

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

A STUDY ON STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE: WHAT ACADEMIC
AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES ARE NEEDED TO ASSIST WITH A
SUCCESSFUL POST-SPORT TRANSITION

By

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Dissertation Approved:

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STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....ii

List of Figures.....viii

List of Tables.....ix

Abstract.....x

Chapter 1- Introduction

 Introduction.....1

 Student-Athlete Identity.....4

 Significance of Project.....6

 Project Goals.....8

 What Student-Athletes Report.....8

 What Student-Athletes Need.....9

 Conceptual Framework.....10

 Definition of Terms.....13

 Conclusion.....14

Chapter 2- Review of Literature

 Identity Formation.....15

 Identity Foreclosure.....17

 The Commitment to the Game.....22

 Time Constraints for Student-Athletes.....23

 Student Development Theories.....25

 Chickering’s Theorys.....26

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Astin’s Theory.....	27
Magolda’s Theory.....	29
Schlossberg’s Theory.....	30
Sanford’s Theory.....	31
Student-Athlete Development.....	32
Environmental Theory.....	32
Emotional Development in Student-Athletes.....	36
Personal Growth within Student-Athletes.....	37
Support Services for Student.....	40
Synthesis.....	43
Conclusion.....	47

Chapter 3- Methodology

The Charge in Research.....	48
Research Questions.....	48
Qualitative Study.....	49
Justification of Methodological Choice.....	49
Setting.....	50
Participants.....	51
Selection.....	51
Procedure.....	52
Ethical Consideration and Positionality.....	52
Data Collection Method.....	53
Process.....	53

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Interviews.....	54
Data Analysis.....	54
Trustworthiness.....	56
Limitations.....	57
Conclusion.....	59

Chapter 4- Findings

Review of Study.....	60
Demographics of Participants.....	61
Themes from Interview 1.....	63
Theme 1: Parental Involvement.....	63
Theme 2: Coaches Influence and Support.....	70
Theme 3: Lack of Outside Sport Interest During Formative Years.....	78
Themes from Interview 2.....	85
Theme 4: Professional Development.....	85
Theme 5: Career Development.....	93
Theme 6: Mental Health.....	99
Conclusion.....	106

Chapter 5- Discussions, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Restating of the Research Questions.....	107
Discussion.....	107
Recommendations for Student-Athletes.....	112
Recommendations for Advisors and Support Staff.....	114
Recommendations for Coaches.....	116

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Recommendations for Student-Athlete Development Offices.....	119
Recommendations for Non-Athletic Department Staff.....	121
Summary of Recommendations.....	123
Who Takes the Role of Family in Student-Athletes Lives?.....	126
Implications.....	129
Deliverables.....	130
Conclusion.....	131
References.....	133
Appendix A Sample Email.....	142
Appendix B Qualifying Survey.....	143
Appendix C Sample Interview Questions.....	146
Appendix D Human Subject Research Certificate.....	149
Appendix E Professional Presentation Template.....	151
Appendix F Conference Program Proposal.....	157
Vita	

List of Figures

Figure 1. Estimated Probability of Competing in Professional Athletics.....3

Figure 2. Division I college athletes reach 90% graduation rate.....7

Figure 3. Factors that Influence Student-Athlete Identity Development.....11

Figure 4. Establishment of Identity for Student-Athletes in College.....12

Figure 5. Factors that Influence Student-Athlete Identity Development.....46

Figure 6. Establishment of Identity for Student-Athletes in College.....46

Figure 7. Schedule for Data Collection.....55

List of Tables

Table 1. Student-Athlete Participant Breakdown.....62- 63

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Abstract

A STUDY ON STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE: WHAT ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES ARE NEEDED TO ASSIST WITH A SUCCESSFUL POST-SPORT TRANSITION

By

Kevin Charles Mendez

Ed. D. Higher Educational Leadership, 2022

Dr. Don Mills, Distinguished Professor of Higher Education Leadership

The purpose of this capstone project was to study the student-athlete experience, including post-sport life. Participants were invited to engage in the research study so long as they met the following requirements: must be between ages 21-31, male or female, played a NCAA Division I sport for all four years of college and no longer have athletic eligibility remaining from a Power 5 institution. Lastly, they must have been removed from their sport no more than 10 years ago.

The aim of this study was to take an in-depth and interesting look at student-athlete transition to post-sport life. The research included two interviews. Interview one ranged between 60-90 minutes, while interview two ranged between 45-60 minutes. Participants were asked about their experiences before, during, and if applicable, after college. Some questions included family background and upbringing, athletic and academic history, and post-competition experience. The interviews were recorded via Zoom and the participant was informed of such recording.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Although participants did not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because through their experiences and this study the goal is to be able to put forth recommendations related to support services that can better assist student athletes who go through the identity foreclosure process.

The findings included student-athletes in fact do experience identity foreclosure and do need resources such as professional development, career readiness and mental health services to assist them during that transitional period out of their sport.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Chapter 1

Introduction

Tick, tick, tick, tick, there are only three seconds left showing on the clock. For a student-athlete, that may be the last three seconds of their college career. For me, in the year 2010, I knew and realized it would be the last time I ever laced up Nike basketball shoes competitively. As I looked up at the clock, I saw my basketball career roll through my head like a movie. It seemed like every shot I ever took in my life I could remember at that moment. Playing a game I had loved for the last 18 years had led me to this moment. My identity since I was three years old centered on the game of basketball, and in a matter of three seconds it would be taken away. It was an extremely sobering moment in my life. My father played professionally overseas, and that was a dream of mine since I started playing the game. Dreams and aspirations I had of playing professionally were well-known to my closest companions. Yet, now on that day in March, I realized that dream was no longer going to be a reality. From the moment a basketball was put into my hand, I knew that game was going to be my first true love. I remember pouring cement with my father to erect a basketball goal at my old house, just so I could put up as many shots as possible all through the night. All through middle school, I was one of the top players, so my parents moved so I could attend a public high school and subsequently, hopefully, receive more exposure and notoriety. Furthermore, travel ball was an investment of not only resources and funds but of time. The game of basketball drew my family closer together, but as a senior student athlete, I realized what I had come to know as a large part of my identity was no more.

Think of something you have done your whole life, from childhood to adulthood, and imagine that is what your sole identity is centered around. Now, fast-forward to the age of 21 when what you have always known has suddenly been stripped away and when your self-

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

identity is no longer a part of your existence. This simple yet impactful example is a microcosm of what young student-athletes at the collegiate level face on an almost daily basis. Individuals who make commitments to roles without engaging in exploratory behavior are said to be in a state of identity foreclosure (Murphy et al., 1996). It is essential for students in their college years to explore alternative identities to aid them in their growth and development as young adults. Identifying with one single attribute will only hinder their development in the long run. Alternative identity development is crucial in student development. Being a collegiate athlete now more than ever has such unique challenges that it is nearly unimaginable how young students manage and balance all the pressures that come with being a gifted athlete. Student-athletes grace the halls of colleges and universities that range from Division I to Division III, yet no matter the level of notoriety, the fact remains these students have dedicated most of their lives to playing a sport and thus have their identity tied to it directly. The transitional phase of any student's career or going to college can be challenging, but several studies have suggested that certain physical and psychological demands of intercollegiate athletics, combined with the restrictiveness of an athletic system, may isolate athletes from typical collegiate activities and restrict their holistic developmental opportunities.

Currently, the college athletic landscape is money-driven, with little regard for the overall development of the student-athlete. This money mindset only fuels the fire that student-athletes have to play professionally and try to reach the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, which is their respective professional league. However, less than 2% of NCAA student-athletes go on to be professional athletes in the two biggest revenue-generating sports (men's football and men's basketball). The third revenue-generating sport, men's baseball, is rather high at 9%, but consideration must be given to the number of leagues and sub-leagues baseball. According to

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

NCAA research conducted in 2020, Figure 1 shows not only the percentage but the number of participants and many other factors that go into making the professional ranks (NCAA, 2020); it also includes the total number of participants in the five sports that student-athletes can be drafted into, along with the approximate number of draft-eligible student-athletes. It further breaks down the draft numbers from the total number drafted versus how many student-athletes in the NCAA were selected in their respective sports draft. The last portion of the diagram shows the breakdown of percentages.

Figure 1

Estimated Probability of Competing in Professional Athletics



Estimated Probability of Competing in Professional Athletics

	NCAA Participants	Approximate # Draft Eligible	# Draft Picks	# NCAA Drafted	% NCAA to Major Pro	% NCAA to Total Pro
Baseball	36,011	8,002	1,217	791	9.9%	--
M Basketball	18,816	4,181	60	52	1.2%	21%
W Basketball	16,509	3,669	36	31	0.8%	6.9%
Football	73,712	16,380	254	254	1.6%	--
M Ice Hockey	4,323	961	217	71	7.4%	--

Note. Estimated Probability of Competing in Professional Athletics (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2020)

Since I presently work in athletics, I see student-athletes slowly wrestle with identity foreclosure, and it is in full effect almost every single day. Being a former student-athlete myself, I know exactly what these young men and women are experiencing and what kind of physical and emotional toll it can take on someone. I believe we have done them a complete disservice

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

when they leave. Student-athletes are exploited for their athletic talent and ability to generate revenue. Yet, in most cases, when they walk across the stage, they are forgotten about, and the attention of key athletic stakeholders turns to the next student-athletes coming in. I believe higher education institutions (HEI) have done them a disservice with the aforementioned “next person up” mentality. A driving question is: How can HEIs best prepare student-athletes to be valuable contributing members of society? In a rapidly changing world climate, they must acquire skills, in addition to just those of their sport, which can carry them to success off their respective playing fields or courts. I want to be a beacon of change through this research study, to find ways to prepare support services offices and staff to aid students in their holistic development. The challenge we all face is preparing students for the real world during their time as student-athletes. The opportunities for internships, jobs, and shadowing opportunities are very limited since practice and games take precedence. The goal should be for student-athletes to have more answers than questions when they graduate, but that, unfortunately, is not the case. Real-world experience can turn those questions into answers and ultimately help student-athletes be more equipped for professional life. Student success is paramount and challenging them to dive into their identities can be the first step down the road of overall success.

Student-Athlete Identity

The moment student-athletes step foot onto a college campus, their whole life changes. The freedom they once had is gone, and the ability to get lost in the shuffle is no longer an option. Like all students, their identity is forever shaped and morphed into what they make of it from that point forward. Student-athletes face several unique challenges and struggles that are not encountered by a non-athletic regular person, or NARP. Studies have suggested that contributing to an athletic team in the intercollegiate setting places demands on the student-

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

athlete that far exceed those placed on a non-athletic student (Brown et al., 2000). Now more than ever, intentional conversations about identity development and career readiness must take place with student-athletes. The longer they wait, the more we are pitting student-athletes at a disadvantage. Funneling back into normal life can be challenging. According to Grove et al. (1997), during identity assessments of student-athletes, it was discovered that individuals with a high athletic identity at the time they left their sport experienced an increased level of emotional adjustment difficulties. Ultimately, what students do during their first few semesters in college sets the stage for a pattern of behavior moving throughout their time on campus. There are outliers that make systemic changes to aid in their development, but that is why it is crucial that support services are put in place to assist students as they go through their developmental processes.

Support services can aid students in implementing strategies that provide relief for them as they encounter the many challenges that go into their identity development process. It is apparent through literature reviews that as individuals become more invested in their sport, they, in turn, take on a more robust athletic identity during their playing careers and thus develop a self-concept that goes no further than the athlete role (Grove et al., 1997). That is a scary place for student-athletes as their overall identity development becomes stagnant and stunted. Yes, their athletic identity may flourish, but the other parts that make up their identity do not. There is little to no progress in developing who they are outside their sport, and thus, they become close-minded to the outside world. A person with such a constricted view may experience severe negative challenges and emotions when the loss of self-identity following athletic retirement occurs and may put themselves at a severe disadvantage regarding career readiness. Because this transition can be so harsh, it creates a perplexing struggle for student-athletes to redefine who

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

they truly are. Such a narrow focus on their athletic development makes it hard to think of anything else. The role of the support services team is to continue to drop little gems that challenge student-athletes' ways of thinking to have them think of life beyond their sport. Too often, when asked by support services personnel "What is your goal?" student-athletes answer "the league," which on the surface is a near-sided, instant gratification answer. What some student-athletes fail to realize is there are millions of other student-athletes with the same dream.

For some student-athletes, their sport may be the only thing they have held onto in their life and is the primary skill that brought them to their specific institution. The challenge of changing student-athletes' mindset is having to break down walls that may have been up since they started the sport. When trying to take on that task, you run the risk of students pulling back and being resistant, thus negatively impacting their college experience. According to Dweck et al. (1995), "The helpless response pattern, by contrast, is characterized by negative self-judgments, along with negative affect, a lack of persistence, and a performance decrement" (p. 274). There is no problem with dreaming big and reaching for the stars, but it is also important for educators to dare students to think of what a college degree can do for them. The game they play could change them forever, but it is important for student-athletes to realize they must take more away from the game than it takes from them. Support services are met with challenges when having critical conversations regarding sport versus the real world, but the conversations must be had to have student-athletes start thinking about what they can do with their degree.

Significance of Project

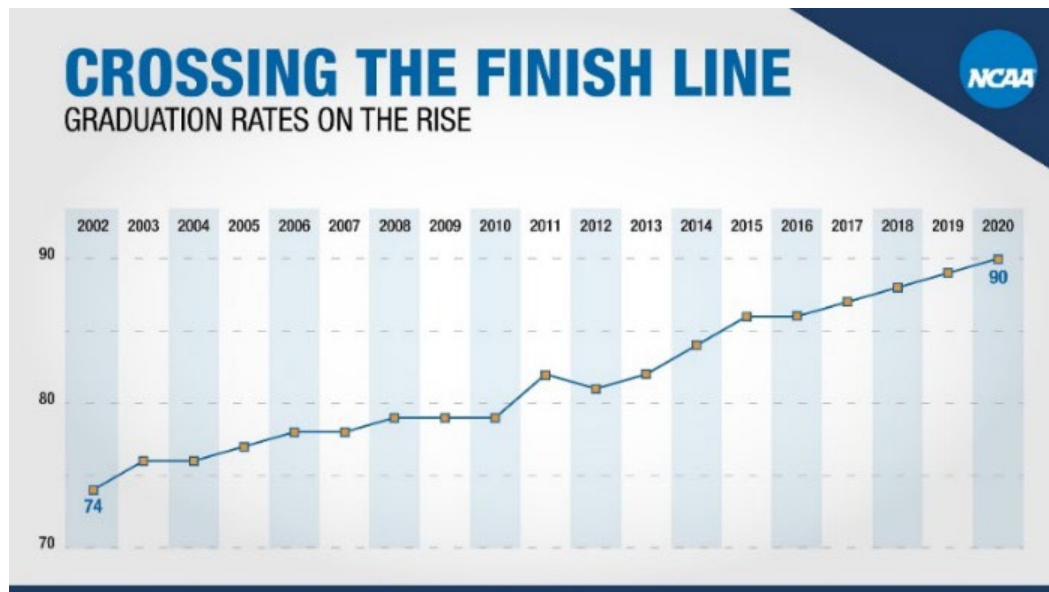
According to the Next College Student Athlete webpage and the NCAA, there are 351 Division I schools, 308 Division II schools, and 443 Division III schools (Next College Student Athlete, 2020). To put that into perspective, 176,000 student-athletes participate at the Division I

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

level, while a little more than 118,000 compete between the Division II and III levels. Each Division has a unique intensity level for its student-athletes, ranging from the sport being a complete lifestyle to having a more balanced approach between academia and sport. No matter the level, Division I, being the most strenuous, down to Division III that is more well-rounded, student-athletes face identity foreclosure during some point in their athletic and academic journey. There are some extremely gifted student-athletes who move on to compete at the professional level, but even those athletes inevitably and eventually reach their identity foreclosure point. The significance behind this study is what can be done to prepare student-athletes for life after their sport. According to the NCAA website, nine out of 10 student-athletes who started college in 2013 earned degrees (Hosick, 2020). The figure below shows the rise in graduation rates for student-athletes.

Figure 2

Division I College Athletes Reach 90% Graduation Rate



Note. Graduation Rates on the Rise (Hosick, 2020)

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

The question remains, how prepared are student-athletes for the real world? The verdict is still out on that question, but it can be challenging to graduate as a student-athlete in today's current climate. Preparation is critical to their career success, because whether in college or post-college, they will be faced with the harsh reality of no longer having their sport for support. This needs to be examined and studied for the benefit of future student-athlete success and to provide colleges and universities key insight on what programs need to be implemented, developed, or strengthened to provide value to the student-athlete experience.

Project Goals

Student-athletes dedicate most of their lives to playing a sport and thus have their identity tied directly to it. My question is one that has been an issue for college athletes for a long time, and it is two parts: What causes a student-athlete to leave their sport and experience identity foreclosure, and how can we best support them? What academic and professional support services are needed for Division I revenue-generating sport student-athletes to make for an easier transition post sport? The overall goal of this capstone project was to prepare a professional presentation on how to best support student-athletes through support services. These can be new support services that can be implemented or current ones that need to be bolstered. Athletic and support personnel can use the findings from this study to better the support services landscape for future student-athletes. Furthermore, I can disseminate this knowledge through presentations at professional conferences to further shed light on identity foreclosure within the student-athlete population.

What Student-Athletes Report

Research confirms that those athletes who continue to preserve their athletic identity up to the point of retirement from their sport are susceptible to career transition difficulties (Grove

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

et al., 1997). Furthermore, “a strong and exclusive athletic identity at retirement was found to be associated with increased reliance on denial following retirement” (p. 199). Student-athletes, some if not all, in fact, struggle to transition out of athletics and find their true identity once their sport is no longer a part of their being. During the time student-athletes participate in collegiate athletics, they are truly married to their sports, but with that said, through firsthand conversations, I can attest that they do, in fact, want time to develop the other skills necessary for success in the real world. More often than not, student-athletes leave their respective schools ill-prepared to tackle non-athletic life. Student-athletes need a professional development space that focuses on their holistic development outside their sport. According to research, there is evidence to suggest that identity foreclosure among college athletes includes a lack of autonomy and career planning as well as low morale development (Oregon, 2010). Resources are necessary to assist student-athletes with their development in those key areas. There is a need for a multi-method approach when working with student-athletes, where they can be provided a solid empirical foundation for the development of career transition programs and help practitioners advise athletes about effective ways of coping with the transition and or retirement from their particular sport. This will begin the process of stimulating the student-athlete enough that they begin to think outside their athletic box.

What Student-Athletes Need

Student needs continue to evolve each and every semester, yet one thing remains consistent: resources. Student-athletes need professional growth resources just like they need athletic resources. The disconnect comes from the amount of attention shown to athletics, leaving professional development as an afterthought in the grand scheme of things. Attention does need to be drawn to this subject matter to adequately provide student-athletes the

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

opportunity to gain real-world experience they can take with them for future endeavors. The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (2005) recommended for athletic academic support to become incorporated within the academic support services currently accessible to other students to limit the stresses put on athletic support staff to lessen academic hurdles for student-athletes costing the overall development of student-athletes' career goals. In addition to academic support, student-athletes also need career support, mental health support, and much more.

Conceptual Framework

The current study was grounded in the student-development theory to bridge the relationship gap between STUDENT and ATHLETE. The phenomenon of identity foreclosure is defined in the research as an individual who has failed to thoughtfully investigate other available roles and has made a premature, serious commitment to a socially prescribed role (Miller & Kerr, 2003). Figure 3 and Figure 4 below paint a clear picture of student-athlete development and the process one may go through when being a student-athlete. In this study, special emphasis was centered on factors that influence student-athlete development both during and after their time as a student-athlete through the timeline of a student-athlete from the time they play a collegiate sport until the time they must give it up. In some cases, student-athletes are good enough to keep playing but do not, for a myriad of reasons. This study examined extenuating circumstances that cause a student-athlete to leave the sport they once loved. Those circumstances include, but are not limited to, injury, graduation, and retirement.

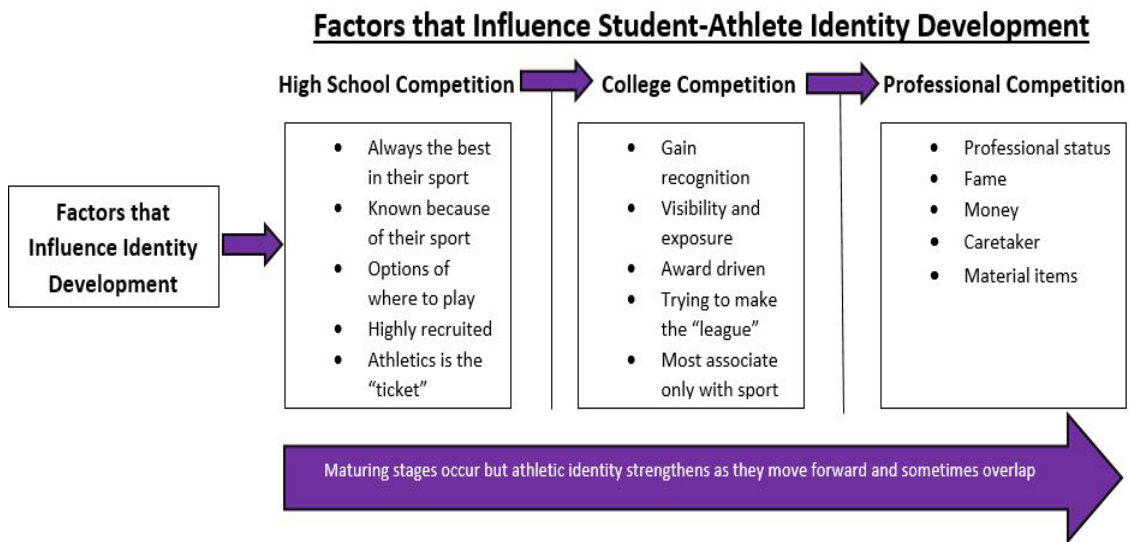
Furthermore, the overall student experience was considered, regarding how student-athletes experience and respond to their identity foreclosure process. Figure 3 is a flow chart from high school to professional life, as developed from the literature, and created to identify factors that influence identity development in student-athletes. This capstone study was designed

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

to develop information to pass along to mid-level athletic administration to foster better student-athlete development.

