their season of play and team dynamics. This of course might be different for those who had a strong desire to continue in elite and/or professional sports. However, while some participants felt like they had 'unfinished business', this did not specifically lead to dissatisfaction with their adjustment. It seemed to be moderated by their insight into their overall body of work as well as their appreciation for the time they did have to participate in sport. These findings suggest an emotional component of readiness to move on and calls for further investigation for future transition guidance programs.

Equally direct experience of alternate career contexts through internships may be useful for preparing student-athletes for the transition. Many participants stated that they had completed internships prior to their graduation. This seemed to help them explore their career paths with confidence and take that next step beyond graduation with more assertion. Even if the internship was not in the same field as their current career or schooling, they felt more confident with their current choice having explored previous areas and discovering what they did or did not like about those careers through a temporary and intensive position. Therefore, it could be beneficial to encourage or even

require an internship as part of the NCAA eligibility requirements. That way, student-athletes would have vital experiences preparing them and guiding their transition as well as providing them with a more secure sense of a net step they would like to embark upon.

Overall, positive adjustment seems to coincide with a student-athlete's ability to advance into new roles, aided by their skills learned through athletics. It is important to normalize the experience and create an open environment to discuss the ups and downs of the transition, which could be especially impactful if lead by a previously graduated alumni student-athlete since they could relate most concretely to the experience.

Fostering continued connection to the athletic community, whether through teammates, coaches, or administrative staff can be improved upon. Encouraging career exploration through hands on experiences such as internships seems to have the largest positive impact on student-athlete career exploration. Capitalizing on the goal-oriented mindset by encouraging structured routines and new goals could benefit the transition. Lastly, it is important to emphasize the fluidity of the athlete identity and how, while not formally continuing to play sport, that identity can still be a beneficial part of their life through health behaviors, coaching or community service keeping them involved with athletics in a different way.

These findings identify positive benefits and key elements that could enhance a constructive and smooth transition. However it has to be acknowledged that – in addition to being a small sample – it could be that those volunteering to participate in the study were those who were more successfully transitioned and satisfied. This means that those who were not well adjusted, experiencing a negative transition, and dissatisfied with their

retirement may not be represented in this study. Nonetheless, it is also likely that it is these individuals who might be most likely to benefit from the identification of elements that enhance transitions and their implementation in programs to assist successful preparation and transition from organized sport on graduation. As such the implications of this study provide a useful framework of action and intervention for all student-athletes alongside recommendations for future research.

The use of semi-structured interviews for data collection provided rich data with valuable validity and useful insights. However, this methodological approach, along with the small sample size, limits the generalizability of the findings. Equally, as noted above, all types of research into this topic could be subject to a participant self-selection bias as those experiencing negative transitions and outcomes may be less likely to volunteer. Efforts to longitudinally follow student-athletes from transition into and out of college would be a useful way to avoid self-selection bias due to such factors. This could have altered the willingness of participants and skewed the resultant data.

Due to limited time and resources, the recruitment strategy for this study was also restricted to established connections with athletic administrative staff rather than across multiple institutions. Consequently, while heterogeneity amongst the participants would have been preferred, most of the participants were recruited from one university. This led to a majority of participants from one NCAA division and therefore could be influenced by the level of play within that division, which could not be generalized across all divisions. Further, some participants had personal relationships with the primary researcher who had been a student-athlete at the primary recruitment institution. In order

to manage this and promote confidentiality, secondary researchers undertook the phone interviews with those participants. These participants were told the transcription of their interview would be de-identified for analysis by the primary researcher, but the potential impact on the information they shared has to be acknowledged.

Finally, interviews took place across a three month period meaning that participants had graduated varying amounts of time when they were interviewed. While a window of approximately three months is generally an acceptable practice to capture a certain time point, when adding in the different seasons of play for the different athletes, this may have impacted timing of key elements of the transition. Indeed the aim was to interview participants regarding their experiences with the transition from sport alongside the college to career transition coinciding with graduation from the undergraduate institution, once they were more established and had a solid foundation in their adjustment. This aimed to control for anxieties that come along with the graduation season and festivities as well as the stressors of looking for a next step and possible geographic changes. Nonetheless, NCAA sports are played either in the Fall, Winter, or Spring and then with regular and post-season play creating a larger spread of when those athletes played their last formal game, but could still have been in school. While the type of methodological approach used means that this variance could not be directly controlled for, interviews allow for the variation in experience and timing to be directly explored in ways that maximize the validity of the data.