Figure 3

Factors that Influence Student-Athlete Identity Development



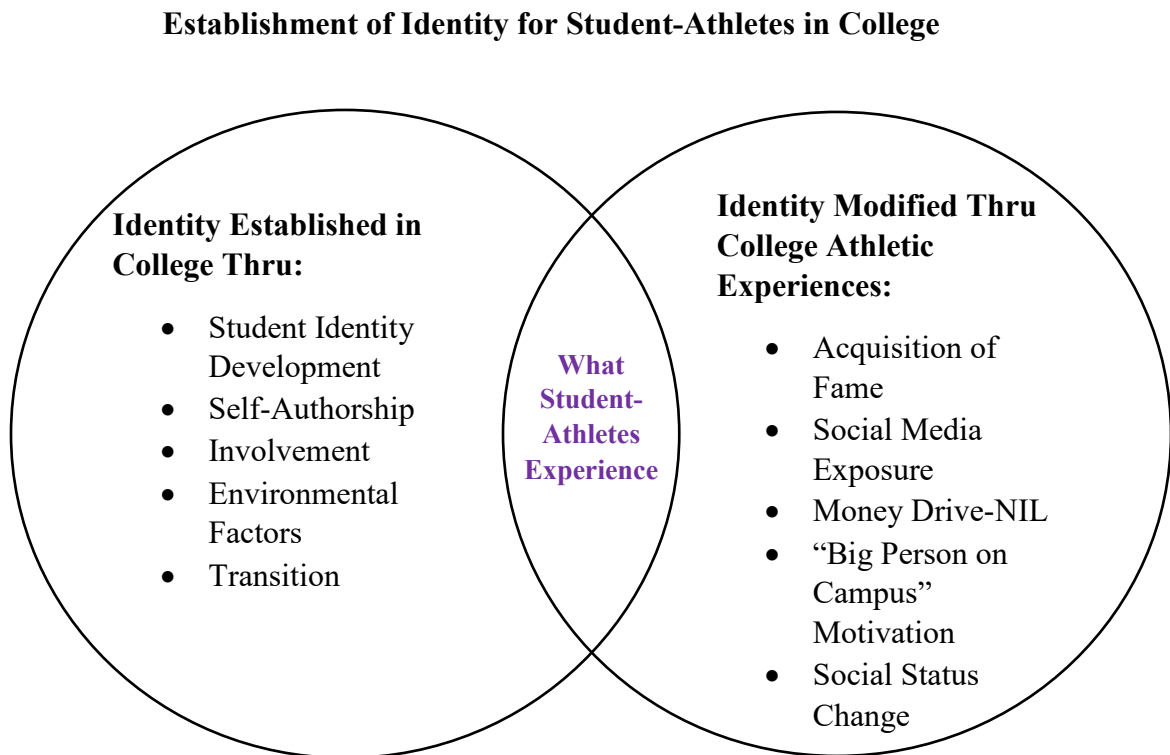
Most student-athletes end their career at the collegiate level. In the 2001 NFL draft, there were 254 draft picks selected, all of whom were former NCAA players. Division 1 FBS had 238, Division 1 FCS had 11, and Division II had 5. The NCAA to major pro figure is calculated using those data. Furthermore, the 2019 NCAA men's basketball draft consists of these facts. There were 60 draft slots, and 52 went to NCAA players (seven others chosen were international players not attending U.S. colleges, and one spent a season at a prep school). The percentage of NCAA to Major Pro is calculated using the 52 NCAA selections (calculated as $[52/4,181=1.2\%]$). Since 2009, 11 international players have been drafted on average each year. Data indicate that a small percentage of Division I student-athletes go pro in something other

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

than their sport (NCAA, 2020). Those data led me to study what we can do to help the other 98% that do not make it. These numbers, along with Figure 1, are real facts and statistics student-athletes face every single year. What happens to those who do not make it?

Figure 4

Establishment of Identity for Student-Athletes in College



The above diagram is a visual explaining the concept of student-athlete development and maturation during their time at a college or university. They change immensely from freshmen to senior year, which makes support services vital to their overall growth as young men and women. Figure 3 and 4 are designed to project the identity development and formation of student-athletes. The things student-athletes experience during their time from high school to the

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

professional ranks shape them into who they are. The identity foreclosure process is not noted in these diagrams since it can truly happen anywhere and anytime throughout their time as an athlete. Both figures serve a purpose to contribute to the overall conceptual framework. Figure 3 focuses on the holistic view starting with high school, while Figure 4 narrows in on the college spectrum.

Furthermore, student development and identity foreclosure meld together for student-athletes. That process happens by the blending of two forces that happen during their time on a college campus. The student-athlete overall development, and in some cases lack thereof, can pose a challenge when facing identity foreclosure. In some instances, everything is done for student-athletes with little development of self-efficacy so when identity foreclosure occurs, they are left with little ability to face challenges on their own. The public perceives the student-athlete experience a lot differently than what actually occurs.

Definition of Terms

- NARP means non-athletic regular person. It is a simple way for student-athletes to describe those students on campus who are not on a sports team.
- Non-revenue sport is a sport at a specific university that does not generate any immediate revenue from spectators of their particular sport.
- Non-Scholarship student-athlete is one who walks on and does not receive any aid from athletic scholarships.
- Power 65 Schools are those in the major conferences that make up Division I.
- Power Five Conferences are Big 10, Big 12, ACC, SEC, and PAC 12.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

- Revenue-generating sport is defined as an athletic program that can report that a large portion of its operating budget comes directly from revenue by the sport.
- Scholarship student-athlete is one who receives direct aid from athletic scholarships.
- Student-athletes are defined as those who compete in intercollegiate athletics.

Conclusion

The overall goal for this study was that the results will be used to better the athletic world for future student-athletes and begin to start conversations regarding student-athlete development and preparation for post-competition life sooner during their journey as student-athletes. The results and information gathered from this capstone study will be presented to athletic personnel to challenge them to think about what support services need to be strengthened and/or developed to help student-athletes transition better into non-athletic life. The challenge as educators is how we help students begin to view themselves as accountable for their career path, rather than hoping it all comes together by luck. The impactful programs that athletic departments have today can shape a student-athlete's tomorrow. This study was designed to provide results that are a stimulus for change and challenge athletic programs to reshape the way they think of student-athletes and how student-athletes mature and develop during their time at their institution. Student-athlete development stretches far behind their respective playing arenas. Instead, there should be a supreme focus on what student-athletes are doing to prepare for the real world. Often, they are left in the dark once identity foreclosure hits, and there is a need for a study to hear what student-athletes have to say and how we can better support them during their time on our campuses. The project was centered on identity foreclosure and what support services need to be in place to assist student-athletes during that transitional time. The overall deliverable is in the form of a professional presentation to mid-level administration.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Identity Formation

Students in college settings face a myriad of experiences that ultimately shape who they are as young adults. Those experiences they encounter begin to form who they are as individuals in the future and as adults, as well as form their decision-making process in future situations. Peter Kaufman (2014) wrote that we must begin to recognize college as a social process and examine students' identity formation from a sociological perspective. In this instance, it can be true that researchers must examine all lenses when looking at the identity formation and development of college students, not just on the psychological side. Identity development for college students comes a lot from the formation of symbolic interactions with peers. Charon (2009) defined the term "symbolic interaction" as a theoretical perspective within sociology that focuses predominately on the interactional process of social life (p. 189).

Furthermore, this interaction takes place in many forms, from human conduct to meaningful dialogue and action. College students, as they go through their years, begin to embrace who they are and form a complete picture of themselves in the large social world (Kaufman, 2014). Real-world experiences in college shape who college students ultimately become because, in today's higher education sector, they spend more time out of the classroom than they do in it. Kaufman stated: "A prerequisite to identity formation is locating oneself within a social group and, more importantly, internalizing the dispositions of that group" (p. 37). Whether a regular student or a student-athlete, identity formation is still one of the most significant factors involved in the college experience. College is a vital social site where identity development occurs, and students experience unique developmental stages, from teenagers to

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

young adults to adults. As educators and researchers, it is important to remember that the university setting is not just a space for intellectual development and advancement. It can be an exceptional mechanism where students can construct a sense of self. Students in college all have distinctive motivational factors that drive them to construct a certain identity that will boost them into the future, so that is something that faculty and staff members must consider. Ethnographers have long studied “social interaction, the social construction of reality, and the production or reproduction of shared norms—all building blocks for a student’s identity formation” (p. 40). Building blocks create who the person becomes when they leave the college and university setting.

Besides real-world experiences outside the classroom, identity development does take shape during the interactions in the classroom as well. Faculty and staff interactions, whether during a professor’s office hours, student support centers, or many other places, are a hub for formation. Students are challenged every day by faculty and staff to break out of their comfort zone, which causes them to grow and form a new version of themselves. There needs to be even more emphasis placed on identity formation within college students for educators to grasp this concept truly. Notably, comprehending and grasping the reality of identity formation requires educators, parents, employers, and students to understand that students long for and require more education than just knowledge from a textbook. Simply put, education needs to promote the development of students’ overall identities: self-knowledge, values, goals, orientation, and skills for personal and social transformation that ultimately would help in handling the swift changes that characterize life in a rapidly changing social milieu (Brophy, 2009; Flum & Kaplan 2006; Harrell-Levy & Kerpeleman, 2010). Of course, identity formation never stops as one matures through life, but one can argue that there is no more meaningful time in one’s life than during

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

their college years. Higher education professionals must take the opportunity to shape young minds.

Identity Foreclosure

Student-athletes come to college during a pivotal point in their lives, where intersectionality occurs. Intersectionality is defined as the interaction between systems of oppression (Weldon, 2008, p. 193). Ignoring the divergent experiences of student-athletes is simply being naive to the situation. There is a merger of all distinct types of identities that they are forming, such as gender identification, race, class, sexual orientation, etc. These young adults are encountering a different way of thinking than they are used to. The overall holistic development and maturity of a student-athlete are unique to that individual. I once heard it said, “You can stand a lot longer on a stack of books than you can a sports ball,” and that could not be truer for collegiate student-athletes. There are genuinely three distinct phases of identity for college student-athletes: athletic, academic, and foreclosure. All three are distinctive in themselves, but collectively, they shape their experience and who they are as individuals, both during and after their sport. I will take a deeper dive into these types of identities and how they directly correlate with career development.

When developing an athletic identity, it becomes much easier for student-athletes to venture down that road because it is something they are accustomed to. Similar to ego-identity, athletic identity for student-athletes is the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role (Brown et al., 2000). Therefore, one of the most important things to understand when working with student-athletes in their career decision-making process is their *why*. Understanding what and how they identify and what is important to them allows support service staff members to know how to advise them. The literature does indicate that student-athletes who

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

identify more strappingly with their athletic role may be less likely to explore other careers, educational opportunities, and lifestyle options because of their intensive involvement in sports. This makes it challenging to ask intrusive questions that may push student-athletes out of their athletic comfort zone and think about life after their sport.

Furthermore, a strong athletic identity is related to identity foreclosure and lower career maturity, which pose serious issues for student-athletes once their sport is taken away from them (Brown et al., 2000, p. 54). At their core, student-athletes want to have ultimate control of their identity and the decisions that shape said identity. Often, student-athletes have very little control of what goes on in their lives if they play at a Power Five institution. It is vital when working with student-athletes during their athletic identity process and subsequent career decision-making to let them ultimately make the decisions they feel are best for their future. Ego identity is a term that is usually associated with student-athletes because it focuses on who they are and how they act on that sense of self. Because most student-athletes have a large ego, it is vital to allow them to have the ability to establish a sense of control over their lives. They can express a sense of self-assurance in their ability to achieve career decision-making tasks. This is critical and crucial to their vocational planning and subsequent career pursuits.

What it all comes down to is confidence. Student-athletes' confidence in their sport allows them to shine in their athletic identity realm. Still, they must take that same confidence and belief when making career decisions and trust that career decisions are within their control (Brown et al., 2000). At their core, they are young adults who have an incredible gift to play a sport, but they still need support along their journey of defining who they are and what they want to become.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

One of the most taxing things student-athletes face is balancing their academic life with their sport. Many Division I student-athletes come to college with poor educational backgrounds, making it a rather tough transition and an uphill battle from day one. Hollis discussed the fact that a large number of underprepared students more often times than not come “from minority groups or lower socioeconomic backgrounds . . . data reveals that student-athletes who attend private college enter college with stronger high school quality point averages than those student-athletes who attend public college” (2001, p. 280). The most challenging part for a student-athlete, as it relates to their academic identity, is staying engaged through the entire four-year process. According to Comeaux and Harrison (2011), it seems as though first-year student-athletes benefit similarly from sound engagement practices as do their non-athletic peers. They must manage dual roles in that they have to be exceptional athletes while at the same time being good students. Although society makes it appear as though student-athletes never go to class, which in some cases is true, these young men and women dedicate their time to being great at both. Student-athletes’ increased campus involvement can improve their personal and educational growth and may also disrupt the prevalent ideological thoughts that coaching demands and the athletic subculture limit their commitment to activities on college campuses. The NCAA does not make it easy to be a student-athlete but does have specific metrics students must meet at the end of each year to remain eligible for competition. Although a test, it is “possible that student-athletes may identify themselves primarily as students who are engaged in athletics (student-athletes), or as athletes who are pursuing an academic degree (athlete-student), or both” (Yukhymenko–Lescroart, 2014, p. 89). It all depends on what the student-athletes value and in what they invest their time. This tag in their heads does create the very tenant of identity development. Having these identities simultaneously forces student-athletes to wear many

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

different hats. This causes an internal struggle of who they are and how they want to be viewed by society.

Yukhymenko–Lescroart (2014) classified student-athletes and their academic identity into four categories: first, scholar-athletes, who are committed to academic and athletic roles. The second and third types, pure scholars, and pure athletes, are only committed to one of the roles. The fourth type includes student-athletes who do not commit to these roles. As you walk through any residence hall or athletic complex, it is rather apparent that student-athletes embody these four categories. No matter where student-athletes are along the continuum of these categories, they still heavily emphasize how people will remember them. Although student-athletes must manage all different identities, what it comes down to when developing their academic identity is what they want to gain from this not-athletically-related experience. This is a challenging message to get across, so student-athletes stick with the athletic part of their identity, but they are so much more than that. Unfortunately, the athletic culture creates a climate that encourages prioritizing athletics over academics and a culture that fosters an environment in which individual identity development can be hindered, along with the stunting of personal and social development (Despres et al., 2008). Identities can fluctuate for most people, depending on the setting and environment. Student-athletes can have a deeper connection with their athletic identity during their competition seasons. When the semester changes over, they have a more academic identity during peak times of the academic year (Yukhymenko–Lescroart, 2014). As anyone can see, there is a distinctive tussle for student-athletes related to their academic identity because most do not come to college for that. Yet, to remain eligible, they must make the grades.

A question that arises every semester when working in higher education is how to keep students engaged in the classroom. The concept of help and assistance should consider all

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

students in the classrooms to aid in the overall student development. Student-athletes do face unique challenges when walking into a classroom. To elude further difficulties and barriers, it is imperative to explore and implement strategies for reducing the potential adverse effect of the label student-athlete' on college athletes (Stone et al., 2012). As mentioned previously, that title carries much weight.

Collaboration with campus partners is critical to the development of student-athletes. Individuals may perceive student-athletes in a certain way, when in most cases it is not always the reality of the situation. Research illustrates that “educating a campus about the true academic determination and success of college athletes and creating educational programs that help college athletes deflect the negative stereotypes hold promise for eliminating these responses” (Stone et al., 2012, p. 106). Eventually, student-athletes will have to hang up their uniforms and shoes and look at themselves in the mirror, being fully vulnerable, and ask themselves Who am I and What do I want to do now.

Identity foreclosure can be a humbling experience and shake anyone to their core. Identity foreclosure takes place when a student-athlete becomes comfortable with one identity and thus shuts off any further exploration of other identities in their lives; this often happens as a defense mechanism to avoid role conflict (Whipple, 2009). Student-athletes do this to avoid role conflicts and make it easy on themselves by adopting one singular home role. There is still no clear-cut relationship between identity foreclosure and athletic identity, yet one can infer that there still is a connection that they somehow share. Student-athletes' overall development plays a vital role in their career development, both athletically and academically. There would be a happy blend and marriage between the two in a perfect world that allows the student-athlete to excel both on and off the field.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

It is abundantly clear that the pressures and unique challenges student-athletes face are entirely different than what non-athletic students encounter. That is not to say non-student-athletes do not experience issues, but as stated above, the literature suggests an ever-present intrinsic battle that student-athletes must face head-on. Although some avoid it, to fully develop, they must be able to navigate it appropriately and continue to move forward for their athletic and academic identity development and career development. While regular students can obtain internships in the summer, student-athletes practice their craft. This alone puts them at a severe disadvantage and causes them to do more just to remain competitive. Success can no longer simply be defined as a first day or making a three-pointer; instead, success needs to be defined as graduation, career readiness, and students' holistic development.

The Commitment to the Game

For a student-athlete, the last play of their career is frequently the most memorable and impactful. That is the moment when they realize that the result of investing years and years of hard work is now over. According to Schlossberg (1981), a transition is defined as an event that causes an alteration in assumptions about the overall perception of oneself and society and necessitates an equivalent modification in one's behavior and relationships. What support systems are set up to help with this transition? Schlossberg et al. (1995) recognized four significant factors influencing an individual's ability to cope with transition: the situation, the self, support, and strategies. Herein lies the problem. Since student-athletes dedicate most of their lives to playing their sport and thus have their identity tied directly to it, the question remains: What support services need to be developed and/or implemented to provide them with a deeper level of support to prepare them for life after their sport? According to Murphy et al. (1996), "individuals who make commitments to roles without engaging in exploratory behavior

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

are said to be in a state of identity foreclosure” (p. 241). Now more than ever, being a collegiate athlete has such unique challenges that it is nearly unimaginable how these young students manage and balance all the pressures that come with being a gifted athlete.

Student-athletes grace the halls of colleges and universities that range from Division I to Division III. Yet, no matter the level of notoriety, the fact remains that these student-athletes still dedicate most of their lives to playing a sport and thus have their identity tied to it directly. According to Despres et al. (2008), many student-athletes have “unrealistic expectations regarding their athletic potential because they perceive sports to be a viable avenue to fame and fortune . . . which in turn undermines the pursuit of educational goals and, ultimately, results in severe disenchantment” (p. 208). What is their return on that investment while investing all that time and effort for four years? The problem presented is apparent: Are student-athletes leaving college adequately prepared to take on the real world? If not, then why and what can we, as educators, be doing better to support them during this transition? Unfortunately, since their time is dedicated to one sport, they lose track and sight of life after it. The transitional phase of any student’s career out of college can be challenging. Still, several studies have suggested that specific physical and psychological demands of intercollegiate athletics, combined with the controlling nature of an athletic system, may segregate athletes from typical collegiate activities and restrict their holistic developmental opportunities (Murphy et al., 1996). Currently, the college athletic landscape is money-driven, which bleeds over into the student-athletes and only fuels the fire to play professionally and try to reach the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Time Constraints for Student-Athletes

The term *competitive* is defined as a situation in which a group of individuals tries to be more successful at something than others, thus causing them to have a strong desire to be the best

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

in said activity. Student-athletes come to college and university campuses at the age of 17 or 18 and are immediately enthralled in the competition of college athletics and college academics. In some cases, certain student-athletes sit alongside students in classes who may have doubled their SAT or ACT scores. Imagine that feeling on day one. The adjustment from high school to college can be challenging, but couple it with balancing dual roles, and one can see how overwhelming it can genuinely be. The achievement gap is so wide on so many levels that student-athletes are trying to adjust to a multitude of different environmental factors all at the same time. The most significant adjustment for student-athletes is the lack of time for anything other than their sport. In a sense, they feel owned by their sport. However, the argument is that they are receiving free education, but that is not always the case. Since the student-athlete population is deemed at-risk, it is essential to draw attention to their overall success, not just in their first year but in subsequent years at their home institution. Coaches' salaries hinge on wins and losses. Still, support services offices should be on the other side of the aisle, working collaboratively with students to foster their overall development when they are not practicing or playing.

More than ever, there are watchful eyes on collegiate athletic programs to ensure guidelines, rules, regulations, and time constraints are followed accordingly. What gets lost in the shuffle is that these student-athletes, at their core, are still kids and want to be as normal as possible. The challenge is how to help them be normal when almost all the time they have is spent doing something athletic. Athletic departments need to be more aware of the overall time demands placed on student-athletes during their crucial periods of adjustment and incorporate early prevention programs to aid in the adjustment period (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). To their credit, the NCAA has tried to limit the amount of time student-athletes can be on their respective

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

playing field over the years and has incorporated the 8- and 20-hour rules. That means that student-athletes are supposed to spend no more than 20 hours per week for required athletic activities during their playing season and 8 hours per week during their offseason.

Furthermore, student-athlete activities are now classified under three main pillars: Countable Athletically-Related Activities (CARA), Required Athletically-Related Activities (RARA), and Voluntary Athletically-Related Activities (VARA), which allow for athletic compliance offices to monitor obedience to rules put forth by the NCAA (NCAA, 2020). The NCAA implemented the student-athlete Time Management Plan (TMP) to ensure all parties are on the same page. This safeguards all stakeholders (coaches, administrators, student-athletes, trainers, etc.) by forcing a collaborative approach when building schedules. This also provides more flexibility and voice for student-athletes regarding their most prized possession, that of time. It must be understood that not all collegiate programs adhere to the guidelines listed above, and therein lies the challenge. Spending 20-40 hours per week with their sport sets students up for success in only one area of their life, which is that sport. The restraints and obligations these student-athletes face are some of the biggest challenges, but it is something that must be addressed. How are student-athletes preparing for life outside of their sport when all they are doing is their sport? Our job is to help them navigate college athletics and use the gift they have been given to their benefit.

Student-Development Theories

This study focused on four distinct theories to inform the research on student-athlete identity development. Understanding the applicable theories that touch on identity development allows for a greater understanding of the student-athlete.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Chickering's Theory

Chickering's theory of student development provides a good framework to understand student-athlete development. Chickering classified student development into seven vectors and provided key evidence of what students experience in each one of those vectors. As it is codified, students must go through tasks while developing their identity. Chickering described these tasks as developmental projects that each student encounters for them to develop. Identity development does not happen overnight; instead, it takes repeated exposure for a student to have the appropriate developmental environments necessary for change (Chickering, 1969).

The seven vectors proposed by Chickering are: developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing a purpose, and establishing integrity. The measurement of this theory centers on how a student moves and develops through these seven vectors (Stankey, 2018). This theory focuses on helping students answer the ever-present question of Who am I? According to Chickering, this question is of supreme importance and poignancy during the college years (Chickering, 1969). Young students' overall identity development and maturity level do not come without challenges. How do you manage your emotions or develop freedom, especially as a student-athlete? How can you make meaningful and lasting interpersonal relationships when the only people you hang out with are other student-athletes? Although elementary, all these questions pose challenges to student-athletes, as described by Chickering's vectors. Yet, once students realize they are making positive strides in some area, they can live with certain uncertainties that exist in the adult world and adapt to society's rules, so they become personally meaningful.

The identity formation process may take longer for student-athletes; a possible reason is that they must be more intentional about working their way through the process. More often than

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

not, whether it be through conversations or actions, intentionality is the key to overall development. There are two vectors that student-athletes might move through more easily than other students: establishing identity and developing purpose. When student-athletes begin their college career, a huge part of their identity is already in place for them. Their purpose in their mind is set, that of making the professional ranks. The number on their jersey is a large part of their identity. Chickering (1969), in vector four, suggested that age-old question of Who Am I? For student-athletes, the answer to that question is almost always, an athlete. A few vectors are more critical for student-athletes to prepare for life after sports. Developing competence and autonomy are key when beginning a journey into the real world. Student-athletes, in some instances, are solely dependent on people, places, and things to take care of them. Some student-athletes lack the independent nature needed to succeed in the real world. Lack of competence in areas besides athletics puts them at severe disadvantages in some instances. The development in these areas may begin to strengthen their professional profile.

Astin's Theory

Astin's (1984) theory of involvement is another salient and applicable theory when studying student-athletes. The developmental stage of student-athletes' life starts with their involvement in their sport. The game they play has shaped them as people, and it plays the most vital role in who they are as individuals. Astin defined involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). That definition cannot be more spot on when you think of a student-athlete. All of their time and energy focus on an experience. Although it may not seem like it translates to the academic realm, Astin's theory connects the time a student puts into something to their overall development in a higher education setting.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Astin's (1984) theory, ultimately, challenges students to make an individual investment in their educational success, referring more to the student's conduct and their actions rather than feelings and opinions. Investment is something that a student-athlete will make; they just need to be engaged and invested in it. Student-athletes are programmed to be 100% on all the time but not sometimes from the academic realm. Therefore, investment in the academic area can lead to many positive results. Astin measured his involvement theory by having five basic assumptions: student development occurs by devoting significant physical and psychological energy to various activities; the overall involvement scale for a student is continuous and varying; student involvement has both quantitative and qualitative results; the more effort and passion a student puts toward becoming involved in activities, the greater return they will gain through their overall development; and lastly, student's overall academic success can be directly influenced by the amount of involvement and investment they have within their campus community.

The challenge for student-athletes of Astin's (1984) theory is being fully immersed in their campus culture while being a student-athlete. Involvement and investment are the keywords. Student-athletes invest in their sport, but how do educators continue to challenge them to become involved in their academics and co-curricular activities? As their behavior changes, acceptance by the student-athlete is also vital to their overall development. Through Astin's model, we know it makes a difference. Strayhorn (2008) explained how Astin's Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model was adapted to examine the relationships between students' progression, contributions, and learning atmospheres. This coincides with the student-athlete experience, including input from their prior experiences. Student-athletes have many existing characteristics that go into their input, from age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, to many more.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Their environment before college, both good and bad, shapes who they are when they step onto campus, and when they attend college, their involvement shapes their outcomes. Involvement includes academics, peer-to-peer, faculty, and athletics, leading to the overall cognitive output.

Magolda's Theory

Baxter Magolda (2008) put forth one of the most impactful student development theories that tie directly into student-athletes, that of self-authorship. Magolda explained that when a student becomes the author of their life, one has the aptitude to select one's overall beliefs and stand firm despite differing external viewpoints. One of the most challenging yet meaningful points in a student-athlete's life is when they take control of their life. It is almost as if they see the light bulb go off in their head and have that eye-opening experience. Instead of playing for everyone, they play for themselves; instead of going to class because they are required to, they go because they want to; instead of looking at their sport as their way out, they look at their books as the ticket to change their forever. Magolda further confirmed this observation when she stated that students can control their reactions when responding to events, which guides them to becoming more self-assured in their internal consciences, although they could not always regulate external events. Magolda's theory, at its core, measures identity development by the following phases and how students maneuver through them: following formulas, crossroads, becoming the author of one's life, and internal foundation.

How are student-athletes challenged to become the author of their own lives? During their time at a university, they are rarely challenged outside their sport to be an active member and participant in their educational journey. The awe-inspiring moments come when they realize that opening a book opens endless possibilities. Magolda's (2008) charge for students was to become empowered and take control of their lives. It is hard for student-athletes to do that

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

because their whole four years are, for the most part, scripted for them. Magolda stated that young adults uncovered the three main factors: "trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments" (Magolda, 2008, p. 269). It is crucial that they inevitably end their time as student-athletes feeling more grounded in who they are, their beliefs, and what they will stand for.

Schlossberg's Theory

Students encounter many unique challenges when transitioning to college life. It is a new environment, but they must adjust to school, being away from home, and many other things that arise during their time at a university. Student-athletes not only face all those transitions, but they must couple that with being another four-star recruit in a pool of 40 others and figuring out who they are in the academic and athletic world, to name a few. Schlossberg's (1981) theory puts forth major factors that influence a person's ability to cope throughout a transition. As explained by Bailey-Taylor (2009), Schlossberg defined a transition as any event or non-event that results in a changed relationship, routine, assumption, or role. For student-athletes, a transition can be a trigger or timing of a situation, a loss of control, a role change, or specific stresses during their time on a college campus. Schlossberg (1981) quantified her theory by focusing on four aspects of a transition and how individuals handle that situation: situation, self, support, and strategies. Powers (2010) stated that the "transition model allows practitioners to understand a student's needs through a structured approach to predicting, measuring, and modifying reactions to change" (p. 4). Schlossberg (1981) date stressed the importance of providing student-athletes the support necessary to flourish. They will encounter challenges, but how they respond and what support they receive are crucial to their success. According to Schlossberg, if students can master the four aspects, they will be able to tackle any transition that comes their way during their time

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

in college. When college students face a transition, they often go into a fight or flight mentality. This means a student has a physiological reaction to an event, and their body responds and prepares the body to either fight or flee. They must have support and proper strategies to take on all the many issues that may arise in their lives. Understanding themselves and being grounded in who they are is vital to their success.

Sanford's Theory

One of the foundational theories in student affairs is Sanford's (1966) challenge and support theory. Sanford explained that most learning experiences involve a unique balance between challenge and support. Moreover, students ultimately mature through lived internal or external challenges fostered by the collegiate environment (Stankey, 2018). There must be a proper balance of support during the challenges to help them navigate the situation. As stated in *Student Development in College*, if a student faces a mission that is too great and is not adequately prepared, that student may draw back, where they stop progressing and distance themselves from the challenge (Evans et al., 2010). The last piece of Sanford's (1966) model that he added later was the term readiness, which states that a student cannot grow unless they are ready. That means that for students and educators, consideration must be placed on the developmental process.

The college experience is one of the most significant growth periods of a student's life. The experiences student-athletes face may not always be enjoyable; some will have consequences associated with them but student-athletes can learn from each one. From being one of the 24 star recruits on the team to failing a biology class, student-athletes can learn from these challenges while having guidance along the way from support staff. Having guidance does help students, but ultimately, the student must internalize the learning. Reassurance by support staff

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

must be provided to student-athletes to remind them that seeking assistance and asking for help is okay. That can be the most challenging thing for a student-athlete to do. Still, when they do, it is essential for support services to offer enough assistance to prevent students from withdrawing, but not too much that it thwarts overall student growth and development (Evans et., 2010).

Intentional and respectful conversations must be had for the growth process to occur. The fostering of personal relationships and lending student-centered support is crucial in aiding student-athletes in navigating the challenges they face. Because athletic departments have such a high level of involvement, it truly allows support staff to be a beacon of light for student-athletes.

It is rather evident that student-athletes are a unique population and thus encounter things that not everyone does in their lifetime. Not everyone knows how it feels to have millions of people watching you on television and then the next day be expected to go to class and be normal. Student-athletes must have the support necessary to flourish, yet they must want to take the steps and journey down the road that leads to being uncomfortable because where comfortable ends, growth begins.

Student-Athlete Development

Environmental Theory

When holistically examining such highly competitive athletic programs and the strains they put on student-athletes, the totality of the experience must be questioned and whether student-athletes are gaining the most out of the four-to-five-year experience. Having such rigorous schedules causes student-athletes to have a difficult time transitioning. In most college athletic programs, “student-athletes schedule their classes and lab work around their workout schedules, rather than the other way around” (Curtis, 2006, p.1). Athletics is now a full-time job, something completely different than high school. Student-athletes experience unprecedented

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

pressures related to their athletic status, such as the widespread time demands, the loss of their star status that many had experienced throughout their lives, injuries, the possibility of being benched/red-shirted, and a plethora of other factors (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). So, the issue becomes, is the environment and culture conducive to student-athlete success from a social and emotional perspective? When considering the principles of environmental theory (readiness, challenge, and support), which further examine the relationship between the student-athlete and their environment, it is hard to find many positives that show their overall development outside of their sport. Readiness alludes to the internal process that comes with maturation and growth. Challenge refers to certain situations in which students are not yet equipped with the skill to cope with the problem. And lastly, support refers to the support and resources they must have to meet that challenge. When applying Sanford's theory to student-athletes there needs to be a proper balance between a student-athlete's environment and their overall support, which is crucial throughout their time as a collegiate student-athlete. Performance and development, both on and off the field, are just two factors in the overall totality of the student-athlete's environment.

Rodgers (2002) discussed educational environment and experiences students face by referencing John Dewey and his theory that educational experiences are a product of the fundamental principles of continuity and interaction. What is most important is the overall interaction between "the individual and their environment, which is defined as whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes and capacities to create the experience which is ultimately had" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 846). The student-athletes' environment ultimately shapes them as individuals each and every day. During their time on college campuses, it is challenging for student-athletes to leave their so-called bubble. Everything they know and are accustomed to is in the athletic realm. In the person-environment theory, people and

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

environments both have characteristic “personalities,” and people seek environments to express their strengths, values, and primary characteristics (Sergent & Sedlacek, 1990, p. 260). The maturation of a student-athlete, in some instances, is severely stunted by a lack of involvement in extracurricular activities that stimulate their mind to develop a more social and emotional level.

Ultimately, the environmental learning theory has a broader understanding that a student’s environment will inevitably shape their learning and behavior. Furthermore, in the same regard, a student’s behavior and learning are also reactions to their environment. The environment’s influence may be unconscious or unstated yet can be extremely powerful. The athletic environment affects and shapes every thread of the student-athlete’s character and mentality. From the social perspective, it is rather challenging for them to develop on that level because of a lack of exposure to the main campus and non-athletic students. Now, it can be said that it is a two-way street, which is correct. Student-athletes rarely want to branch out for personal security reasons. The environmental theory tells us that supporting students comes with a fine balance between stagnation and maximum growth. As the levels of challenge and support increase, there must be enough security and safety, so the student feels supported and has a resource, while at the same time, not too much to where disengagement occurs. They often feel a sense of refuge accepting their athletic role and are hard-pressed to engage in the self-exploration essential to social and identity formation, thus finding it challenging to redefine themselves when they leave their sport (Beamon, 2012).

Unfortunately, student-athletes have their growth delayed when they do nothing other than their sport. While one can argue that sports promote values, teamwork, character development, and dealing with failure, there are far more things that go into the college experience and student development. Students’ social identities are firmly planted, to a large

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

degree, in their roles as athletes. Social restriction plays a crucial role in the student-athlete experience. Research indicates that social identities for student-athletes are constructed almost exclusively by friendships with teammates and activities almost entirely within the context of athletic events (Miller & Kerr, 2003). This is where the root issue lies, limiting the social growth that these individuals face daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly.

The exclusivity of the student-athlete's time on a college campus ultimately stunts their growth and development from the social perspective. It is rather startling, especially during such a critical developmental point of their lives. The mentality for some student-athletes starts at the beginning of their first year when they come in with ambiguous or fictitious objectives and invest deeply in their athletic roles (Chen et al., 2010). I once was told that if "you tell me who your friends are, I will tell you who you are," and that cannot be truer for the social development of student-athletes. Plain and simple, most of the student-athletes are products of their environment. It is hard to break out of that cyclical mentality when you are solely grounded in one thing, and everyone else around you is grounded in the same thing. Student-athletes do not know what they do not know, and sometimes, they cannot manifest into anything else but athletes.

The person with a foreclosed identity neglects assessing their own internal needs and values and instead assumes a socially conventional role identity (Miller & Kerr, 2003). The role of an athlete sometimes comes at the cost of the student and the significant exploration they so richly deserve. The firm focus now should be on allowing and incorporating student-athletes into activities outside their sport to have those social settings to grow and learn. Now is the time to no longer let student-athletes be passengers in the car that drives their educational journey. Instead, educators must challenge them to be the drivers of their cars to better their future.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Emotional Development in Student-Athletes

Along the same lines as social development, student-athletes struggle with their emotional development for many of the same reasons. During my time working with student-athletes, there are instances where I have seen firsthand that they are unable to communicate and interact with faculty and staff because they never allow themselves the chance to do so. All they ever do is get yelled at by coaches and fade into the background during practice. The emotional toll sports take on an individual is almost impossible to measure, but it is somewhat visible when working with student-athletes daily. Due to a lack of emotional development in student-athletes, there is, now more than ever, a significant emphasis on mental health. Four of the most common mental health issues facing college athletes are “depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse” (Ryan et al., 2018, p. 68). Referrals to university counseling centers are becoming more prevalent, and subsequently, mental health cases continue to rise yearly. The pressure that everyone in athletics faces is palpable, but it is challenging to ask for help. Some of the obstacles that keep student-athletes from seeking help related to mental health are lack of time, fear of possible adverse reactions from coaches and administrators, and fear of experiencing personal discomfort. There is such a strong interest in winning, and thus the student-athletes must be tough and show the grit needed to be successful, rather than show weakness. Coaches, sports administrators, and other key stakeholders are unwilling to support non-sport co-curricular activities that would begin to dissolve student-athletes free time or distract them from their primary focus on their respective sport.

Additionally, with noteworthy time restraints and a belief that it is necessary to give maximum effort to their sport, student-athletes may be less willing and comfortable to seek various occupational and ideological options (Murphy et al., 1996). Because of the emphasis

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

placed on athletics in the money market known as the NCAA, the pressure continues to fall more and more on the student-athletes. Often, showing emotion in the athletic arena is a sign of weakness. No one wants to be labeled as weak-minded or soft. In most cases, athletes are taught not to show emotion unless it can be used to better their play because it signifies a flaw. Student-athletes have a unique connection with their coaches when they say things of that nature; one can say it is a relatively strong emotional connection. That emotional connection is then strengthened by a firm structure of activities, which causes a delay in the student-athlete “becoming comfortable with an independent state of mind because there is little emotional or physical space to develop that autonomy to do so” (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2002, p. 37). While student-athletes frequently have difficulty articulating and expressing those unique emotions they are feeling, educators are trying to create these safe spaces for student-athletes to express themselves.

Furthermore, having “negative attitudes toward help-seeking, student-athletes may also fear stigma and lack of knowledge when deciding to seek help for mental health concerns” (Ryan et al., 2018, p. 74). One must consider the amount of pressure these young adults face daily and the struggles they encounter with developing the trust to open up. The integration of social media has played a key role as well. The scrutiny these young adults face is almost unimaginable. There are numerous points of anxiety for student-athletes that stem from the evaluation by others, a lack of self-confidence, and unreasonable expectations (Hinkle, 1994). Although some student-athletes do not fully develop from the social and emotional perspective, growth still occurs.

Personal Growth within Student-Athletes

Most athletic programs invest in with their student-athletes, in some way, shape, or form, by offering support for their overall personal growth and development. This will look completely

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

different depending on the institution you visit, but at the heart of the matter is student-athlete development and what can be provided to ultimately prepare them for the real world. Throughout their time on the field or in the classroom, student-athletes are constantly shaping and morphing into what they will become as young professionals. But like any normal student, they face challenges and struggles and need help. For starters, student-athletes must be ready to encounter increased academic and athletic demands at the college level, which add unique stressors to their lives (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). It is imperative to draw attention to athletic departments' level of involvement and the support services they offer to help student-athletes during and after their athletic careers.

Preparing student-athletes for life after their sport is one of an athletic department's most beneficial things. By providing several unique resources, the athletic department assists student-athletes in their transition to non-athletic life. Student-athletes invest their time, energy, and well-being to play a sport for a university that supports them. It is essential to remember that retirement comes at a fairly early age, at which point the athlete must redefine their self and social identity (Beamon, 2012). Because the athletic department has such a high level of touchpoints with student-athletes, they can promote and execute programs that can enrich their experience. When it pertains to student-athlete programming, the main question is, do student-athletes have time to take advantage of these opportunities?

Each year, it becomes more challenging to have student-athletes think earlier about career readiness and decisions because most are set on playing professionally. As stated previously, most student-athletes do not make their respective professional league. The magnitude of the situation is serious as student-athletes find it harder to make career decisions. They serve to lose potential earnings, face underemployment, and develop poor attitudes toward early jobs (Burns

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

et al., 2013). Over the last 5 to 10 years, attention has been drawn more heavily to the stunting of student-athletes' career development and thus leading them down a poor road once they graduate. Because of that, countless colleges are offering unique workshops, tutoring, and advice through academic support services. By surrounding student-athletes with support services, the goal is to create a level of satisfaction and confidence with the services being provided. In the instance of athletics, over-involvement is a good thing for student-athletes. These young adults are equipped with academic advisors who help them plan classes and talk about what to do with a degree, their skills, interests, and abilities, and how that can manifest itself into a career. Most universities also have what is called Student-Athlete Development office. Their focus is nothing academic and nothing athletic, but everything else. They strive to get student-athletes involved in their local community and help them network with movers and shakers in their potential areas of interest.

Support services staff must have intentional conversations with student-athletes about life after their sport and the career that goes along with it. The resources are there when it comes to helping them expand their identities, but it all comes down to who chooses to benefit from them. Just as there is a commitment to their sport, there must be a commitment to career development because eventually, the jersey will have to be hung up. Holistic career development could allow student-athletes to develop a powerful sense of individuality and inventiveness and take part in growth ventures that require them to think as individuals, which is critical (Martens & Lee, 1998). Our duty as educators is to help student-athletes view themselves as accountable for their career path, rather than hoping it all comes together by luck. The impactful programs athletic departments have today can shape a student-athlete's tomorrow.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Support Services for Students

Student support services are intentional places and spaces that foster positive relationships between faculty, staff, and students, increasing the likelihood of student success. Student support services in colleges and universities look uniquely different at each institution and take on different forms for their respective students. From academic advising, disability support services, academic workshops, career centers, counseling, and much more, students can take advantage of these services to increase their retention, comfortability, and success rates. The overall transition can be challenging for almost every first-year student coming into college. Still, the more quickly students can get plugged into supportive communities, the better their chance of flourishing. According to Webber et al. (2013), “greater involvement can help students focus and synthesize thoughts, strengthen academic preparations, and ultimately develop a skill that earns academic benefits” (p. 608).

In a study in 2004 at California State University, San Marcos, Grant-Vallone et al. (2004) analyzed the effects of self-esteem, social support, and participation in student support service on students’ adjustment and commitment to college. The study found that programs such as educational opportunities, academic support, and faculty mentoring are very beneficial by allowing students to foster meaningful and impactful relationships that help them become more integrated into campus life. Care from faculty, staff, mentors, and counselors indeed play a vital role in a student’s attainment while on a college campus. According to the California State University study, students who become more immersed and involved in campus life and university programs are likely to experience a smoother and more positive conversion into the academic setting.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Additionally, Grant-Vallone et al. (2004) indicated that it is “essential for student support services programs to find ways of ensuring that their students participate in various social activities . . . and student support services should take proactive steps to increase the number of students they serve” (p. 272). Student support services create a sense of belonging for a student, thus hopefully preventing a sense of isolation, which some students feel when beginning their college journey. Inclusivity is what students long for, a feeling that someone cares about them, how they do, and their well-being; and someone to hold them accountable. That is what support services provide. The study results also showed that students who were better accustomed to campus life were more likely to be devoted to the objective of a college degree and more dedicated to their university. It is evident that student support services assist students with their matriculation through college, making the services vital for overall student development.

Colleges and universities are said to emphasize student support services to directly influence the retention and GPA of students who are considered at-risk. Most students feel overwhelmed and underprepared when they start college fresh out of high school, no matter where students come from. Rheinheimer and Mann (2000) stated that “academic support services can help underprepared or at-risk students not only catch up to but, in some cases, surpass their better-prepared counterparts” (p. 10). Another support service that is offered to students is a success planning course. This can be in the form of a first-year class, second-year rehabilitation class, or even a career planning course to support students in their educational journey. Tinto (1987) relayed that it is tremendously vital that colleges create an institutional environment of caring and belonging and have a general mission of instructing, supporting, and holding onto its students. A research study by Laskey and Hetzel (2011) from Cardinal Stritch University investigated the factors related to the retention of at-risk college students and how support

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

services benefit those starting the college journey. The researchers found that students deemed at-risk by university standards needed more support and encouragement to utilize academic support services. In current college settings, students identified as high priority tend to fade into the background when struggling and do not utilize available resources.

According to Laskey and Hetzel (2011), “it is the responsibility of institutions of higher education to continue to provide and expand support services, especially given the trend of underprepared college freshman, and to create a climate in which degree completion can become a reality ” (p. 41). In addition, it is crucial that student support services continue to be investigated and researched to provide students with the most meaningful programs and opportunities and optimize student achievement.

Student-athletes receive essentially the same support services as NARP students; the difference is that they receive it on a more concentrated level, generally in their respective athletic academic departments. This creates a unique dynamic for student-athletes, in essence, creating a further divide from that of the main campus. In some instances, it even causes student-athletes’ efficacy within their decision-making process. A study conducted by Burns et al. (2013) examined the relationship between evaluations of academic support services and student-athletes’ career decision-making self-efficacy. Athletic program leaders must be reminded that student-athletes are at a greater risk of having their academic and career development inhibited because of their sport, thus making workshops, tutoring, and guidance through academic support services crucial. There can be an inference made between the student-athletes who use academic support services and those who do not, but the Burns et al. study showed that “the relationship between satisfying academic support services and Career Decision Making and Self Efficacy was

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

greater for student-athletes with a more external locus of control and lower levels of general self-efficacy” (p. 165).

Athletics does, in most cases, create a bubble for student-athletes, making it challenging when they are forced into a larger culture on the main campus. This is not true for every student-athlete, but based on real-world experience, often student-athletes struggle to find their voice in larger groups since they are able to stay in their bubble in athletics. Student-athletes surround themselves with like-minded individuals who play the same sport and have very similar mentalities and goals, thus putting them at a disadvantage when they are challenged to be a part of the larger campus community.

Student-athletes face a plethora of challenges during their four to five years at an institution, but what are we really doing to support them through those different mini-journeys? It is said that “individual precollege characteristics are used in most broad student success models because they are likely to predict certain behaviors as well as academic success in college” (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011, p. 237). One of the most challenging conversations that can be had with student-athletes, especially in revenue-generating sports (i.e., football, basketball, and baseball), is the realization moment that they recognize they will not be playing at the next level. Once that takes place, attention turns to how to best support this student-athlete from the career space. The issue is that for the last three years, the student-athlete and support staff may have never touched on the subject of life without the sport.