Overall the interviews provided a rich data source with insight into the various experiences of student-athletes as they coped with the transition from both their student

and athlete roles. The data collected can inform more effective practices for administrative staff within athletics to implement intervention programs and modify existing workshops. There are a multitude of future directions informed by the results of this study with specific aims to better prepare the student-athlete for the transition through increased awareness of adjustment difficulties. The results can inform counseling psychologists working with this population for more effective treatment practices and create a positive mentorship model for a larger impact on student-athletes. As such this study illuminated the important areas of emphasis to be discussed by administrative staff with graduating student-athletes in order to increase positive and successful outcomes through this transitional period.

Implications and Recommendations

The impact that the NCAA has on the commitment of institutions to follow regulations and rules set forth by the board makes their research into the matter more impactful. Many programs are in place to ensure the success of student athletes as they take classes to culminate in graduation, but less is discussed and acted on with regards to their success beyond their time at the institution. This leaves a large gap in the literature which could impact the newly graduating student-athletes each year become more productive members of society, increase well-being through maintenance of health behaviors, and limit mental health struggles throughout this period.

The implementation of programs that foster a sense of control and confidence going into the transition through preparation and planning are important. A helpful option includes utilizing previously graduated student-athletes to mentor the upcoming cohort of

student-athletes with their personal experiences. Spreading information about the process of the transition with what to expect could decrease anxieties by limiting the uncertainty. In addition, finding ways to create a culture in which the difficulties of this period are discussed openly could normalize the experience, which could in turn decrease stigma about negative feelings surrounding the transition as well as initiate anticipatory preparedness. Most notably identifying ways in which to create open discussions within that community stemming from athletic administration, involving coaches, and ultimately all athletes would be highly recommended.

Further research and exploration of the overarching themes and sub-themes in studies with larger and more representative samples is highly desirable. Development of these findings through multimethodological research would be ideal. Future research should also include implementations of various interventions with analysis of their efficacy in promoting and creating positive transitions from sport. It would be helpful to further research the areas that are the most helpful to graduating student-athletes. Such findings, along with the finding reported above, could usefully inform counseling psychologists working with this population on what to look out for as well as what unique issues present themselves with this population and effective ways to cope with the change.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What sport did you play in college? (explore for how long and level of involvement)
2. What sports did you play as a child? (explore: age started, level of involvement and years played, when started to focus on one primary sport)
3. Do your parent(s) play sports or engage in athletic activities? (explore: level of incorporation of sport media/ game attendance for professional teams, level of support for athletics for child)
4. Does anyone in your family play sport or have they played sport at the college or elite level?
5. How prepared did you feel regarding the transition from sport and graduation? (explore: confidence in decision making for next step, career exploration)
6. How do you incorporate athletics or exercise into your current health behaviors? (explore: level of intensity of exercise, duration and frequency of exercise, team or individual format)
7. Is the transition similar to your expectations of graduation?
8. Do you feel any skills developed as a student-athlete are beneficial in your current career or life?
9. Are there any areas you feel can be improved upon or emphasized by athletics administration for future graduating student-athletes?
10. How do you feel currently about your adjustment from college and athletics?

Thank you for your participation in this research study. You will receive compensation through a gift certificate by e-mail within 2 weeks, is this e-mail preferable?

Do you have any questions regarding this study or your participation?

APPENDIX B

THEMATIC CODES

Themes and Subthemes

1. Need for Social Connection

- a. camaraderie from team
- b. accountability for health behaviors
- c. mentorship to guide them

2. Goal Orientation

- a. Having a clearly defined next step
- b. Structured Routine
- c. Fitness goal to work towards

3. Translatable Skills from being a student-athlete

- a. Work Ethic
- b. Team-orientation and effective communication
- c. competitiveness and drive
- d. Balance with time-management of tasks

4. Preparedness for the transition

- a. Career Preparation
- b. Emotional readiness to move on from sport
- c. A need to continue sport as a motivating factor for collegiate athletics

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Current Age		
22	6	46.15
23	5	38.46
24	2	15.38
Race/Ethnicity		
Caucasian	12	92.31
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	7.69
Season of Play		
Fall	2	15.38
Winter	2	15.38
Spring	9	69.23
Sport		
Soccer	2	15.38
Track/Field	1	7.69
Swim and Dive	1	7.69
Rowing	3	23.07
Baseball	1	7.69
Basketball	1	7.69
Softball	1	7.69
Cross Country & Track and Field	3	23.07
Gender		
Male	6	46.15
Female	7	53.85
NCAA Division		
I	2	15.38
II	11	84.62
III	0	0