Synthesis

It is important to dive further into how the theories relate to identity development and foreclosure for college students. Chickering’s (1969) examination of students’ identity development in higher education lays out the movement of students through the seven vectors.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

When a person cannot complete the tasks necessary to move to the next vector, the student must continue to repeat exposure to strengthen their development in that area. Repeat exposure allows students to have more chances to learn and grow to progress through the vectors. When a student goes through identity foreclosure, they may be stuck in a vector, stunting their developmental growth, and resulting in their continued search for exposure for growth.

Along the same lines, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory puts forth the Four S's (situation, self, support, strategies). It is important to consider how this can intertwine with the support services needed for students undergoing identity foreclosure. When looking at support services from the lens of those going through identity foreclosure, we must first think of the overall transition process and what students are leaving behind. Emphasis must also be placed on the type of support service, its function, and how we measure its effectiveness. We must also think of the student's situation, regarding the timing, duration, and stress they are under, as well as the personal and the demographic characteristics they possess. And lastly, we must emphasize the strategies we will put in place to help students cope. It is a unique blueprint that can be followed when developing support services.

Astin's (1984) theory of involvement suggests that individuals are shaped by their unique environment. It is important to stop and think that if the environment is solely athletics and is all the student-athletes know, then the outcomes will be infused with the culture, behavior, and values of said sport. Since college athletics is money-driven and athletic departments are the same, there is not a big emphasis on holistic student-athlete development. Their desired outcome is championships and television contracts instead of student development. The question remains: What happens when the environment the student-athlete has always known is gone? Being involved in the co-curricular experience has been a continuous one for them, making the identity

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

foreclosure experience even more challenging for collegiate student-athletes. Astin's theory is relevant for athletic departments as they begin to ask themselves the question: What environment are we creating?

If the overall environment is making great athletes and great young professionals, the desired outcome will follow. But until then, student-athletes will continue to face this struggle. Change the culture and emphasis and the outcomes will follow. Much can be learned from these theorists, not only on what students are going through but how we can support them. As one dives deeper into the theories, they hold the keys that can unlock the support services that may be beneficial to aiding students during their transitional period of phasing out of their sport. Every student-athlete will face the unfortunate time when they can no longer play their respective sport, but if they have appropriate developmental experiences during their co-curricular involvement, they surely will have a better chance of having far greater outcomes during their foreclosure time.

Many factors influence student-athlete identity development and the establishment of who they are. Their identities mold and morph into young adults that the public sees once they leave their sport. The figures below (5 and 6) depict the continual spectrum of student-athlete development. Coinciding with development theory, these diagrams seek to point out what student-athletes go through during their college experiences.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Figure 5

Factors that Influence Student-Athlete Identity Development

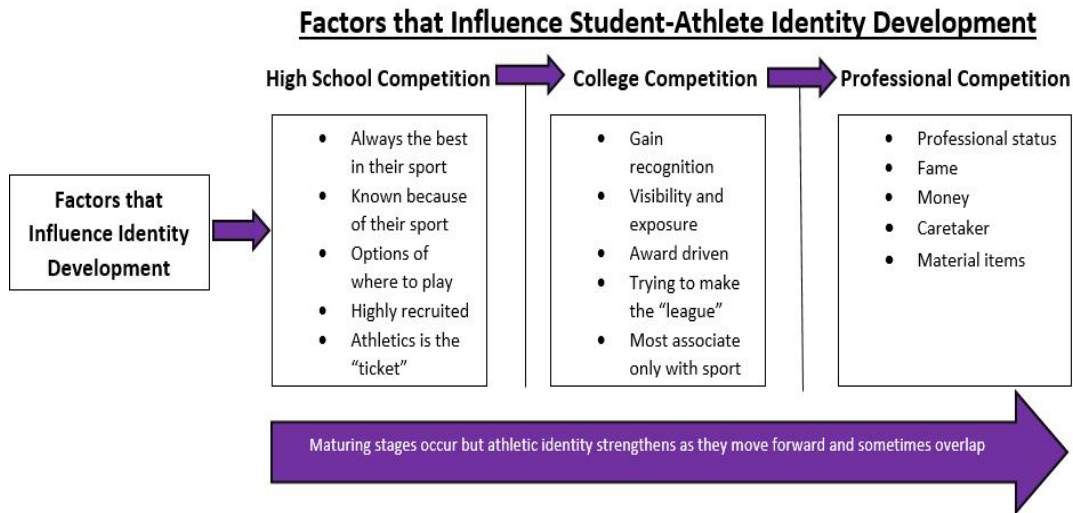
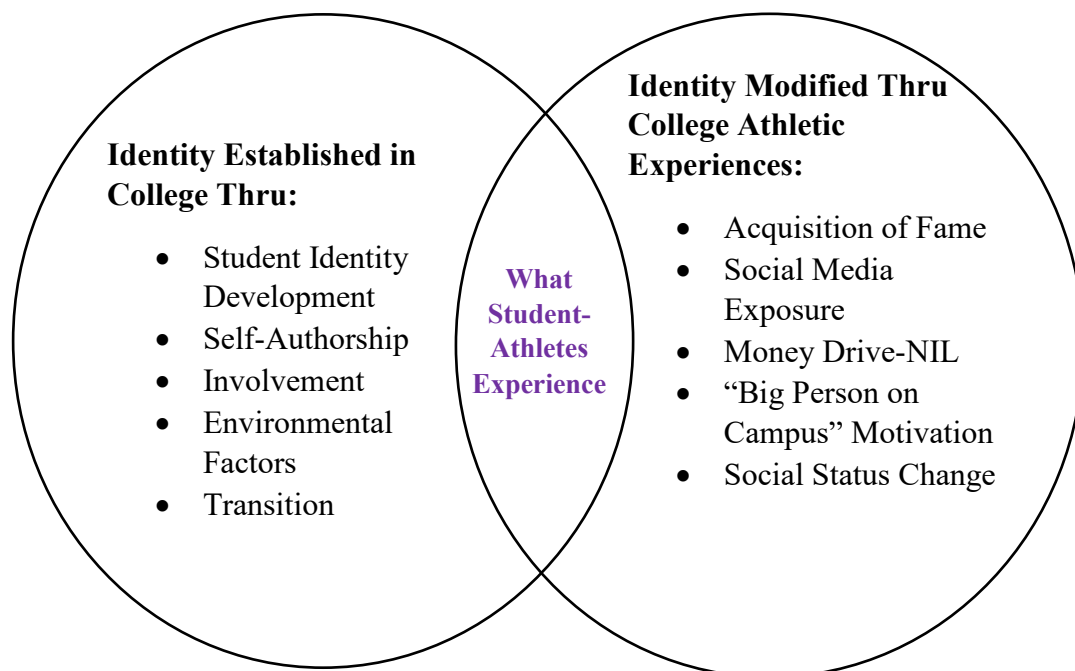


Figure 6

Establishment of Identity for Student-Athletes in College

Establishment of Identity for Student-Athletes in College



Conclusion

The above literature points toward my research questions and methodology for studying student-athletes and the support services that can be implemented to help student-athletes transition to non-athletic life.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The Charge in Research

Examining literature and key theories that provide valid insight into the overall development of a student-athlete is crucial when also examining student-athlete identity foreclosure. Researchers use a wide range of methodology to study a student-athlete's overall development. During my initial investigation, I found I could either do a quantitative or a qualitative method of research. For the qualitative side, I saw comparison studies of different divisions and public versus private institutions where student-athletes completed comprehensive surveys that measure their identity development or identify foreclosure if they had just finished their sport (Beamon, 2012). Questionnaires were also administered to collect qualitative data. Other qualitative methods included pre-existing data from the NCAA or home institution to further strengthen the study.

While researching such strategies, I encountered intrusive interviews that challenged student-athletes to have a deeper level of thinking regarding their sport. Other data collection included writing samples and video recordings of student-athletes. Qualitative research allows the writer to tell the story of the subject. Other qualitative methods included student-athlete journaling and consistent contact to track their development. It is apparent that there are many ways to gather data, and it is important to find something that works for the researcher and participants.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were: What academic and professional support services are needed for Division I student-athletes to make a successful post-sport

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

transition? Is identity foreclosure a real phenomenon among former student athletes? My capstone project will be completing a professional presentation at a national conference.

Qualitative Study

I conducted a qualitative study to focus on the lived experiences of student-athletes. I endeavored to capture their understanding of the student-athlete experience and what can make the transition to post-student-athlete better. The aim of this qualitative study was to further explore student support services for student-athletes experiencing identity foreclosure. Qualitative methods enabled former student-athletes to express their opinions and provide recommendations instead of just providing quantitative numbers. It was essential to hear from those who experienced identity foreclosure and how educators and athletic departments can better help them during their transition to non-athletic life. Descriptive data is defined as a research method that describes the characteristics of a certain population and phenomenon, which focuses on the what rather than the why (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative approach is a standard methodology in the education field and was more than suitable to answer my research questions. The purpose of this study, once again, was to hear the experiences of former student-athletes and make a call to educators to help shape new policies, procedures, and programs that can be implemented effectively.

Justification of Methodological Choice

The reason for choosing a qualitative study that focuses on a narrative approach was to dive into the essence of the student-athlete experience (Merriam, 2009). “The study of experience is through stories. Emphasis is on the stories people tell and how these stories are communicated—on the language used to tell the stories” (p. 202). A quantitative study would not have allowed the reader to hear the voice of those on the front lines. This approach contributed to

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

new awareness and consideration for a subject that has yet to be fully studied. Structured interviews provided a more comprehensive understanding of the subject's views and sentiments on this studied topic. The overall mission of this research study was to provide information for better experiences for student-athletes potentially experiencing the identity foreclosure process, by hearing directly from former student-athletes.

Completing a narrative, qualitative study using only interviews is acceptable in qualitative traditions (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). If the understanding of the researcher suggests “that people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research question are designed to explore” (Mason, 1996, p. 63), then qualitative interviewing is appropriate. Interviews are useful when an experience or phenomenon is hard to observe and interviews might be the only way to gain knowledge about some experience that has occurred in the past, and therefore cannot be observed or documented at present (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Setting

This study took place at a private Division I institution in a large metropolitan area. The total enrollment was a little under 10,000 undergraduate students, with 43% of its students from out of state. This institution had an average class size of 26-30 students, and 48% of students live on campus. The institution had a 92% first-year retention rate and offered 116 undergraduate majors. The gender breakdown was 59% female to 41% male, with a 13:1 student to faculty ratio. This private institution had 717 full-time faculty. The location of the study housed over 500 student-athletes spanning over 18 Division I sports. It is currently a part of one of the Power Five conferences and last year graduated 90 student-athletes. In 2020, this institution brought in a

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

revenue of nearly \$25 million. Recently renovated facilities allow for an exceptional experience for student-athletes at this institution (Institutional Website, 2021).

Participants

The participants were identified from a variety of sports and majors and were selected by some of the following characteristics and criteria: Played in college at the Division I level, Power Five program, either male or female, and ranged in age from 21-31. The participants were eight former student-athletes who had completed their athletic careers. The goal was to have them reflect on their time and share valuable information that may impact future generations of student-athletes. Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) indicated that one of the key factors when selecting a sample size and subjects is the accessibility and inclination to contribute to the study, and the capability to communicate viewpoints and experiences in a coherent and thoughtful fashion. The characteristics of the participants were wide-ranging from different sports producing unique perspectives from student-athletes who experienced and completed a college athletic career. The participants retired from their respective sport due to injury, graduation, or exhausted eligibility from their particular sport. Participants were recruited by receiving a qualifying survey email from the researcher.

Selection

When identifying the subjects for this study, I utilized purposeful sampling where the researcher relies on personal judgment when choosing individuals for the study. Purposeful sampling is a systematic approach that is used in qualitative research for recognizing and selecting information-rich cases for the most practical use of limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015). Here are the characteristics I sought out:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

- 50% men and 50% women
- Graduated no more than 10 years ago from a Division I Power Five institution
- Represented a variety of sports
- Retired from their specific sport
- Must have competed for all four years of college and exhausted their eligibility

Procedure

I identified eight interviewees that allowed me to speak with them to further my study. I was able to acquire a database that had every student-athlete who graduated within a ten-year span from the university as a part of my recruitment process for participants. They were emailed and personally asked to participate (See Appendix A). Upon confirmation from the recruited subject, there was a scheduled time for the meeting. Communication was all through email and calendar invitations were sent to each participant.

Ethical Considerations and Positionality

Ethical considerations were at the forefront of this study by maintaining the confidentiality of the subjects to keep them safe and out of harm's way once the research was published (Merriam, 2009). Prioritizing the subjects and providing them the respect they deserve for being bold and sharing their ideas and thoughts was crucial throughout the process. Moreover, it was essential that my position as the researcher did not influence the results but instead put forth real-world insight from the specific student-athletes.

Confidentiality for the interviewees was paramount. I went over the purpose behind the study with each participant and how they would be protected from any mitigating risks. I used

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

pseudonyms and kept all recording devices and confidential information in a locked storage device and or file.

My positionality as a researcher in this study is that of extreme passion regarding this phenomenon. There are multiple personal reasons this is so important to me. First and foremost, I was a former student-athlete and I remember the exact moment I experienced identity foreclosure. I remember taking off my basketball shoes, sitting in the locker room and pondering what I was going to do. My identity since I was three years old was tied directly to the game of basketball. My father played professionally and for the longest time that was what I wanted to do. Experiencing a sense of loss and grief was truly hard for me to cope with. Furthermore, in my current role as an academic advisor for athletes, I see student-athletes regularly experience identity foreclosure and it motivates me to have more intentional crucial conversations regarding their overall development outside their sport. It pains me to have conversations with seniors who are trying to transition to the world that they feel ill-prepared to encounter. I believe universities and athletic departments need to change and assist student-athletes in development, not just focus on their particular sport. There is an ethical responsibility for university faculty and staff to help contribute to the overall maturation of all students as young adults and professionals.

Data Collection Method

Process

The data collection was comprised of a total of 16 interviews, two per participant, and utilized a semi-structured interview approach for questioning. Interview one explored 12 questions and interview two had 10 general questions that the participants answered. There were two in-depth Zoom interviews that took place with each participant. The interviews were conducted over a period of two months.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Interviews

The formulation and collection of data for this qualitative study consisted of two semi-structured interviews. All questions were pre-determined to ensure everyone was asked the same question (see Appendix C). Although the questions were predetermined with an overall idea of what I would be asking, the interview was conversational (Merriam, 2009). The questions were designed by considering the research of Schlossberg (1981) on transitions, Astin (1984) on the impact of experience on outcomes, Magolda (2008) on developing self-authorship, and Sanford (1966) on challenge and support. The first-round interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, while the second lasted 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews took place via Zoom and both interviewer and interviewee were in locations away from individuals, and answers were recorded on a computer desktop device. During the interview process, I also observed and took notes on the interviewee's body language and facial features. Many positive results can arise from in-person interviews. For example, I had access to facial expressions, gestures, and other preverbal communications that may supplement the meaning of participants' vocalized answers to the questions, as suggested by Knox and Burkard (2009). Individual student-athlete narratives are presented later in the concluding findings section to provide the answer to my research questions. All recordings were locked in a password-protected computer file, and written notes were stored in a locked cabinet in my office. All interviews were transcribed for data collection purposes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process started once the interviews were completed and collected. I looked for common themes that arose and began to shed light on what former student-athletes think can benefit current student-athletes. I also looked for examples of what worked well during

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

their time to locate those programs and build upon them. Figure 7 shows the schedule for the interviews.

Figure 7

Schedule for Data Collection

Schedule for Data Collection				
What?	Interview One	Interview Two	Member Checking	Coding
Who?	All Subjects	All Subjects	All Subjects	Researcher
When?	Week 1 and 2	Week 3 and 4	Week 5 and 6	Week 6 and 7
Date?	September	September thru October	October	November

When interviews concluded, a significant amount of time was dedicated to the coding process. Data collected from the individual narratives were coded at the end of the data collection process.

Coding took place to organize and sort all collected data, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). The main purpose of such a process was to identify and then analyze trends or tendencies that arose from the interviewees and their statements. One of the keys to coding data and conducting a qualitative analysis is developing a narrative. Manual coding took place to validate trends that arose during the interview process. Keeping the overall purpose and research questions at the forefront helped in later stages during the development of themes in the data sets that link up to the storyline based on the developed codes, as suggested by Stuckey (2015). A narrative approach calls for continued communication with interviewees post-interview so that if clarification is needed on anything, there can be follow-up. I did reach out via email to ask participants to engage in member checking to ask if there was anything else participants wanted

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

to add or subtract from their statements. Portions of individual student-athlete's cases are presented in the findings portion, and charts and or tables laid out to show trends and patterns that came about during the data collection phase. Once I received the member checking answers back from the participants, I then started the coding at the end of the data collection process. Thematic trends were the goal when coding the student-athletes' responses to the interview questions.

In a qualitative methodology, research analysis is based on spoken words from subjects and first-hand observations (Merriam, 2009). The two interviews conducted with former student-athletes were transcribed by Zoom's online transcription service, allowing for thematic analysis to be conducted. Thematic analysis is a method "for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2006, p. 79). The purpose of thematic analysis was to find out former student-athletes' views on their athletic experience, the impact and reaction to the end of their athletic careers, and what can be done to help student-athletes transition into life without their sport. Using thematic analysis allows for a deeper understanding of experiences and thus provides the researcher with themes to explore.

I wanted to tie theory to practice during the analysis process to determine better solutions and alternatives that might be used to help student-athletes with their transition through identity foreclosure. I also looked for trends and commonalities that might steer support services in a direction that can aid student-athletes in their overall development.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of results is vital to a qualitative study. Many measures have been used to establish the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that writers have also used terms like *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* to measure the overall

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

quality and reliability of a qualitative study. Utilizing member checking is a way to control bias and improve the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Participants were provided transcripts of their narratives using the process of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) asking them to review for accuracy and whether they wanted to add any information. No changes were requested. “Member checking is the process of continuous, informal testing of information by solidifying reactions of respondents to the investigator’s reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77).

Coding of the interviews was conducted by the researcher to detect and appraise key themes. Subsequently a number of themes emerged and warranted further focus to gain a grander understanding of the participant’s responses and thoughts. Throughout the interview and coding process, I debriefed with my chair to discuss findings and thoughts regarding what I was gathering from the interviews. Ethical consideration was placed on validity and reliability to ensure the qualitative method approach supports the capstone project regarding student-athlete support services when reaching identity foreclosure as recommended by Merriam (2009). According to Creswell et al., “investigators need to be prepared to provide additional explanation and justification for the use of mixed method procedures and ethical considerations that go along with its use” (2011, p. 24). Participants’ key experiences and stories further provide the reader with insight and knowledge regarding student-athlete development and only strengthen the need for this subject to be studied further.

Limitations

The biggest limitation of this study is the potential bias of the researcher because of two main factors. The first is that I was a former student-athlete myself, and this topic resonates with me deeply. Secondly, I currently work in athletics and see the challenges student-athletes face

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

every day. To counter this potential personal bias, I did my best to remove my emotions from this study and take an objective approach when conducting this research. Another limitation is that the participants all attended the same institution.

There are other limitations that are vital to address for the validity of this capstone study. According to Price and Muran (2004), limitations are defined as “the systematic bias that the researcher did not or could not control and which could inappropriately affect the results” (p. 66). To further explore research limitations, they are restrictions placed on the capability to generalize results from one’s study. Furthermore, there may be unexpected challenges that arise during a study and researchers must focus on validity in their findings and results. The limitations of my study included: sample size, private university attended, different NCAA division, a Power Five school vs. a large school, a small school vs. a large school.

The sample size of 8 participants is a limitation because with more participants, I might have generated a greater wealth of data from former student-athletes who experienced the identity foreclosure process. Also, the study was conducted at a private university, which could have yielded different answers from participants had I interviewed those from public universities. There is a difference between private and public universities, and if my sample size included a variety, the findings might be different. When looking at the type of division along with a difference in Power Five versus non-Power Five, the limitation that needs to be addressed is that every division (I, II, III, NAIA), as well as Power Five (FBS) versus non-Power Five (FCS), dictates the number of resources certain schools have, along with the type of student-athletes that attend.

Depending on the level of the school, the answers from student-athletes could have been much different. All institutional levels require a different level of commitment, and

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

along with that comes the association even further with their sport. Since this study was conducted at a Division I, Power Five institution, the limitation is that it was my only sample, and responses could be different for those in different divisions. If this research was conducted at a large university, there might have been a unique difference in responses. Smaller versus larger universities can create a stark difference in the student-athlete experience, and that may have been brought about had I researched a large university.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative approach with a narrative methodology allowed me to attain the words from former student-athletes and share their stories. All eight participants had such unique lived experiences that needed to be told, while at the same time protecting them. The importance of confidentiality was crucial in this study since the former student-athletes were sharing such candid information. This information is going to be used to start the conversation centered on student-athlete identity foreclosure.

Chapter 4

Findings

Review of Study

This study focused on two primary questions: What academic and professional support services are needed for Division I student-athletes in order to make a successful post-sports transition? Is identity foreclosure a real phenomenon among former student athletes? During this study, I interviewed a multi-sport sample of former student-athletes to dive deeper into their pre- and post-student-athlete lives. Purposeful sampling was utilized, and participants were selected based on the following criteria: played collegiately for a Power Five program, either male or female, and ranged in age from 21-31. Through these criteria, I was able to locate, identify and interview a total of 8 former student-athletes that retired from their respective sports.

Participants were emailed directly and personally asked to participate in this study. They were reminded that they were able to withdraw at any time with no penalty to themselves or others. All participants recognized the minimal risks involved and agreed to participate. The data were collected by conducting two online Zoom interviews with each participant. The first interview centered on the formative years of pre-collegiate life, and the second interview focused on college life and post-college life as a collegiate student-athlete. There were 12 questions for the first interview and 10 questions for the second interview. Participants received a minimum of one week between each interview to process all that was discussed and to allow time to add anything additional they might have forgotten to say during the interview.

At the beginning of the first interview, I explained the informed consent and reminded participants that their comments would remain confidential, their identity would not be revealed, and I could stop recording at any time if they wanted me to. Both interviews lasted around one

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

hour. At the end of each first interview, we set up a mutually agreed upon time to conduct the second interview. After all the interviews were completed, I then had Zoom transcribe each recorded interview for me to review for accuracy. I used member checking to ensure that all participants were afforded the opportunity to view what they said. An email was sent out a week after the interview, and participants were allowed one full week to review the transcription and let me know if there was anything that should be changed. Once that week had passed, I was able to begin analyzing the transcripts, finding themes, and telling the story of these former student-athletes and their views on identity foreclosure.

Demographics of Participants

In this study, there was an equal number of male and female participants—4 male and 4 female participants. When breaking down the demographics of the male participants, the age range was between 24 and 29. The men's sports represented were basketball, football, track and field, and swimming. Within the male sample, there were two White, one LatinX, and one African American participants. While in college, two of the four male participants were from Texas, one was from Oklahoma, and one was an international student-athlete from South Africa. The male participants' majors consisted of nursing, business supply chain management, general studies, and business finance. One participant had a college minor in communication studies, while another received a double major when they added entrepreneurial management to their finance degree. Two of the male participants completed master's degrees, one in liberal arts and the other in business administration. Because there was a diverse population of male participants ranging from race, place of origin, and age, it lent itself to having unique and critical conversations that produced interesting results.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

The female sports represented were volleyball, basketball, soccer, and equestrian. These participants' ages ranged between 24 and 29, and there were one African American and three White participants and came to college from Arizona, Texas, California, and Australia. Their college majors consisted of environmental studies, movement science, business marketing, and strategic communication. Two participants had minors, one in business and one in human/animal relationships. One participant had a double major in which she combined marketing with supply chain management. Lastly, one participant completed a Master of Business Administration. Because the female participants came from such different backgrounds, they provided unique contexts for their outlook on sports.

The grade point averages for all participants ranged from 2.1 to 3.7. None of the participants competed professionally, and all are either working professionally or continuing their education in the master's or doctorate realm. All interviewed participants attended the same collegiate institution. Three out of the eight had multiple head coaching changes during their time at their institution, while the other five had consistent head coaches throughout their collegiate athletic career. Table 1 depicts the participants' pseudonym, their sport, and their gender.

Table 1

Student-Athlete Participant Breakdown

Participant ID	Sport	Gender
Phelps	Swim & Dive	Male
Pele	Soccer	Female
Jordan	Basketball	Male

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Participant ID	Sport	Gender
Donald	Football	Male
Lewis	Track & Field	Male
Beth	Equestrian	Female
Misty	Volleyball	Female
Kim	Basketball	Female

Throughout the interviews, there were buckets of themes that began to emerge from each former student-athlete. The participants provided distinct examples that gave a glimpse into their personal and athletic lives, allowing me to recognize commonalities and differences in their exposure to their sports. Through it all, I am now able to share the stories of these former student-athletes' lived experiences.

Themes from Interview 1

Interview one focused on pre-college life and the more formative years of the student-athlete. Through asking certain questions, three main themes emerged: parental involvement, coach support, and lack of involvement outside of sport. Each theme is next discussed through the story of each participant, as identified with in vivo quotes.

Theme 1: Parental Involvement

Phelps

Growing up without a father since one year old, Phelps had a unique perspective on parental influence on athletics and academics. He stated:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

My mom was pretty much my only parent until, you know, until she really got married and we settled down and being a family. She said “You've got a brilliant mind; you can't let it go to waste; school is important, and you need to put more time and effort into it.” A huge part of that was my mom holding me accountable to reaching my full potential in academics, as well as sport. But my mom always like held me accountable and made sure that I was pursuing both. Both sport and academics, at the same time at any point, if one is suffering to the degree where it's going to be detrimental to my future, then you know you got to dial back on one and focus on the other.

Pele

Growing up in a two-parent household in an affluent area where both parents went to college, Pele felt that going to college was not even an option; it was the next logical step. Growing up the oldest of four kids, it was an extremely busy household. Although athletics was a major part of her childhood, academics was always a large priority. She commented:

For me, college was just the next natural step because that's kind of what my family and parents instilled with me since I was young. There were times when I'd be in a sport, my brother being too, we'd all be playing different places. I don't know how my parents made it work to be quite honest with you, but there was a ton of involvement.

Pele indicated that besides parents pushing student-athletes academically and athletically, there needs to be an internal drive within the student-athlete. She explained it this way:

Having that support system in your parents and them being able to help you is huge, but when it comes down to it, if you want to do it, you're going to make it happen, and if you don't, then it is just not going to work out.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Jordan

Having parents involved in sports and coaching sets the stage for a student-athlete to jump right into the sports arena. Jordan had a father who was a player and coach. In his household, there was a large emphasis placed on academics over athletics. As a realist, Jordan has a unique mentality in the world of sports and academia. He explained his perspectives:

I mean education versus sport really wasn't a competition; it was education first for me and for my household. My sister, it was the same thing; education was one, sports came second. So, if I was not performing in the classroom, even in high school, there was going to be no sport. They were going to pull me; they were going to make me do whatever I can to make sure my grades are first on the priority list.

However, Jordan still had extremely supportive parents that aided in his development for playing his sport. He expressed the importance of his parents:

Just starting with my dad, he had access to unbelievable resources. During the summers, I would go to a million different camps and obviously my parents were super supportive and involved in terms of they're paying for me to go to these different camps and learning. So, they were super invested in terms of always having me being able to surround myself with the game and they knew I liked it, they were investing in it. So, they were extremely supportive.

Donald

Donald grew up without a father figure. Being raised by his mom provided interesting context when it came to parental influence and support. Donald had an extremely persistent aunt who pushed him to consider college. Donald's aunt was the only person in their family to go to

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

college. Donald and his aunt are now the only two people in their family to graduate college.

Donald's repeated what his mother would tell him when he was growing up:

“Pick your lane. You know I'm not going to force you to do anything,” but she also said

“You graduate high school you don't have to go to college, but you can, but if you don't, you're going to do a trade or do the military.” Her main focus was to stay out of trouble.

She really didn't push for you are about to go to school, you go to college, you know.

Even when I was at college, she really didn't check in on me.

Further explaining his mother's involvement, Donald indicated that he was doing a lot of it on his own. Members of his family would drop him off at practice, and he would do things academically just to be able to play ball. He recalled:

But by the time I say my mom was working a lot so when she could make a game she really wouldn't even come inside the stadium. But the way our stadium was set up, she would park and like flash her lights and honk the horn and I knew it was her because I could see the car.

Donald still credits his aunt for pushing him to get a degree.

Lewis

Lewis described his parental influences as a yin and yang which worked for him. He credits certain parents for pushing him and always supporting him in whatever he was doing. He talked about his parents in this way:

My mom was more so influential on the education side of things, where it's kind of the inverse with my dad is he's very influential for the athletic side of things. He played college football. And so, it was kind of a very much a yin and yang type situation which, like if I ever had anything, you know question wise, with academics, it's to my mom. And

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

you know any questions with athletics, it was to my dad, but one thing I definitely enjoyed is both them and my brother, when he was able, which tried to make it out to like every athletic event that I had.

Furthermore, along with Lewis's parents, he had an exceptional brother who set a positive example for him growing up. Something very unique that he brought up, that no one else had in the interviews, was the impact of his sibling:

I very much looked up to my brother, even from a young age, I wanted to, you know, be like my brother. He's definitely been a good role model for me. And so, I think it was more of a healthy relationship, and you know him encouraging me to not only to achieve what he's achieved.

Beth

A sport that requires a heavy financial commitment puts added pressure on student-athletes. Beth explained how her parents supported her in her sport, while at the same time, she felt the need to do well to show it paid off, both literally and figuratively. Her reflections on the role her parents played were:

There was more of a pressure because I knew how much time and effort and financial commitment my parents had involved in it, and I wanted to be able to show that it was paying off, and it was worth it.

Furthermore, having parents as coaches and so involved weighed on the overall relationship dynamic in the household of Beth. Beth recalled:

It didn't end when we went to dinner and left for the day, like it was like okay we're going to go watch it back and then we're going to talk about it in perpetuity forever about like what you could have done better and we're going to like make sure it's hammered in your

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

head and so sometimes that was hard, because when you have a rough day sometimes you just want it to be over and you're like I know what I did wrong. Like tomorrow's a new day, but sometimes with my parents and it was because I just wanted me to do well, and they wanted me to continue to improve.

For Beth, there was never a time where her parents had to get on her regarding academics; she had an internal drive to do well and perform well. She never felt pressured to go to a 4-year school. She always set that standard for herself, as she explained:

So, I was always very academically inclined and growing up, I kind of lived in a high-performance anxiety headspace when it came to academics and I never heard the words come out of my parents' mouth that said, "If you didn't have straight A's you weren't going to do this." I think I just assumed that that was going to happen, I was the oldest, so it was like this standard that I just set and I worked really hard at it.

Misty

When people think of support, they often think of cheering in the stands. Misty put support into perspective when discussing her parents' overall commitment to helping her continue playing her sport. Even with her father being laid off work, her parents found a way to support her at an all-time low. She remembered those times with her parents:

My dad was really involved physically and like participating with us. I didn't realize until much later how much of a financial strain my club sport put on my parents. My dad got laid off, I think, in 2008, like during that recession and I was, I was in prime volleyball time, like it cost probably like three to four grand for a season. My parents always came and as I got older, it was maybe just my mom or maybe just my dad but like when I was 12, 13 and 14, like my whole family came. It did not matter how much it would cost like

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

if I was playing like I was going to have support and that's something that I have always been super thankful for.

Misty was more driven within her academics than even her sport because she saw a long-term career and future out of her academics. She enjoyed learning and being a student. All these things combined really created an internal drive inside her since her parents were more hands-off as it relates to academics. She described how her parents supported her:

I mean, they knew what I'm studying and when I was studying in school, but like the specifics of it and how intensive it was and, I don't know, they just like weren't very like I talked to him about it, but they weren't very I guess interested, not like that saying that like mean. Like it wasn't something that they either with understand or like comprehend very well.

Kim

Influence and support can come from many different areas. Kim indicated her biggest academic supporter was her sister. Kim's parents did not complete high school, so she looked up to her sister since she had more experience in academia than their parents. Kim wanted to follow in her sister's footsteps, so her sister prepared her for the rigors of higher education academia. Yet, her parents still ingrained a work ethic into her, as she described:

So, I think they have influenced my sister to kind of take me under her wing and guide me. More I guess hands on through that process. But my parents have always been like hey did you do your homework, make sure you do your homework, but I didn't really need to be told that. Yeah, I think it was more I think the philosophy is ingrained in me and like that idea like you try as hard as I can at it.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

For each of the student-athletes, parental support was important for their success. While the amount and type of support differed within each family, familial support played an important role in motivating the students. It is also apparent that the student-athletes found this involvement as a constant that assisted in making decisions and supporting the achievements of the students.

Theme 2: Coaches Influence and Support

Phelps

Phelps indicated he had different coaches during his formative years. The one he had for seven years played a crucial role in building him up as an athlete. He stated:

She, yeah, she played a very crucial role in building me up as a competitive athlete and I went from, you know, being a kid that just played sports because they were fun, and I liked to compete and have fun. She harnessed that and my attitude towards putting in the work and played a fundamental role in shaping me as a competitive athlete for sure. I went from basically not knowing that I was a good swimmer to, you know, at some point when I was 12 or 13 to being, you know, top five in the country for some events. She played an absolutely crucial role in in that development.

Even after Phelps changed to a new coach, he had a similar influential experience. He stated:

Like they were career coaches, and they did it because they love the sport and loved developing people. You could feel that, like you can tell when your coaches are doing it because it is a job or because that's what they love to do, and you know, at no point did I question that my coaches like to do what they did. And the amount of time and effort that they spend in developing, you know, goes a long way. I mean you might even consider them to be parental figures, you know. At that point, so, you know, the attitude that your

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

coach has towards you and the amount of time and effort that they put into you definitely has a lasting impact and can make or break whether someone decides to continue playing sport.

Pele

Pele provided some life lessons that resonated with her from previous coaches. The impact coaches have on young adults is so powerful that sometimes they do not even realize how lasting those impacts are. Pele said:

I had teammates that didn't like coaches and have decided like, okay, I don't want to play anymore, which is kind of sad that a coach could ruin a sport for you. I had some very great coaches going through that I think cared about me on the soccer field but also cared about me further than just soccer and was like making sure that you're on top of your school and making sure that you're being a good person and that you're kind and helpful to people, and so I think coaches had a very positive impact on me as a student-athlete, whether it was on or off the field. I had a positive experience, but I think it could also be a very negative experience because I have seen it go both ways personally.

Pele also referenced a quote from a young coach that she holds near still today and is something she lives by; the coach said:

“Hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard” and that you can always control your work ethic, and the outcome of that work ethic so.

Jordan

Jordan went into detail about how his coaches stressed the importance of being a team and how that resonated with him at an early age. Being a good teammate is hard, but Jordan

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

believes his coaches stressing that at an early age helped him far beyond his athletic career. He talked about his coaches this way:

My coaches were always kind of stressing just being as valuable a teammate as you can and for me, I realized that I thrived in team settings and I liked, you know, working with other people who have different backgrounds and thought completely different. I mean, and trying to achieve a common goal, so for me and all the different coaches I've had growing up, they kind of helped me figure this out from an early age. For me, it was a team aspect and them kind of pouring into me while working with the team was important. I learned my personality can be contagious; how you can influence other people and how good you feel when you work hard, and you know how it feels when you accomplish things and how to fight through adversity and just million different things, 100 different, you know, locker topics that kind of all compiled together, maybe honestly, who I am right now.

Jordan also went into great deal about three impactful coaches in his younger formative years and what he remembers in working with them. These coaches seemed to be the reason he played his sport. He recalled how these coaches all believed in him in different ways:

I had a YMCA coach who, when I first started playing basketball, he made everything fun, and it was enjoyable, and he had a bunch different funny little acronyms and sayings for things, so it got me invested because I thought he was funny, and I like to be around my buddies, and I like being around this coach. In high school, I had an unbelievable travel coach who was completely different than anything I've ever been around and completely tough and just completely different demographic that I was accustomed to. He like really showed a lot of tough love and brings into where he's from and just very

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

kind of cultured you a little bit and showed a lot of belief in us as a team and definitely kind of instilled some confidence in me. Lastly, I started working out with a guy my junior and senior year of high school who was extremely optimistic and would really believe a lot in me and would really kind of gas me up and had lots of positive affirmations. He would verbally tell you how much he believed in you and thought you could do this and thinks you're a great person and player and really start building my confidence.

Donald

Donald explained the importance of coaches during his pee-wee years, as they were essentially father figures to him. The valuable lifelong lessons Donald learned was from the days in practice with his coaches. He reminisced about those coaches:

I'm going say start from there with the toughness and the discipline. You got to practice, your coaches run, make you bear crawl, roll, and you've got stuff like that. So, I figured I got to discipline from that and just a hardnosed toughness. At that time, we were 9 and 10, we were just kids. Sometimes parents are out there, though, so it's all good, and the crazy thing is, a lot of us don't have father figures, so these coaches, in a sense, are our father figures. I am the way I am because I always have positive male role models in my world.

My coaches was tough on us and but this world is tough on us and we were just kids, you see, and you have these conversations and I promise you man. He's a Black man talking to us and granted we was kids, we didn't understand. I remember hearing, "You aren't going to understand right now; basically, like I said, I'm sowing seeds. You are going to

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

hear me when you are grown and when you are old and cross this path of these, you know, these boundaries, these obstacles come about, you are going to hear me.”

The inspiration coaches can provide to young student-athletes is immeasurable. Donald had a coach who showed belief in him and aided in him getting a scholarship:

My high school coach kept telling me, you can do this. He is really the one that inspired me to try to get a scholarship.

Lewis

An outlier to almost all the other interviews, Lewis had a negative experience as it relates to his coaches growing up. It is surprising that he continued his sport since he had very little investment from coaches and mentors during his formative years of the sport. Coaches would essentially make fun of him during competitions, and Lewis really enjoyed challenging himself to be great rather than worry about anything else. The raw emotion and frustration were evident during this interview. Lewis indicated:

At no point did I have a coach until college. Obviously, you know, my college coach lived and breathed the sport but prior to that I never had a coach who was educated in the sport. There was very little, I'll say, influence that my coaches had prior to college on my decision to pursue my sport. It was very frustrating and in high school I think now being older more mature I can kind of see it from, you know, different perspective and understand, maybe the logic behind it, because it's not a big sport, it's not a money making sport, but it's very frustrating as an athlete knowing that you don't have the support from other coaches, who aren't your own coaches. You're just looked at as kind of, you know, stepchild of whatever else is going on.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Beth

Having parents as coaches causes an interesting dynamic growing up. Beth had her parents as her coaches throughout her formative years on an interim and temporary basis, while she had other coaches work with her throughout her time traveling with her sport. This was, in her words, “very abnormal” since you have multiple different coaches within any given year. It left her feeling like an outsider during her formative years. She recalled her feelings:

The sport industry I was in that world is very small, so my parents, having being fairly established in the industry, knew a lot of people, so I didn't necessarily have one coach or several coaches. I didn't necessarily have just one person that ever helped mentor me. It's very unique; it's not like a football or more traditional sport in which you have like the same coach maybe all four years or where like your middle school coach, also known as your high school coach, like it's just, it's very different, so as far as the role or influence that they had to pursue, I don't know that I could speak to one coach who like stands out. In my like formative years that really was like yes, I'm going to continue on and do this like you gave me the confidence. From a behind-the-scenes perspective, those coaches were my parents, even if they weren't ever formerly like my coach on paper. It is so traditional than a different sport. I had three different coaches at a time in different places based on location and that would be my coach for a weekend. I think because I floated so much I sometimes always felt like an outsider.

Misty

Building confidence was another theme that came up during the interviews, specifically, coaches' role in developing student-athletes' confidence during their younger years. Misty had coaches that turned into mentors right around the time she started playing competitive club

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

sports. This participant provides a stark comparison of what coaches have the ability and power to do with young student-athletes. Her love for the sport waivered when she was 16-18 years old. During that time, coaches provided confidence and preparation, while others had a negative impact on continuing the sport. Misty explained:

In high school, that was kind of when I was like starting to figure everything out and like that he was the first person like ever made me feel like a superstar. He was the first person to look at me and be like you're really good and like you're going to be really good. And so, I've never had that before and I've always just kind of been like I'd always been a really good player, but I've never had someone like actually look me in the face and say you're actually really good. I think that validation kind of just gave me some more confidence just like having someone to like actually be on my side and root for you, not always harp on you.

Beth also described challenging memories she had regarding a coach during her high school years. She explained in detail the negative feelings that overcame her during their time working together:

I have like a lot of really bad memories from him (16-17 coach) and he just like harped on me and just broke my confidence and like there was one tournament that we like he just pulled us apart, like the whole team, like it was just like everyone against each other, like we had. So, when I finished that year, I was like I'm done, like I don't want to do this anymore, like this isn't fun, so he, yeah, that was just horrible year and it was just one of those years that you had to get through.

Misty went on to say that her coach when she was eighteen was the one that saved her career. She recalled the importance of that coach:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Like he wanted us to do well and actually prepared us for college and took the time to teach us skills that and different places and sets and defenses that we could be running in college, not just like he wanted to do to win. He was there the year that I fell back in love with volleyball.

Kim

Coaches have such a strong way of making student-athletes believe they can do something greater than they even think. Kim had a coach that made her realize college basketball was a reality:

He had experience with college and then so he kind of put that idea like, oh, this college thing is a reality. I think it reignited the fire and I did a lot of like morning one-on-one trainings with him a lot of extra stuff.

Kim also recognized how their coach invested time and effort for the betterment of her as a player:

Yeah, I think he put in so much extra time in like and didn't get paid for it, he got paid in some breakfast that we've got and kind of thing. He recognized that I could go to college. It was decided that that's what he's going to do so, and he did that for me out of the kindness of his heart. He was the one that made all my film tapes to send to coaches and yeah, he was amazing. He just kind of set an expectation for me.

Coach involvement clearly influenced the student-athletes playing career. The type of influence varied by coach and coaching methods. Some coaches were more like family while some exhibited a tough love approach. Generally coaches were supportive of the student's athletic goals and encouraged them to continue to reach for them. While there were instances

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

when coach behavior had a negative effect on the student, in all cases the coach played a significant role in the student's life.

Theme 3: Lack of Outside Sport Interest During Formative Years

Phelps

Phelps relayed a unique perspective that. During his formative years of elementary to high school, he did not feel he had the time to pursue anything other than his sport since it became so competitive. He had other passions he wanted to pursue, but time constraints just would not allow it. This shows the parameters sports can put on a young person's growth and ability to pursue other non-athletic avenues. Phelps explained it this way:

I would have pursued getting into theater. When I matriculated from high school, I actually had the highest grade for dramatic arts for the school and you know, 50% of that is theory and 50% of it is practical. I was seen as one of the strongest performers at the school, but the reality is that I just didn't have the time to participate in plays and the only thing that I could really do, and this is because we were given time to do it in school, was it was like a house play. That was the closest thing that I did to like extracurricular activities for dramatic arts. If it was anywhere outside of school hours, I wouldn't have had time to do it. So, you know the reality is like I didn't really have time for anything else.

During the most formative stages of life, it is challenging if student-athletes cannot pursue other avenues they are interested in due to the strong commitment sports can require. Phelps faced this challenge and had interests that were not attainable due to time constraints related to his sport. While he excelled in his sport, some other areas of his growth were stunted.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Pele

During Pele's formative years, playing her sport provided her a sense of belonging. Playing a game allowed her to be around friends and have a group that always was there for her through thick and thin. This participant felt that sports gave her a community when she needed it. She expressed her thoughts this way:

It was a way to just have a community and the support group. Not many people understand what it's like to be doing 20 plus hours of this craft every week and so to have that group of a shared experience with other people. I also think some of my closest friends today are people that I played high school soccer with, people that I played with when I was eight years old together.

Jordan

Jordan provided an interesting contrast between what sports provided him and what it took from him. Sports gave him many valuable life lessons he still carries today, but since it is so competitive, it hindered his growth in other areas. His reflections were:

I mean you could talk all day about the different life lessons that sport teaches you and some of the coaches that I had growing up and but in high school, just extremely formative years and years that will mold you as a human being. So, the life lessons that the game teaches you, I mean that's absolutely forever. It's almost like a fraternity; you're around like-minded guys. You're building healthy relationships.

When asked further about his formative years and his ability to pursue other avenues,

Jordan indicated:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Not really, honestly, like other than, you know, kind of my family and faith and friends and going to school, it was my sport. I didn't have time to start learning how to draw or play the piano or anything like that it. Especially in the summer, it was strictly athletics.

Donald

When Donald was in high school, he felt confident that he could pursue different areas of interest. The issue he ran into while growing up was time, money, and transportation.

Development is crucial during the formative years but can be stunted for many reasons. Donald spoke of the challenges he faced when asked about pursuing avenues other than his sport:

Who was going to take me to all this other stuff? Who got the money first off to do all this other stuff? We barely got the money to pay for any fees I got for football, you know what I mean, so I dang sure cannot do anything, and I like the guitar. I can take no guitar lessons. I can't go to a chess club, you know what I mean. I can, but who is going to take me to that is the thing. How am I going to get there and who has the finances to pay?

Who pays for it?

Donald raised a unique point regarding education and a student's formative years. This participant emphasized that it starts early:

Those who really want to and care about education and those don't give a crap about education. I promise those who do care about education, it started in the home. When they were children in the first grade, second grade, and third grade. It started then.