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

Retirement Transition in Collegiate Athletes

Knizek, Meân and Roberts

Interview Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a follow-up interview about the transition from college of student-athletes on graduation. To participate you must be at least 18 years old, have graduated from college this past Spring semester (2017), and have participated in a Varsity level sport as a student-athlete for your institution. Your participation will require approximately 30 minutes to participate in an interview led by one of our researchers at your convenience. Interviews can be conducted through an internet-based video calling platform or in-person based on your preference and location. Your participation and individual responses will be recorded through an audio recording device and kept strictly confidential.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey. You may not directly benefit from this research but we hope that the findings may benefit future graduating student-athletes by contributing to understanding about the transition from college.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. In order to link your previous submissions with this follow-up interview, unique identifying codes were created for each participant. The de-identified codes are linked to the data submission and your identifying information is stored securely in a separate location to limit the risk of a breach in confidentiality. All data will be stored in secure computer files and in a separate location from any identifying information. Use and disclosure of personal information, including research study records, is restricted to the researchers.

If you choose to participate in an interview, you will be contacted for the best method to set up an interview at a time that works best for you. Arranging a time to meet for the interview is taken as your consent to participate in the follow-up interview. While conducting the interview, you are free to stop at any point or not answer a question. Choosing not to participate in this follow-up interview will not adversely affect you in any way or alter your participation in the initial survey. You will be compensated for your time and participation with a gift card, which will be sent to you upon completion of the interview.

This research is being undertaken as part of a Master of Science thesis by Olivia Knizek at Arizona State University under the supervision of Associate Professors Dr. Lindsey Meân and Dr. Nicole Roberts. If you have questions or would like a summary of the results of the study, you can contact the research team through Ms. Knizek at oknizek@asu.edu in the first instance. If you have questions for the research supervisors please contact Dr. Meân at lmean@asu.edu or Dr. Roberts at Nicole.A.Roberts@asu.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Behavioral IRB. You may

talk to them at (480) 965-6788 or by email at research.integrity@asu.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

Lindsey Mean

NEW: Social and Behavioral Sciences, School of (SSBS)

602/543-6682

Lindsey.Mean@asu.edu

Dear Lindsey Mean:

On 5/21/2017 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Retirement Transition in Graduating Collegiate Athletes
Investigator:	<u>Lindsey Mean</u>
IRB ID:	STUDY00006275
Category of review:	(6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings, (7)(b) Social science methods, (7)(a) Behavioral research
Funding:	Name: National Collegiate Athletic Association
Grant Title:	
Grant ID:	
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Follow Up Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • KMR Student-Athlete Retirement Clarification of Funding.docx, Category: Sponsor Attachment; • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Full Survey Version 2.pdf, Category:

	<p>Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knizek Graduation Study Guiding Interview Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Interview Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • KMR Student Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Study Athlete Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Funding Application pending Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition , Category: Sponsor Attachment; • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Non-athlete Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition, Category: IRB Protocol; • CITI_Completion_NRoberts_Mar2015thru2018.pdf, Category: Non-ASU human subjects training (if taken within last 3 years to grandfather in);
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The IRB approved the protocol from 5/21/2017 to 5/20/2018 inclusive. Three weeks before 5/20/2018 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 5/20/2018 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:

Nicole Roberts

Olivia Knizek

APPENDIX F
IRB MODIFICATION APPROVAL LETTER

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

Lindsey Mean

Social and Behavioral Sciences, School of (SSBS)

602/543-6682

Lindsey.Mean@asu.edu

Dear Lindsey Mean:

On 1/23/2018 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification
Title:	Retirement Transition in Graduating Collegiate Athletes
Investigator:	Lindsey Mean
IRB ID:	STUDY00006275
Funding:	Name: National Collegiate Athletic Association
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Follow Up Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Non-athlete Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • KMR Student Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Study Athlete Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Knizek Graduation Study Guiding Interview Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey

	<p>questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Interview Recruitment and Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition, Category: IRB Protocol; • KMR Student-Athlete Retirement Clarification of frefFunding.docx, Category: Sponsor Attachment; • CITI_Completion_NRoberts_Mar2015thru2018.pdf, Category: Non-ASU human subjects training (if taken within last 3 years to grandfather in); • Funding Application pending Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition , Category: Sponsor Attachment; • KMR Student-Athlete Graduation Retirement Transition Full Survey Version 2.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);
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The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:

Nicole Roberts

Olivia Knizek