Lewis

During the high school formative years, some students forget the need to get involved since they are so immersed in their particular sport. Lewis had a forward-thinking approach, which served him well during his high school years. He thought beyond his sport and began to

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

realize what he had to do and what skills he needed to develop to make him a competitive candidate going into college. His words explain that:

I did a lot of, I guess, extracurricular activities. A lot of them were probably for the reason of to improve my college application because, again, that was always sort of an understood, you know, next step. So, you know things like student council, volunteer activities, tutoring, you know things of that nature. I was definitely involved outside of just sports. You know, like church groups and youth groups and stuff like that that I was involved in. You know, and again a lot of it was out of those that I've just mentioned, like due to faith or due to knowing social groups.

Although Lewis had so much going on throughout his formative years, he indicated he never faced burnout. Instead, he took it as an opportunity and challenge to bolster his toolbox of skills.

Beth

Similar to other participants, during Beth's formative years, she had to make a decision about what else she got involved in. It is important to have a wide breadth of experiences, but as sports become more competitive, it is hard to have other interests during those formative years. Beth's words tell that story.

I didn't participate in any other organized activities. My parents were pretty good at when we were younger about summer camps that I have a huge affinity for all things Broadway and musicals, so I definitely did a few like summer camps of like musical theater camp. But at a certain point, if you really are passionate about competing in your sport, it's an all-encompassing thing, it is 365, it is every day. Not that I couldn't have made time. I'm sure I could have; I just chose to pour all of my time and energy into my sport.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Beth also expanded on the time constraints that occur when you begin to take the sport more and more seriously. When asking if she felt like she could do anything else, she replied:

I think it depends on the level of which are competing at. So, you'd have to be really diligent about it and I don't know that personally I would have been able to give 100% to more than one thing at that time. And I think part of that is because of also the level of diligence that I put into my academics. And so, it was pretty much like any spare time that I wasn't playing my sport, I was doing homework. Like that's just how it got done, but I personally could not have done my sport the way that I wanted to do if I had other activities that I was also trying to be competitive at. If I can't do it at the level that I think that I am capable of, then I would rather just take that aspect of it and do it for fun and do it for pleasure and leisure. And so, if I had another interest that I was involved in, I would feel like I would have to also put as much energy and time and effort into that and I don't know that I would have done myself justice in either aspect, so I just chose to do one.

Most participants had their identity tied directly to their respective sport during their formative years.

Misty

Misty, although she had no regrets, felt as though she lacked the normal formative experiences in high school. Because her sport was so intense, physically, mentally, and emotionally, she did not feel she had a normal day-to-day life and was involved in only very few activities and groups outside her sport. She reflected on those experiences:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

I was involved in church, and I was younger and went to like church camps. In high school though, I think, honestly, I think it was majority of volleyball, not a lot of other activities.

Along those same lines, Misty relayed an experience in high school when all she was known by was her sport. Walking the halls, no one associated her with anything else but that. When asked “Did you feel like you even had enough time to pursue other activities with having such a competitive volleyball schedule”, she reported that she had what seemed to be a non-traditional high school experience:

No, I really don't. If I would have had more time, I would have liked to like do more things, like not even like structured activities. I would have enjoyed going to more high school football games. I remember in high school I was walking down the halls and someone looked at me and said what's up (University Name), and that person did not know my name but knew I committed to that school. And I thought, hmm I guess that's really all I do. But I mean stuff like that, like, I would have loved that opportunity to like have more friends outside of my sport teammates. I just would have enjoyed having a more traditional high school experience.

Kim

Sports teach student-athletes a lot during their formative years. Because it took up a large part of her time, Kim highlighted what sports did for her during those crucial stages of her growth. She explained a scenario she encountered and what sports did for her:

I found myself having the confidence to be able to ask the questions and drive the meeting, that sort of stuff, and I think that's not an innate part of my personality. I'm a bit introverted, but I think sport had forced me to be more extroverted and more confident in

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

my leadership skills. I naturally don't want to be the leader. But if I don't instinctively perceive anyone around me to be a leader, I will take up that position, and I think sport kind of taught me to do that and gave you the confidence to do that. I think the competitive drive has helped as well, particularly with like academics and I think just, I think it gives you a healthy amount of ambition.

Even at an early age and living in a different country, Kim still had similar experiences to the other participants. Her sport consumed a lot of who she was from a very early age. Although she had other interests, the only time she got to pursue those was during her downtime, as she described:

I went to school and then I played basketball after school or before school or sometimes both kind of thing, so it just took up a lot of my time. I enjoyed like relishing reading books and stories and like watching films and that sort of stuff. And that was the only, I think, activity that I involved myself in. But I think even as a kid, like it was a lot of my energy went into play basketball. So when I wasn't playing basketball, I had breaks. I just like to kind of you know (took a deep breath).

Sometimes, the sports these participants played took more away from them than the participants took away from the game. Participants found that athletic success required a time commitment that frequently hampered the ability to engage in other (non-athletic) activities. Those who did have a broader list of involvements made a conscious decision to engage outside of their sport. Engagement, however, was mostly focused on the athletic endeavors of the student.

Themes from Interview 2

Interview two centered on the collegiate years of the student-athlete, and as discussions commenced, three distinct themes emerged: professional development, career development, and mental health.

Theme 4: Professional Development

Gaining professional real-world experience is vital in a student's development during the college years. Professional development is what sets students apart when applying to jobs and internships. Having a resume that puts forth a polished, young professional creates opportunities for success. Although professional development is challenging to acquire for student-athletes, it is necessary for their overall development.

Phelps

While challenging to come to terms with, understanding that eventually a collegiate career will come to an end is a big step in a student-athlete's professional development as professional readiness is just as important as sports readiness. When asked "what would you tell your 18 year old self", Phelps discussed his thought process when fully immersing himself in his internship and putting his sport on an equal playing field with his overall professional development:

I made the decision junior year that I was going to focus on my internship and give 100% in that arena, so I can set myself set up to get a full time offer position when I graduated. And so, I chose that, I chose the long game, over chasing what the dream was for so long, just so that I could say I was an Olympian. So, I mean I wanted to set myself up so that I

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

could be independent and pursuing the dream was not worth sacrificing the path where I can be an independent person.

Pele

Pele raised a unique point when discussing her role as a student-athlete. She mentioned how important internships and shadowing are for the overall professional development of a student-athlete. She explained that she feels a little lost since she never broadened her horizons as related to professional development:

This profession [athletics] doesn't leave a lot of room for that [development], but I'm like I have zero clue because I didn't have internships or things like that. I don't know what I would do if I didn't work in college athletics. I mean, I was definitely lost after graduation, and I mean still today there's times where I'm like, I don't know what I'm doing, so I don't think it ever ends. I think being immersed in different opportunities and I think internships are just so helpful and I think internships that are good internships are helpful...but doing an internship where you're just doing inventory all day isn't going to actually tell you something. I think good internships are able to at least open you to another possibility and maybe now I know I don't like, but at least you know something that you've tried. So, I think whether it's an internship or some type of job shadow program that an institution had, like spend a day being a nurse or spend a day with a tax account or something like that, even if it's not a full internship because that is obviously a lot of commitment from both parties, employer and the student-athlete. Even if it's just like job shadow stuff, it just opens more of the world for student-athletes and puts ideas in their brain to think of things.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Jordan

When discussing his experiential learning seminar strategy that he would implement for collegiate student-athletes, Jordan went into detail about how underprepared he was and expressed his thoughts on how he could prepare future student-athletes. His innovative ideas are something colleges should begin to consider.

A way that you can learn by going through an experience. Maybe if it's, you're working with GM financial, okay you're learning the financial side of things, or maybe it's you are meeting with a GM representative once a month and you're talking to them or you're helping them on the phone just to almost like a mentorship program with a bunch of different individuals with a bunch of different positions where you can at least bounce some ideas off and feel like you're helping them with a project, while you're learning at the same time. Just any way that you can kind of build some experience that's going to help you long term. I mean, because for me, I had nothing like. I had, I can make a bunch of free throws in a row, and I was really good at two-ball dribbling. That was my experience for the summer; that was my experience during the year. I don't know exactly how it would look, but I think if there could be a way to get these athletes in almost like mentorship situations where they're talking to different businesses and even if it's an hour shadow once a month or something. I think really looking long term would be good.

Jordan continued by explaining:

You heard it all the time: hey, the ball will stop bouncing, really start figuring out what you want to do. Until you are physically placed in that situation and can visualize yourself sitting behind a desk every single day, it's hard. I even remember going to those career fairs; they made every athlete wear a suit, go walk around. I hated that because that

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

to me wasn't important. I didn't want to go shake a hand at the booth. I don't think it's important at all. If I had to go sit and file something away at some business for an hour or two a week or a month, then I could really start visualizing and be like hey, I hate this or hey, I could actually see myself doing this, and these people are cool. Maybe in two years, I have this good experience in the back of my mind where when I'm looking for a job I can kind of call and use that.

Donald

When looking into professional development, it is also important to understand the transition and thought process of a student-athlete and the self-reflection during that transitional period. Donald shared his journey:

The most challenging thing is figuring out, the "I am." Who are you? Your whole life, you have said I am my sport. I am an athlete, a this and a that, a superstar whatever. Number 57, 23 and 18. And I think the hardest part is feeling out who am I. And after that, what am I into. I think we are all trying to chase that high again of competitive feelings. I think that is the most challenging part, figuring out what do I do next, what do I do with my time now, where do I spend my energy. What skills do I gain now, because the only skill I thought I had and was valuable, I realized they don't mean anything. Being a good athlete has no value to the real world.

Donald also briefly discussed the need for internships within the student-athlete population:

I'm going to say this: allow them to do summer internships, even if it's once a week during the summer. In the spring, once a week, you can do once a week. There's time to do something, or even if he can do an internship have like once a month.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Lewis

Lewis brought up something his home institution did, called “suits for success,” which allowed student-athletes the opportunity to own business professional attire before they graduated. Furthermore, he discussed the need for real-world speakers to be brought to campus for display purposes and for students-athletes to see the professional side of a career that does not involve their sport. He explained his thoughts about this:

Maybe they could have brought in, you know, for all of the athletes who are business, bring in a business professional who used to be, you know, an athlete at their home university, and speak on this was what my transition was like or, you know, for a nursing professional who used to be an athlete at the university or whatever. Just come in and speak on this is what my transition was like, this is what I struggled with just maybe to identify it.

Regarding professional development opportunities at his school, Lewis said:

It’s one of those that they would have been helpful if I would have taken them seriously. You know I don’t think many athletes probably do. It’s one of those things. It’s a requirement; I just got to do it like, you know, my coach said, if I don’t do this, I have to, you know, run. If I could have had a conversation with my 2021-year-old self, I could have probably said, you know, take this more seriously.

Beth

Beth discussed the blended model of a student-athlete development office on college campuses. A symbiotic relationship is critical in the development of student-athletes. Beth made these comments:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

I think that, if you're going to say like a department like student-athlete development, I think is definitely the go to. You've got your professional development, and your personal development, and I think some schools do a really good job of having those be two separate things, but I think a lot of times those need to come together and show how personal development can bleed into professional development at the end of a career and I think sometimes.

Furthermore, she explained the confirmation bias internships can have on a student-athletes' professional development:

I was lucky because there was a confirmation bias through an internship, which a lot of times I feel like people take an internship and they're like no, that's definitely not what I want to do, and I was fortunate enough that my first experience with the world of college athletics was really positive.

Misty

Having quality resources can aid students during their time at their home institution.

Misty raised an interesting thought when discussing her struggles:

Some sort of like post-athlete community program like having some sort of network, where people can still be connected to their sport or to like the university and athletes within university afterwards. Also, like just having resources, like the same resources that we were already talking about, like available to athletes post-graduation, like post-identity foreclosure, like post-transitional period. Because sometimes, you think you've got a hang of it and then out of the blue, it just hits you again, you know, like, do I really have purpose, is this really what I'm supposed to be doing? I still even today with my career, my sport was something so natural to me and so I guess it just came easy to me

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

and so like today, physical therapy is not something that comes as naturally to me, like I still have to work like 10 times harder for it than I did for volleyball, you know, so just having resources available and programs available for people that have already gone through the transition be helpful.

When discussing utilizing resources and what she would tell her younger self, she stated:

Probably to not be so stubborn about using those resources that we already talked about. It took me a while to actually, like, I guess, swallow my pride and realize that I did need the help. Also, that I had benefited so much from like later on in my career and maybe just that it's going to be hard but it's going to be worth it, and just make the most out of it.

Kim

Kim discussed what the internship process was like for her, not only being an international student-athlete but also building and maintaining quality, long-lasting professional relationships:

I think, for me, personally, I felt a bit under prepared, but I think that was more on me. There was so many opportunities. I was just being a little crap and I didn't take full advantage of them. In my field, you kind of need to volunteer in the field to get a lot of the job opportunities, so I guess yeah, you have to intern. And I feel like we couldn't really do that because of the time restrictions. And it might be specific to my field, because I know a lot of my teammates were able to do internships summer and that sort of stuff, but I feel like being an international person, I didn't. Even if I wanted to do an internship in the states, it would have just been like a line of my resume but it wasn't making those connections for me, because it wasn't relevant to me because I'm from the other side of the planet. And like a lot of the people that I'm currently doing master's

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

degree with, you know, they intern and volunteers. Those internships were summer ones and a lot of them have been there for two-three years sort of things and have relationships with those people.

Kim also explained the importance for student-athletes to begin networking and building connections:

So, like networking opportunities wasn't there, but then again, I think that was just for me and my niche, environmental science field. So, I think it was a bit, I didn't take full advantage of the services provided to me, but at the same time, I think, given my situation, it was yeah, but yeah, I think the internship thing for everybody is a bit of an issue. Even if you do make these connections, some, like for example a teammate was amazing at keeping those connections in touch and even in season, like she might only go once over a four-month period to go see them and work for them, but she kept that relationship and texting them. I think for the most part, that was really difficult for us to maintain that kind of ongoing internship relationship thing. It just took like particularly extraordinary people to manage to do that.

The student-athletes understood the value of professional development although they recognized the challenges of finding time and opportunities for professional development. There was also a general acknowledgement that focus on professional development came later in the collegiate experience and was sometimes difficult to discover or fully engage the opportunities available. As students came to realize that future employment was likely to be in a field other than athletics, the desire for professional development naturally increased although how to find those opportunities was not always evident.

Theme 5: Career Development

Career readiness can be one of the most challenging things student-athletes face when leaving their sport. Since they are fully immersed in their sport for so long, and their identity is tied to it, the lack of being equipped for the career world is extremely daring.

Phelps

Phelps suggested a university context that student-athletes should consider when finishing their educational and playing career. Having a career services center where student-athletes can leverage their skill and abilities can truly set them apart, he explained:

I think career services. I mean, I think teaching athletes how to leverage their skills that they develop from being athletes and learn how to leverage that in the professional world and channel that into either getting a job out of college or, you know, how to channel the things that they've made them successful in the athletic careers. I don't think that transition is easy for a lot of people to make. I ended up really enjoying the field that I was studying and working in so it's like this whole new world I could step into which was pretty cool. But I think the transition can be tough for some people. It's two very different worlds, like being an athlete and being a working professional. You know, unless you're prepared for that then you could be off to the races, or you can be kind of stuck in place for a while.

Pele

Most student-athletes do not think of their career coming to an end, but ultimately it does. Thoughtful consideration and preparation for a career is not the norm, but Pele discussed an

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

interesting point when talking about the need to think of career opportunities sooner rather than later:

Football and basketball is more of a chance they're going to play professionally, so I think, and especially in women's sports where you may play professional but not make money, it's really important to emphasize opportunities outside of sport. I think at times when you're playing you don't think about it, and at times I'm like, why do I care about what career I want to take when I'm a sophomore in college. But when you get to the end of your academic career and you realize, wow I spent four years, I had the best time in my life, but I did not prep to find a job or I did not get my resume together or I did not get experiences that will help me. I think at some point, like obviously the student-athlete needs to do that, but if they're guided to do certain things, whether it is certain programs like student-athlete development.

Jordan

Jordan dove into some specifics when discussing career readiness, posing multiple ways student-athletes could be ready to tackle the career world. Understanding what you are not good at is just as important as figuring out what you are good at, as Jordan explained:

I think honestly, I don't know if it's even possible but, like shadowing somebody for a day or meeting with a career advisor and saying hey, take this career assessment. "Based on these answers and then there's a million different assessments out there, based on these different questions you answered and situational questions you answered, we feel like these would be the top five jobs for you. And we have contacts at five different companies with similar jobs. Why don't you go spend an hour with them and here's some questions that you can ask them just to get an idea of some stuff they do." And you know,

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

athletes maybe don't have a ton of time for in-person internships where you're sitting there for three months in the summer, but maybe you can meet with a mentor from a company and you can help them do a project which is, you know, a couple hours a week, just so you can kind of get some experience and kind of build your resume. More so than anything, you can figure out like, hey, I really liked this marketing stuff like what jobs can I do in marketing, or hey, I really love supply chain, like what can I do in supply chain management. I think, for me, working with a career advisor and them helping me see my skills and how it translates from my sport I think that would be really, really big and sometimes it takes somebody who's able to, you know, look at little assessment that you do and say hey, you're pretty introverted, maybe sales wouldn't be very good for you. Just somebody that's working with you to narrow it down and then obviously the opportunities to go and get some of that experience. Even if it was a class and like experiential learning simulation or something that you can at least learn a little bit in terms of what you like, what you don't like, what you're good at, what you're not good at.

Donald

A new term called career immaturity was something Donald brought up when describing himself. Rehashing his first job interview and breaking down what career services should be like for student-athletes, Donald said:

I read this article about this, one day, and they use the term career immaturity. That's what it is because I never had a job before. I really think my first interview broke my spirits. They should have career services available. Force them to be uncomfortable, that is the thing, you got to talk to people. That's the thing. They could be talking to a company and they don't even know if it could be something they may be like, that's cool

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

and meet this person. Like, I always tell them when you are an athlete you really are a celebrity so these people who work for these companies like thinking, dang this is a student-athlete. They should force these cats to engage in conversation or even set up some type of resume class. Stuff like that, just sessions every month.

Lewis

Lewis provided an interesting take regarding career readiness and development. He discussed the need for a life skills approach when he thought of career readiness. He encouraged people to think more deeply from the life perspective:

Honestly, probably just, and this is something that I think of, you know, education in general lacks is like you're just teaching students things that aren't important for your career, but are important for life, like, you know, simple things of doing your taxes, like how the heck do I do that, you know. I never learned that any of my classes in high school and undergrad, none of that right, like things that I guess define you more so as an adult, like how do you know? I fortunately haven't had to do this, but you know what's the smart way to get a mortgage, you know. What kind of housing market do you want to buy in, things like that that you just don't think of as a student and a student-athlete that as a functioning adult in society, or you know big things that I know a lot of people, not just athletes, struggle with and so maybe that would have been neat, you know, saying something like that from, you know, the athletic community of just hey, these are things, you know, that you might not think about on a daily basis, but from an adult perspective, you know these are things that I stress about, you know, in my adult world. General life skills of things you will come in contact with.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Beth

Beth brought up the value of having a former student-athlete panel to help current student-athletes start thinking of careers after their sport. She suggested that, along with that is the importance of having critical conversations that start with advising and student-athlete development offices.

Careers feels like the end game but having conversations of like what do you like to do outside of your sport, I think academic advisors are really good in that mentoring aspect of like what makes you happy outside of your sport. Like, what is it that you like to do and start having those conversations early on, so that when a career starts to maybe look like it's coming to an end, there's so many things that have been talked about that provide the student-athlete fulfillment and some sort of purpose. What about all these things we talked about last three years that make you happy, like how do we have that kind of translate. I think a guest lecture series, I think that would be great and like I said, finding a group of panelists who had careers end at various different points because no one knows. There's got to be a person or an image or someone that they can relate to like, okay, they had to go through this and they're telling me like maybe I should think about this.

Misty

Echoing what Beth said regarding career readiness, Misty described how it feels when the sport is taken away and how dependent student-athletes are, making it hard to transition to normal career life. In her opinion, there is a need for life coaching and student-athlete development that can help with future career endeavors:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

I think having more programs with student-athlete development and with life coaching. I feel like life coaching would be a good thing, because it was honestly like someone just like turned off the lights, you know, like you go home [when sport was done]. Like nothing was there anymore. It's just like, all right, have fun doing it on your own now. Which I feel like a lot of normal students in college learn that independence from leaving home and not having to count on parents or stuff like that, but for us it was almost we became more dependent on people because you know you have everything given to you. You're not technically allowed to go outside of universities resources when you're an athlete.

Kim

Accountability is something that, without even trying, prepares student-athletes for their careers post-support. Kim started to think more about the fact that when student-athletes have everything handed to them, they miss the skills of being an adult. She described how she has seen how hand holding affects student-athletes tremendously and can stunt their career readiness:

It's really important, I think, after and for careers and responsibility and that sort of stuff and I think some people didn't have that because they just kind of expected, I'm an athlete, people will do this for me. I think that entitled mentality didn't help because when it was gone, they didn't, they kind of didn't know how to operate. So, I think yeah, just implementing more responsibility roles. I think that those kinds of skills, those practical admin, is the best way to describe it. Skills, I think you don't get because you're told be here at this time and like there's a responsibility. I think the time management that comes in, to be able to figure out, but I think you lose some of the knowing how to make your own routines. Being responsible of yourself as a human adult, things outside of the career

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

that I think that is missed. I think, adding an element of accountability of like you're an adult, you need to figure this out. I'll work with you and I'm here to help you and guide you, but you should do it.

Recognizing the need for career development followed a similar pattern to recognizing the need for professional development. Student recognition of the need comes later in the student's collegiate career and understanding how to proceed toward preparing for a non-athletic career is not obvious. The participants had several suggestions both for themselves and for institutions to make this transition easier.

Theme 6: Mental Health

Going through any transition causes one to have deep pressure and tension on their overall mentally. Being a collegiate student-athlete is no different. When speaking with participants, providing effective mental health resources is a must for college athletic programs. Student-athletes, whether currently playing or making the transition to non-athletic life, need resources and support. These young men and women face a distinctive set of challenges that NARP's do not face. The amount of pressure they are constantly under, both outwardly and inwardly, make the anxiety almost unbearable. It is vital that resources are put into place off the field to better support student-athletes during their most challenging times mentally.

Phelps

Phelps made an interesting point regarding medical disqualification (Medical DQ). He believes there needs to be an emphasis on providing support to student-athletes who have been forgotten due to injury. The lack of closure appears to have lasting impacts that mental health resources should address:

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Mental health services to. I think some people can really struggle with it, especially if their career, that the athletic career comes to an end, because of an injury. I've seen that. With it, you know they don't get good closure on the transition from being an athlete to being a non-athlete.

Pele

Individuals sometimes fail to remember all the impacts playing college athletics has on student-athletes. Pele raised a unique perspective when discussing self-image and self-confidence and stated that athletes face an identity crisis within their particular sport. Resources and services are needed for student-athletes to be able to have these critical conversations that are vital to their overall personal development. Pele's thought on this topic were:

Body image and like self-image and confidence and stuff. I don't think you realize how much your sport does for you, at that time. I think, for some people, definitely mental health, because you do kind of go through somewhat of an identity crisis. And I don't think normal people that didn't play sports don't realize that. I mean even like for me. I think people have a preconceived idea of what a student-athlete does and what their time is and what that is. As far as normal campus goes, we didn't have like a specific sports psychologist within athletics, but the psychology department/on-campus mental health center. They did have a sports psychologist that work with athletes and were able to go there and utilize their services as well, which I think was helpful and a number of my teammates did use.

Jordan

Jordan, although he did not directly discuss mental health, did echo similar sentiments as other participants in that the biggest challenge he has seen student-athletes face is their loss of

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

identity. Having mental health services can be a vital transitional model for some student-athletes experiencing identity loss. He discussed a plan in detail but questioned who can help with the plan. He suggested a good resource:

Loss of identity, they don't really know what they want to do. They all think they're going to play pro. Every kid, it doesn't matter what you think. They think they are going to go play pro and it just is so unrealistic. So, I would say not having a backup plan for their career and I'm talking about like a legit backup plan, like saying hey, I'm going to start my own business or hey, I want to be a fashion designer, like that's a pretty great goal, and I want everybody to pursue that but, having a realistic plan of hey, this is what I could do to make some money, that's not in their sport. They all say coaching as well, but none of them really have a plan like hey, this is how I'm going to approach this or you know they just kind of give a blanket statement.

Donald

Donald was somewhat hesitant to bring up the term mental health, almost as if it had a negative connotation. He did acknowledge that having someone to talk to would have been beneficial during their time in college. Furthermore, Donald discussed seeing fellow student-athletes making it professionally and what that did to him mentally:

I really think you just need to talk to somebody after. In a sense, kind of like mental health. I don't want to call it mental health, but I can still function and stuff, you just need to talk to somebody about this stuff for real. And I guess we can call it mental health, but I do not like to go there though. Because you do not need medication, it isn't that. But yeah, you need to talk to somebody about that stuff, it is just a lot to take in.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Now that I am so removed now, I feel like it was not that much to take in, I was just putting too much pressure on myself, you see what I am saying. I am bottling this stuff up. I don't talk to nobody about this stuff. I can only talk to myself about it. And here is another thing, you see your boys get drafted too and then they are social media and stuff. And you are like, dang, man. And then that will hurt you too. You start peaking in other people's lane.

Lewis

Lewis highlighted the education surrounding mental health and how his institution did a good job addressing it early. Along the same lines, he talked about his support network that helped him get through tough times. Lastly, he discussed the challenge of losing his identity and learning to be a functioning member of society.

I think my institution did a really good job of the freshman experience and also highlighting the importance of mental health. You know, making sure that students have all the resources that they possibly can. They're not forcing it on any student. They aren't going to, you know, force you to go see somebody at any point but, you know, they do highlight that they have the mental services. For mental health, I think I was always just surrounded by a good group of, you know, friends, primarily were my fellow athletes. My coaches were always, you know, great it felt like everybody that I met was very welcoming, very friendly, which was, you know, really nice. Now I did go through a rough period in that my life.

I would say it was something that probably took up, you know, most of that first year and I think that was maybe where I was at a difficult point whenever it comes to like mental health. It is just because you do, as you know, the definition is losing your

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

identity. I'd always, you know, whenever I introduced myself to somebody it was, you know my name, I'm a nursing student, and you know I also do my sport and so now, all you got is your name. You lose a big portion of who you are. A lot of your friends come from, you know, athletics, and so, although they are still your friends, it's not like you lose them the second you're done with athletics, like you still have those friends, but it's just it's a completely different, you know, person. You're trying to figure out like who you are now, and you're now thrown with on top of that, now you have to become a functioning member of society.

Beth

Beth said she would have reached out to someone in the support services realm when she was transitioning out of her sport. Being able to express thoughts, feelings, and emotions would have been beneficial for Beth, and that is something a mental health resource could have provided. She reflected on her perspectives about mental health:

I probably would have reached out to someone in mental health, just because, even as prepared as I was to walk away, I think I could have verbalized it a little bit more and helped myself transition and let go a little bit easier. I knew I was walking away, but that didn't make it any less hard when it did end. Obviously, like we talked about I was like, yeah, I know I was walking away and what were the emotions that led to that. It was like there was definitely a sadness. I'm also very fortunate that my family still has a connection to the sport and so it's not as if I have never seen the sport again and I've never played again. But I definitely think having someone to talk to could have helped that in a little bit more concrete way.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Misty

Struggling with anxiety can be challenging to cope with. Misty bravely discussed her battle with anxiety and how support services like a team psychologist, counseling, and character coaches helped her through tough times. All those resources combined empowered her to get through life's difficult road. Misty shared a unique perspective on many topics regarding mental health and resources to help student-athletes cope with the competitive nature of college athletics and the downfall as well:

So, my athletic trainer, she kind of gave me some resources to talk to a counselor at my institution. So, I went for a few sessions with that and then, so that was my freshman season. Then in my junior year, I went back to the counseling center to help with my injury and when I was facing disqualification, I talked to them again to kind of cope with, you know, losing my identity of sport. My life did end up going on after volleyball so like having those support services and like my counselor and character coach just like talking to like you know there's more to come and like how excited I am about things that still haven't happened yet, so yeah.

I feel like maybe, something that was more sports specific because I got a lot out of counseling but more of like coping with my anxiety and like transitional periods, but from someone that kind of didn't really know where I was coming from. Additionally, I feel like even after I graduated, I still there have been times where I've struggled with like my injury, the mental components of it, or like stuff like that, so even after I graduated having resources available for people that have gone through like the trauma that I did like ending my sport, because it still affects me today. Like I woke up this morning, I couldn't feel my hands like it's just not something that once you graduate,

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

once you end your volleyball career, you just get better you know. Having those support services follow you afterwards might be beneficial. I would definitely take advantage of them if they were given to me.

Having counselors like the student resources and just having a conversation I guess before it ends would probably be helpful, like to prepare, because it is like a very drastic end. One day you're an athlete, the next day you're not. I don't think like people can really prepare for it until they have a conversation about it beforehand so maybe like instilling some sort of guidance or coaching before the end happens, would probably help. Every student-athlete, no matter walk of life you are from, what kind of problem you're having, there is always benefit from like counseling and getting plugged into some sort of resource to have someone to talk to you that doesn't know anything about your sport, because that was the most helpful for me. In times, where it felt like overwhelming to like step back and like get some perspective from someone who like doesn't care what your stats are like doesn't care how you won or lost the night before, like just having someone like that to talk to you.

Kim

Kim provided an opportunity to dive into her mentality regarding why she did not use mental health resources. For her, being a student-athlete put a persona that was hard for her to get past:

I think, for me, particularly because I was in such a crappy mental place, I wish I had hopped on the counseling services a little bit more. I think, too, I feel like, it's also hard as the student-athlete to do that, and they try their hardest to be like, it's fine open up, but I also kind of as a student-athlete felt like because I tried to, you know, think rationally in

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

situations of high stress by trying to pull myself away and control my controllables. I also felt like I needed to deal with this myself, if that makes sense, but that's probably out of the scope of everything, so I think there were parts of the mentality of being an athlete also kind of prevented me from sometimes accessing these support services because, not because I looked down on them or looked down on other people; in fact, like if anyone ever came to me with the same kind of like concerns, I would be like they can help. I guess I had a different set of rules for myself and that's not coming from an arrogant perspective; it's more from like I've been super critical of myself and had expectations of myself that I wasn't living up to.

Dealing with the anxiety and stress of being a college athlete creates mental health challenges to varying degrees among student-athletes. Help is found in a variety of places from athletic staff, medical staff, to institutional sources. However, the key seems to be a willingness to ask for help which is difficult for some student-athletes.

Conclusion

To summarize and recap the themes from Chapter 4, during the first interview three main themes emerged: parent involvement, coaches influence and support, and lack of outside sport interest during students' formative years. In interview two, the themes that emerged were the need for resources in professional development, career development, and mental health. These themes drove my recommendations and pointed me in the direction of what challenges I put forth to athletic staff as well as non-athletic staff.

Chapter 5

Discussions, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Restating of the Research Questions

Before diving into a discussion of the findings and the specific recommendations and what educators and support services professionals can do to assist student-athletes through the identity foreclosure process, it is first necessary to restate the research questions: What academic and professional support services are needed for Division I student-athletes to make a successful post-sport transition? Is identity foreclosure a real phenomenon among former student athletes? This capstone project has a deliverable of completing a presentation at a professional conference to shed light on this phenomenon. The charge of this research was ultimately driven by the research questions and the goal of aiding in student-athlete transition.

It is important for athletic support services personnel and both athletic and campus administrators to better understand the challenges student-athletes face. Through this study, former student-athletes shared their experiences to assist future student-athletes during their time of transition. The capability of these young men and women to recall such vivid memories of their past provides information for guidance. No matter the sport, the transition to non-sport life can be challenging. The purpose of this study was to contribute thoughtful ideas that can make leaving one's sport somewhat easier and a little less challenging.

Discussion

When looking at the data, it is important to consider what the participant student-athlete reported experiences mean. What do the trials and tribulations they explained mean? What did identity foreclosure mean to these student-athletes? And lastly, what can people do to help student-athletes with life after their sport? These are challenges that all campus communities,

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

including athletics, should confront. Student-athletes contribute a lot of their time, effort, and abilities to provide exposure for their institution. Thus, the question becomes: How can student-athletes best be supported during the transitional phase out of their athletic career?

There are numerous ways individuals can provide service to student-athletes. Whether becoming a mentor, asking challenging questions, or simply being an ear to listen, there is not one concrete answer to how one can help. Instead, the challenge is, how individual people can meet student-athletes where they are and support them along that journey. Identity foreclosure and identity development are connected at the pivotal point in the student-athlete's life when the realization of the end of formal athletic competition occurs. The findings of this study indicate that student-athletes struggle to establish a new identity and be confident they have the tools to move to the next chapter of their life. The findings from the interviews confirm and validate the ideas of authors such as Astin, Magolda, Schlossberg, and Sanford.

Astin's theory of involvement is tied directly to the student-athlete's engagement in their sport and lack of connection, in some instances, to anything else. Astin defined involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (1984, p. 297). In the interviews with former student-athletes, it became apparent that most of the interviewees' prior devotion to an activity was solely to their sport, and as these participants noted, unfortunately, student-athletes lack involvement in most other aspects of college life. In his work, Astin challenged students to immerse themselves in their campus culture, but since most of the student-athletes interviewed for the current study did not, they faced a harsh reality when they transitioned out of their sport. If they had focused on Astin's I-E-O (Inputs, Experience, Outputs) model (Astin, 1993), which focuses on students' progressions, these participant student-athletes would have invested more time and energy into their overall

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

development outside their sport. The investment would have the overall goal to progress the student-athlete's development. If these student-athletes could have focused on progression and investment in themselves outside their sports, they may have alleviated the negative aspects of identity foreclosure.

My findings also support and confirm Baxter Magolda's (2008) dive into self-authorship, which demonstrated that, in most cases, student-athletes do not acquire the ability to take control of exactly what they want to do outside their sport. Based on the interviews, for these participants, sports always came first, and the student-athletes could not always pursue their other passions because they experienced conflicting emotions related to sport versus academics and career development. Magolda pointed out that students become more confident in their internal voices when they can control their thoughts and responses. The former student-athletes in this study often did not reach that point until the end of their careers. Student-athletes are rarely challenged to be the authors of their own lives, and that is a hurdle for them to overcome. My findings indicate that some of the interviewees only became the authors of their lives when they left their sport. It is challenging for student-athletes to meet Magolda's task of taking charge of their lives. Based on my findings, it is difficult for student-athletes to trust their internal voices and foundation because everything they always knew was centered on their sport, and thinking outside the sports bubble was sometimes used against them. According to some interviewees, they were programmed to focus on their sport and let the rest take care of itself.

Schlossberg's (1981) theory put forth major factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition. Bailey-Taylor (2009) proposed that the Schlossberg theory confirmed the meaning of identity foreclosure, which is a transitional period in a student's life defined as any event or non-event that results in a changed relationship, routine, assumption, or role. Student-

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

athletes face many transitional changes, from starting their career as a student-athlete to the end of their time playing their sport. Schlossberg (1981) identified four major sets that influence a person's ability to deal with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. My findings confirm the literature that students need support and strategies to navigate difficult situations. Transitional times in student-athletes' lives happen daily, monthly, and during each semester, but it is crucial that they understand themselves and the support they have. Based on the interviews, some student-athletes used resources to the full extent, while others had a challenging time asking for help during transitional times. In some instances, they did not have control and did not know what to do. Therefore, my findings confirm Schlossberg's theory.

Sanford (1966) maintained that most learning experiences involve a tricky balance between challenge and support. Students mature through internal or external challenges fostered by the collegiate environment (Stankey, 2018). There is an overall interchange between challenge and support. Too much support can limit the growth of the individual. Too much challenge without the necessary amount of support makes growth extremely difficult. Growth comes from the balance between the two. My findings through the multiple interviews support Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support and thus directly relate to student-athletes. Student-athletes encounter many unique lived experiences throughout their time on a college campus. Having guidance and support provides them with the reassurance they will be confidently able to navigate situations that may arise and persist through them. Based on my findings, some student-athletes sought out and utilized support services during their significant growth periods, such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), mental health counselors, and advisors. Sanford's challenge and support theory agreed with my findings that support

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

services provide a necessary space for student-athletes; some interviewees in my study even indicated that they wish they would have similar resources post-sport life.

The student-athlete experience is a series of transitions that is dependent on outside challenges. For student-athletes, it is not clear where their support comes from. Throughout my study, it became apparent the former student-athletes did not find themselves consistently ready to embark on their post sport lives. The lack of self-efficacy and self-authorship led the former student-athletes to a lost state where they found it challenging to handle real-world situations that arose in their lives. The pre-college and collegiate experiences shared by the participants led directly to the results that identity foreclosure is a real challenge that student-athletes will face now and in the future.

One of the most interesting findings is that the concept of identity foreclosure was real and evident with each participant. These findings directly answered research question two. Regardless of the sport, gender, and pre-college background, identity foreclosure was exhibited by each participant. No matter the severity of the foreclosure, each participant faced it and had to work through the challenges it presented to them specifically. This indicates that colleges and universities must start having critical conversations surrounding this issue and how to address it.

In summary, my findings confirm what the literature posited. Through transitional periods, student-athletes can navigate the many changes that come with being a student-athlete if they have support; it is vital, though, that they ask for help and utilize the resources there to assist them. Furthermore, although the literature talked about students in general, my findings confirm that the literature also applied to student-athletes.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Recommendations for Student-Athletes

For addressing identity foreclosure of student-athletes, student-athletes should use a multitude of different resources and take active engagement steps to ensure that when their time with their sport is complete, they feel comfortable and confident going into the real world. One of the most consequential actions student-athletes can do is take their post-competition career trajectory more seriously earlier in their educational career. This would entail utilizing the resources available instead of making it a second thought. When student-athletes come in as young eighteen-year-old students, most are not in the forward-thinking stage and are not considering how to best position themselves for life after their sport. Therein lies the challenge, which is the need for support services and student-athletes to start critical conversations earlier in their college careers.

Student-athletes need to start developing their professional portfolio and brand earlier in their educational career. That does not mean they need to know what they want to do for the rest of their lives, but they should be taking impactful steps to start coming up with some ideas. Student-athletes need to start investing in areas of interest outside their sport. The overriding impact of identity foreclosure is that when student-athletes finish their sport, they are left with a sense of lost identity because little investment has been made in their development, except for their athletic skills. The same investment needs to be made by student-athletes into their academic, professional, and career side while at their home institution. Student-athletes must connect with faculty and staff members. It requires the institution to make the investment and commitment as a value-added resource of the department, including coaches, administrators, and support personnel. By engaging the institutional resources, students could begin to build their network and brand to create a professional presence; explore areas of interest, strengths and

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

weaknesses, and potential career paths with university faculty; engage in self-interest inventory assessments, and intentionally have critical conversations about the selection of their college major. These insights came directly from my interviews with former student-athletes.

There are many different campus resources that student-athletes should be utilizing more fully to ensure they are positioning themselves in a prime position once their athletic career ends. If their campus has a career center and a professional center, it is imperative to visit those resources a minimum of one to four times per semester. That may seem like a lot, but just as though practicing is investing in their sport, the same is true for the support of career and professional resource centers. During the time with these centers, student-athletes should be taking advantage of workshops and classes that continue to add to their skill set. Career expos, networking events, internships, and volunteer and shadowing opportunities are all areas that student-athletes need to prioritize and were recommended by participants. Whether it is resume writing, cover letter development, or mock interview sessions, these key takeaways from their experience can be vital to their success post sport. Taking full advantage of all types of resources will provide student-athletes a sense of comfort and confidence that they are equipped with both transferable and tangible assets that will help them transition and be successful once their sports career ends.

Student-athlete participants identified two challenges to involvement: not enough time and the league. It is crucial for student-athletes to take advantage of the many resources and service areas that their campus provides. Simply put, they should invest in their professional career the same as their athletic career. By discovering all the possibilities their colleges offer, building their brand, acquiring experience, and setting sail on their course of action, the support services they utilize early and often can make their transition to non-athletic life much easier.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Student-athletes should be challenged to have critical conversations throughout their time in college because those are the conversations that help them learn and grow, but it is essential to take advantage of the resources that will push them out of their comfort zone. In some instances, student-athletes have always been the best in everything they do, which is almost always their sport, but that is not always the case in their academics and careers. Student-athletes must experience life outside their sport during their time at their institution to fully grow, be at their personal best, and prepare for identity foreclosure.

Recommendations for Advisors and Support Staff

Athletic academic advisors and support staff are uniquely positioned to assist student-athletes in their overall development before they reach the end of their sports careers. In some instances, advisors and support staff interact with student-athletes about the same or more than their coaches. There is a shared responsibility to engage student-athletes in serious conversations regarding overall development. When looking at student-athlete interactions with support staff, their working relationship usually evolves during their time together. The three phases of such relationships are dependent, interdependent, and independent. Student-athletes should move from dependent on advisors and support staff to interdependent, where it is more of a partnership, all the way to independent, where they are able to be self-sustaining student-athletes ready to encounter the real world. The piece that can stunt a student-athlete's growth is when they remain in the dependent stage with their advisors and support staff because they never become sustainable on their own.

Advisors and support staff must create a sense of accountability and aid student-athletes in becoming independent young professionals so that they have the necessary skills to succeed in the real world. The same way coaches push student-athletes out of their comfort zones, advisors

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

and support staff must do the same. These resources must challenge student-athletes and equip them with transferrable skills, so when identity foreclosure occurs, they can draw on those skills instead of being lost since they have been so dependent on a support staff member for so long. The goal should move them from dependence to interdependence, and finally, independence. Being an independent individual only helps them be ready for when they leave their sport. That does not mean support staff should not help student-athletes, but there also must be an end goal in mind of preparing and challenging student-athletes to have the necessary skills to be active and engaged members of society. The goal should be to have advisors and support staff create a long- and a short-term map of activities, beginning in the student-athletes' first year.

Along with challenging student-athletes to reach an independent phase to better prepare themselves for life after their sport, advisors and support staff also have a responsibility to student-athletes and their families for having pointed and critical conversations early in the student's educational career. Most often, eligibility is the focus, so the first few years, student-athletes are placed in courses with little consideration for major and career selection. It is necessary to have these conversations starting the first year, so student-athletes can start thinking about life after their sport early enough to position themselves appropriately. Types of conversations should include selection of a major, course structuring that meet their interests and goals, putting a game plan together of what steps they should take to maximize their time at their institution, what career and professional development resources to utilize, and the expectations of what young professionals are expected to do and know in the real world. Advisors and support staff must push their student-athletes to utilize resources. At the same time, it is necessary for support staff to collaborate with athletic and main campus partners to provide student-athletes the time to do so.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Whether it is making event times that fit around their practice and class times or bringing staff members, guest lecturers, or resources to the athletic side a few times a month, it is important to meet students where they are while still encouraging them to go on the main campus and make connections. Having important conversations early during weekly meetings is crucial in student-athlete development. Conversations should be structured around their goals and vision for their life, outside of sports. Although some student-athletes may be resistant to these conversations, it is imperative to continue to have them. It is crucial to explain the why behind the resources and how those resources can benefit student-athletes.

In the new Name Image Likeness (NIL) era, student-athletes' time is more precious than ever, so advisors and support staff must explain the importance of what resources like career and professional development centers can do for them and the benefit of attending. Will every student-athlete take it seriously to start thinking about life after their sport? No, but for most student-athletes that do not make the professional ranks, advisors and support staff must have these conversations surrounding post-sport life. Begin to talk about resumes, cover letters, interviews, professional etiquette, grooming, and attire, all with the hopes of bettering the student-athlete experience and securing a seat at the professional business table.

Recommendations for Coaches

Coaches are in a unique position in that they are often the reason student-athletes come to a particular school, while at the same, coaches are the ones to hold student-athletes accountable when they get to the campus. Coaches play a vital role in student-athletes' preparation for life after their sport. Coaches should take that role seriously and encourage and push student-athletes to start thinking about roles and responsibilities they will be taking on as young professionals while also challenging them to dive into their interests outside their sport. Coaches have a unique

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

charge since they see these student-athletes more than almost anyone while also having control of the most important thing—playing time. Coaches have the ear of the student-athlete, although most of the message centers on their sport. There should also be messaging around what it means to be a young professional; it can start with little things such as accountability, discipline, and teamwork, which are needed in the real world, to collectively celebrating wins academically and professionally. Coaches should emphasize wins on and off the field. They are true teachers in every sense of the word, so why not use that platform to teach student-athletes what it means and looks like to be a professional?

Like advisors and support staff, it is imperative that coaches challenge student-athletes to be great outside their sport. Also, it is important to be honest and upfront with student-athletes from the start. Coaches that stress the importance of academic, career, and professional development, and make it a priority to develop in their program, will hopefully foster an environment where student-athletes see the importance of developing themselves outside their sport. Seeing coaches invested in them off their respective playing fields goes a long way in how serious student-athletes take their engagement in these resources during their time at their institution. This study's interviewees still remember the impactful programming that coaches and athletic staff provided to better student-athletes' overall development. Coaches should reassure student-athletes that the investment they make today will pay dividends whenever they reach their transitional phase.

Participants mentioned “suits for success” or something similar to a “life after their sport” program where coaches invested in their development. Coaches can make everything mandatory, but in most cases, putting that caveat out there does not yield the best return. Former student-athletes stated that when something was mandatory, they simply went to check the box. Instead

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

of making everything mandatory, the challenge to coaches should be how to intertwine academic, career, and professional development into their athletic program. How can coaches assist with giving student-athletes a playbook to successes off the field, as they do for them on the field? Coaches should be pushing student-athletes to attend networking nights, career fairs, and professional development workshops. The need for student-athletes to do those things is there. Everyone knows sports take a significant amount of student-athletes' time, so intentionality is critical in making the above statement a reality.

Another important factor is major selection for student-athletes. Unfortunately, student-athletes are unable to select majors and areas of concentration since the courses often do not align with athletic schedules. Coaches should also dare student-athletes to be great and pursue the avenue they want even though it may not align perfectly with their sports times. The question can arise: What or who is paying for their school, and/or what did they come to college for? I would answer that by saying they came for both, but also question which is going to set them up for success further down the line. It is understood that certain majors cannot be attained due to numerous conflicts, but it is important for coaches and support staff to reassure student-athletes that they have the academic freedom to pursue what they want to pursue. Also, when they are pursuing this avenue, student-athletes should attain as much real-world experience from that area as possible. Whether it is an internship, shadowing, informational interviewing, or simply meeting with professionals, student-athletes should be encouraged by all support staff, including coaches, to take full advantage of every resource that is readily available to them.

Lastly, coaches need to talk about transitions, although student-athletes often never think their career will come to an end. If coaches begin the conversation, it can segue into more productive discussions with student-athletes. Coaches should continue to challenge student-

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

athletes to seek resources that better them outside their competition areas and put real, tangible programs in place that can assist them with life after sports.

Recommendations for Student-Athlete Development Offices

Student-athlete development offices serve an impactful role for student-athletes during their time on college campuses. They usually do everything that is neither strictly athletic nor academic; they fill in those gaps and much more. Key recommendations arose throughout the interviews that are important to consider for future educators. Student-athlete development offices must first speak with their constituents, the student-athletes, to see their needs. Support services offices are only as good as the student-athletes they serve and the outcomes that are created. So, the first and most important aspect of resolving this issue is visibility and meeting student-athletes where they are and figuring out their needs and life goals. The life-goal component can be difficult because of the lure of professional sports, but it is imperative to continue to ask questions and refine thoughts around individual-specific values that help set up realistic life goals.

Programming is another essential element of this office. During the interviews, student-athletes mentioned better programming from career and professional development centers. It is essential to center programming on student-athlete needs. Furthermore, although challenging, they should find a way not to make it mandatory where student-athletes feel they are checking a box and instead create a sense of buzz around the programming activities, so student-athletes *want* to be involved. Personnel should go to practices, games, and coaches' meetings and publicize what the office does and the benefits student-athletes can gain from attending events and working with the student-athlete development office. Events arising from student-athlete responses that would be helpful are career and networking night, dressing for success, resume

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

and cover letter workshops, and career center consultations, just to name a few. The name of the game is value-added, and some of the topics listed can add value to the student-athlete experience.

Student-athlete development offices must make a career trajectory model or something similar to a college game plan to guide student-athletes throughout their time on college campuses and set them up for success once their sport is complete. Some of the student-athletes interviewed for this study mentioned being lost and not having a true game plan in place once they left their sport. For student-athlete development offices, it is vital to set some benchmarks for each class, freshman through senior, and challenge student-athletes to meet those benchmarks every year. The goal should be a polished young professional at the end of their time. This can be printed and handed out to each student-athlete during their beginning-of-the-year meetings or when they come into the student-athlete development offices. Collaboration with coaches and support staff members is crucial in getting this launched since the buy-in from those areas is vital in student-athlete participation. Having a plan for student-athletes to dive into can set them apart when transitioning into the real world. Furthermore, challenging student-athletes to engage in career assessments and gain valuable professional experience is extremely important for the student-athlete development office. A developmental plan could include having a game plan created during their first year that evolves as the student-athlete progresses. Ultimately, the game plan should be developed and implemented by the student-athlete, with guidance from the support staff member.

Another recommendation for student-athlete development offices is to have onsite career and professional development counselors. The participating former student-athletes mentioned being concerned regarding their resume and cover letters and what to put on those when applying

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

to jobs. An interviewee mentioned that he struggled with not being able to put “dribbling a basketball well” as a skill set. I am sure that is true for most student-athletes, which leads to confusion about their transferrable skills and what employers are looking for. Having on-site staff to meet student-athletes would provide another level of support as they begin to shift their attention away from their sport and onto the real world. These resources can assist student-athletes with developing a LinkedIn page, building their brand, or completing mock interviews. The importance of providing student-athletes tangible things they can take away from this experience is vital to their success post-sport life.

The last recommendation for student-athlete development offices and athletic departments regards mental health services. A few interviewees mentioned the need for more intentionality to support student-athletes suffering from mental health issues. As mental health challenges and awareness continue to grow, not only in sports but across the country, so too must the resources necessary to support these individuals. College athletic programs need to take a long hard look into how they can support student-athletes as they go through mental health challenges. An onsite counselor and/or sports psychologist is vital in assisting student-athletes with the issues they may face. Also, mental health does not just affect student-athletes in their sports, but academically, personally, and professionally. Student-athletes battle numerous challenges during the transition phase, whether due to injury or retirement, so there is a direct need for mental health services, specifically on the athletic side. Aiding student-athletes to be in the best mindset helps them far beyond their sport.

Recommendations for Non-Athletic Department Staff

When considering recommendations for non-athletic department staff, it is important to look at the main campus and what other staff can be doing to better support student-athletes. The

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

first and most important thing is to educate faculty and staff on what life is like for student-athletes. It is hard to understand what a day in the life of a student-athlete is like, so it is essential for main campus faculty and staff to understand what they go through and what is expected of them. It is hard to understand what student-athletes' lives are like with practices, classes, media obligations, medical treatment, and much more. The question becomes, How should faculty and staff think about student-athletes when, in most cases, academics is rarely their number one priority? The standard should never be lower for student-athletes' academic engagement and rigor; rather, faculty and staff can challenge student-athletes to become better learners. If they can learn a playbook, they can surely learn a math equation.

This recommendation is that faculty and non-athletic staff be trained and assigned as mentors for student-athletes. Having student-athletes connect with people on the athletic side is great, but to truly have the full campus experience and build their network, having a mentorship program where main campus faculty and staff link up with student-athletes could go a long way in the students' overall success. More importantly, when they encounter the end of their career, having a support system in place that is outside of athletics can be extremely impactful in their development. A time where faculty and staff can meet with student-athletes once or twice a month to connect and engage them in dialogue can open many doors of possibilities. It is a mutually beneficial relationship because faculty and staff can also see that, for most student-athletes, their future depends more on what they do academically versus what they do athletically. Lastly, a faculty/student-athlete mentor program will hopefully dispel stereotypes regarding student-athletes and allow for main campus partners to truly pour into student-athletes. The more touchpoints that student-athletes have with resources, the better.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Summary of Recommendations

Student-Athletes

- Make career and professional development a serious matter and start focusing on that with support personnel early in an athlete's collegiate career.
- Utilize support and development resources, such as career and professional development centers, starting in their first year instead of allowing them to be an afterthought made once they transition out of their sport.
- Develop a professional portfolio and brand and take impactful steps to start investing in their career trajectory.
- Make their major selection a priority and engage in self-interest inventory assessments as an intentional part of their academic process.
- Develop meaningful relationships with faculty and staff members on campus.
- Attend career and professional development workshops that encompass necessary skills, such as resume and cover letter writing, mock interviewing, career connecting, and professional etiquette.
- Be educated on mental health support services on campus and know where they are located.

Advisors and Support Staff

- Assist student-athletes in their different academic and professional phases and challenge them to become independent young professionals.
- Have intentional crucial conversations regarding a plan of action outside the student-athlete's particular sport.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

- Challenge student-athletes to garner transferable skills they can take with them once their sports career is over.
- Discuss topics with student-athletes that include major selection, course structuring that meet their interests, resources to utilize, and a game plan with goals to achieve.
- Talk about professional and career readiness and what resources they can use on their campus.
- In some instances, be intrusive if a student-athlete does not seem right and refer appropriately to support services.

Coaches

- Encourage and push student-athletes to start thinking about roles and responsibilities they will be taking on as young professionals.
- Challenge student-athletes to pursue areas outside their sports and support them when they find a passion that does not involve athletics.
- Engage in dialogue with student-athletes that explains the why behind accountability, discipline, and teamwork, which are necessary to be successful in the real world. Explain what their game can provide them.
- Celebrate academic and professional wins as much as they do those in their athletic win column.
- Address statistics regarding percentages of those who move to the professional rank, and tie that into the importance of life after ball.
- Show student-athletes the investment you make in them that does not involve athletics and develop programs that can assist their development (i.e., Suits for Success).

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

- Support student-athletes who have out-of-the-box thinking as it relates to majors and minors and allow them the opportunity to make it work with their athletic schedule.
- Show student-athletes the benefit of professional and career development resources and workshops while at the same time not making it mandatory. Challenge them to have a plan for when they transition out of their sport.
- Assist student-athletes who seem distressed and make it acceptable to not be ok, and be able to refer to appropriate resources that can assist them during that time

Student-Athlete Development

- Speak with student-athletes to see what their needs are. Too many times, programming occurs without hearing the input of those it is pointed toward.
- Be visible and connect with student-athletes. Do not expect student-athletes to come to the offices; meet student-athletes where they are.
- Provide programming that is centered on student-athlete needs and real-world demands.
- Develop a career trajectory model and game plan for student-athletes to follow and assist them as they navigate their time in college.
- Create benchmarks each year so student-athletes have goals to strive for.
- Collaborate with coaches, supports staff, and main campus faculty and staff so student-athletes and those involved with the particular sport see that Student-Athlete Development Offices are interlocked with sports and support staff.
- Have onsite career and professional development counselors.
- Offer mental health support for student-athletes to utilize during their time.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Non-Athletic Department Staff

- Educate faculty and staff on what life is like from the student-athlete perspective. It is extremely challenging to understand student-athlete life unless education sheds light on the situation.
- Look into a faculty/staff mentorship program with student-athletes. Challenge both student-athletes and faculty to cross lines and connect with those they may not normally connect with. It can be in their college or outside their major.
- For their growth and development, challenge student-athletes to engage in conversation with main campus partners, while being assisted by advisors and peers on how to talk with faculty and staff. This will aid in the dispelling of stereotypes and aid in student-athletes progression on main campus.

Who Takes the Role of Family in Student-Athletes Lives?

Throughout the interview process, it became apparent that many student-athletes use their close on-campus athletic community as a proxy for their families. Student-athletes travel far and wide to pursue their dreams of making the professional ranks. Most, if not all, leave their families, whatever their family looks like, to chase this one goal. The interviewees grew up in diverse households; some grew up in stable households, and some grew up in single-parent households. Still, when student-athletes come to college, numerous entities take on the new family role in their lives. The question that began to ring loud and clear was: Who do these student-athletes confide in when they come to our campuses?

The first layer of family for student-athletes is their teammates. To be on a team is to be a part of one big family. Not every student-athlete will connect with each teammate, but

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

teammates play a large role in their acclimation to the university and team dynamic. Whether on the road traveling game to game, on their respective practice fields, in the cafeteria, locker rooms, and much more, teammates see each other at their best and worst and ultimately become a tight-knit family. Student-athletes confide in their close teammates because they become brothers and sisters in these experiences that most others cannot relate to.

Furthermore, support staff on the athletic side take on a family role for student-athletes. Support staff members play a unique role for student-athletes in that, most times, their support is not directly related to sport but instead focuses on student-athletes' development outside their sport. Trust is crucial when developing relationships with student-athletes. Support staff members must mentor student-athletes to gain their trust and respect, and in turn, allow student-athletes to feel a sense of security when working with staff to create a sense of a family. These members of the athletic department can and do provide a sense of stability for student-athletes where they can be open and confide in individuals who can help them navigate challenges they may encounter. Student-athletes want to see people outside their sport stand by them, as a family member would, and when they do, the level of respect and admiration is a bond that is extremely hard to break.

Lastly, student-athletes confide in main campus partners and their main campus peers. There is a misconception that student-athletes do not have a quality relationship with people at the main campus, but in most cases, that is inaccurate. An argument can be made that some of the most impactful and meaningful relationships for student-athletes are with professors, campus staff members, and peers. If possible, having the ability to leave the jersey on one side of campus and be a normal student allows student-athletes to dive into resources on the main campus that allow them to have a sense of normalcy as it relates to the student experience. Main campus staff

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

members, whether realizing it or not, in some instances, take on the role of family for some student-athletes. Faculty and staff who take a vested interest in a student-athlete's skills, interests, and abilities open the door to connectivity. They never really know how much their vested interest in a student-athlete can mean. Student-athletes share things with these staff members that they may not share with anyone else simply because professors may have tapped into the students' sense of why. If individuals begin to dive into their story, they inevitably become a part of it, and faculty and staff become family, similar to NARP peers. At their core, a good number of student-athletes want to be normal students on campus.

When connecting with peers, those who treat student-athletes normally begin to create a sense of normalcy for the student-athletes. When a stable environment is created, student-athletes can let their guard down and begin to accept support and trust that their peers have their best interests at heart. Being a student-athlete can be lonely sometimes but having a quality support system can allow others to step up and be that new family that supports them through the college journey and beyond. This all connects back to the effects of identity foreclosure. The recommendation is to have a peer-to-peer group that students stay with their whole first year. A first-year student is connected with an upper-class student, and they engage in weekly meetings and dialogue to assist with the transition. The goal of such a program is to create an environment where the family feeling occurs. Through peer groups and faculty and staff mentor programs, the aim is to provide the student-athlete with a family outside their sport, which can be highly effective in their overall development. Furthermore, there must be an onus on faculty facilitating relationships in the classroom between NARP's and student-athletes. They are in a unique place where they can do just that.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Implications

Some of the major implications, based on the recommendations set forth, are centered on student-athlete identity and their development in that area. Identity formation and development are crucial in their most formative years between the ages of 18 and 24. The recommendations for support services and student-athletes are all meant to challenge student-athletes to form their identity outside their sport. Student-athletes must create and form a new space and identity, so they are not left in a bad place when their career ends. The creation of a new identity that is not centered on their sport but instead is centered around academic, career, and professional areas will benefit the student-athlete in the long run.

Although working with athletic support staff is vital and beneficial for student-athletes, working with main campus resources and partners does have tremendous advantages. The issue for certain student-athletes, when only staying on the athletic side of campus, is they only hear one voice and one opinion. Like anything, whenever one voice is heard for so long, individuals either start to believe it or start to disengage and tune it out, neither of which are effective for student-athlete identity development. It is critical for student-athletes to hear multiple voices and multiple different opinions related to their educational and career journeys. Getting the opportunity and chance to hear multiple voices and different opinions will ultimately help stimulate the student-athletes' mind and challenge them to think about different avenues they can take to better their overall professional space. Furthermore, as student-athletes continue to grow and mature, there is a unique opportunity to break down silos between athletics and the main campus. On most college campuses, this silo stretches across campus, both literally and figuratively. The main constituents who suffer from this are student-athletes. There needs to be more of a symbiotic relationship between the two for the betterment of student-athletes. Student-

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

athletes should be challenged to take on other areas of interest besides their sport. They should also be challenged to focus on professional and career development along with being in a quality space with their mental health. Hearing multiple opinions only helps the student-athlete. The transition to non-athletic life will happen to all student-athletes, but it is incumbent upon support staff and coaches on the athletic side to challenge student-athletes to engage with main campus partners for the betterment of their overall identity development.

Deliverables

The deliverables for this capstone study will be a professional presentation. There are multiple conferences of interest would be applicable due to the work that academic professionals do with students and student-athletes. The N4A conference is a conference that includes academic support and student services personnel that work with student-athletes directly in the academic and athletic realm. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) would be another option where many student affairs professional work directly with student-athletes and could assist in their continued growth and maturation. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is centered on advising and, in most cases, faculty advise students on a college campus. This would be a good opportunity to present at this conference since advising is always occurring on college campuses and it can be an opportunity to learn about student-athletes and their advising process. Lastly, the National Association of Collegiate Director of Athletics (NACDA) would be another conference of interest since athletic directors can learn how to continue to best support their student-athletes. Each of these opportunities have regional conferences that would allow for a myriad of possibilities.

For publishing the study in a journal, there are many options. One that comes to mind that focuses on theory to practice through research would be the *Journal of College Student*

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Development. NACADA and NASPA also have publication opportunities for advisors and student support personnel to learn about student-athletes and their overall experience on college campuses. Also, the *Journal of Higher Education* provides an audience of faculty and administrators that can acquire knowledge as it relates to student-athletes. Lastly, posting an article in the NCAA newsletter would be very important, since that reach is extremely overarching, from administrators to advisors. This venue can be a way to begin the conversation regarding student-athlete identity foreclosure. The professional presentation can be found in Appendix E.

Conclusion

The support services areas in athletics should be designed as a safe space for student-athletes to do grow and develop apart from their sport. As institutions, we must remember that these are still 18- to 21-year-old kids. They have been conditioned over time to put on a persona of strength. Student-athletes do not want to feel vulnerable. When expressing emotion or feelings, they, in turn, must let their guard down and let others in, which can be the most challenging part. They are no longer in control and, in some instances, feel powerless. Yet, at the same time, they are more willing to share when they know they have someone they can trust and rely on to be there for them, no matter what. A lack of wanting to be vulnerable and a feeling of powerlessness lead to an absence of self-efficacy from student-athletes.

When looking at this study as a whole, the purpose was first to engage in the topic of student-athlete identity foreclosure. The college athletic landscape is rapidly changing causing student-athletes to face many unique challenges. There remains a significant need to consider student-athletes development in the same way as the focus for student development is provided students who are not student-athletes. They put their bodies and minds on the line for their sport

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

and rarely think about life after it. The biggest takeaway should be to actively consider how institutions can help student-athletes engage in their identity development outside their sport by challenging them to take ownership in their educational and career journey. When faced with identity foreclosure, the former student-athletes of this study mentioned feeling a sense of loss, mostly because something they have done for so long was taken away. Having support services in place early and engaging student-athletes in that process can greatly impact student-athletes' overall maturity and development when they leave their sport. It is the job of those in the higher education setting on college campuses to challenge and support student-athletes to think about life post sport and how they can turn their current state into their desired reality.

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Appendix A

Sample Email

Good Morning,

My name is Kevin (K.C.) Mendez, and I am a doctoral student at Texas Christian University. I am working with the assistance of my doctorate committee to investigate the student-athlete experience, including but not limited to the conclusion of the athlete's career, at the NCAA Division I level. This is not a study of your playing experience but rather a study of aspects of your life as a student-athlete. I am writing to request your participation in a short initial questionnaire, which should take about 5 minutes to complete. You may also be asked to participate in interviews to explore this important project in more depth. Prior to the completion of the prequalifying survey, participants will be asked to read a consent document before becoming a participant and being interviewed for this study. Upon submitting the questionnaire, participants consent to become participants.

All of your information will be kept confidential and will only be accessed by the investigators of this study. Please understand that your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. If you have any questions, please contact me at k.c.mendez@tcu.edu.

Please click the following link to participate:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeA-wlNU38YZ2jimKe42y1bsbBCINeDHMdRcjFKjtj2Pmsnlg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Thank you for your time and consideration,

K.C.

Appendix B

Qualifying Survey

Student-Athlete Email Questionnaire

The purpose of this capstone project is to study the student-athlete experience, including post sport life. There will be an in-depth and interesting look into the student-athlete reality as a Division I player.

PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK TO REVIEW THE FULL CONSENT FORM:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eOrJdABnCRGWvVHM-rhitfnhvXhzPSUv9lAqK5_XaJo/edit?usp=sharing

* Required

Condensed Consent Form Details- Full Form in the Link Above

Overview: The purpose of this capstone project is to study the student-athlete experience, including post sport life. Participants will be invited to engage in the research study so long as they meet the following requirements. You must be between the age of 21 to 31, male or female, played a NCAA Division I sport for all four years and no longer have athletic eligibility remaining from a Power 5 institution. Lastly, you must be removed from your sport no more than 10 years ago.

Study Details: The purpose of this study is to take an in-depth and interesting look at student athlete transition to post-sport life. The research will include two interviews. Interview one will range between 60-90 minutes, while interview two will range between 45-60 minutes. You will be asked about your experiences before, during and, if applicable, after college.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you were a student-athlete at a Division I Power 5 institution who no longer has athletic eligibility remaining. You have also been removed from your particular sport no more than 10 years. We want to further examine your experiences while being a student-athlete and how future student-athletes can best be supported during their time at their institutions. If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of up to 20 participants in this research study.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your information private and confidential. Anyone with authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

What are the risks for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

We do not believe there are any risks from participating in this research that are different from risk that you encounter in everyday life. You will remain confidential and if quoted will use pseudonyms. Because I will be having in-depth conversations, regarding the student-athlete experience there may be concerns that arise as it relates to emotional reactions to questions and or answers. To mitigate the risk I will provide you the time you need to process, cope and move forward within the conversation and lend assistance if necessary. Furthermore I will refer, if applicable, to support services should you need additional information and support

How will my confidentiality be protected?

Every effort will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Your records may be reviewed by authorized University personnel or other individuals who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality. No identifiable information will not be shared with university athletic officials/coaches.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study or concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

You can contact Kevin C. Mendez or Dr. Don Mills at k.c.menez@tcu.edu or d.mills@tcu.edu and telephone number 210-413-5088 or 817-257-6938 with any questions that you have about the study.

or

Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research@tcu.edu

After reading the above condensed consent form, do you meet all the qualifications and are willing to participate in this research study and complete the below survey? *

Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

What is your current age? *

Your answer _____

Did you play Division I athletics at a Power 5 institution? If yes, where? *

Your answer _____

Number of years participating in your sport? *

Your answer _____

Do you have any athletic eligibility left? *

Yes

No

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

What is your gender? *

- Male
- Female
- Prefer Not To Answer

Have you completed your athletic career no more than 10 years ago? *

- Yes
- No

What sport did you participate in? *

Your answer _____

Did you compete professionally? If yes, please explain where and for how many years. *

Your answer _____

Please provide your full name and contact information (phone number). *

Your answer _____

Selecting "Submit" on this survey constitutes consent to participating in this study. If you selected "Yes" I will contact using the information you provided. If you selected "No" you will not be contacted any further, nor any information used.

Submit

Appendix C

Sample Interview Questions

First Interview

I will begin the interview by informing the interviewee about myself and my capstone study. An explanation will be provided regarding the tape recording of the interview and that their responses will be strictly confidential. They will also be informed that if there is something they would like to say off tape, I will oblige by stopping the tape midstream for their commentary.

- Please describe how your personal experiences influenced your interest in playing your sport(s)?
- Can you please describe your family's influence in you pursuing higher education?
 - Probe: Did anyone in your family go to college?
- How were your parents involved in your athletic career?
- How were your parents involved in your academic career?
 - Please explain the relationship
- Can you please explain the importance of education versus sport in your household?
- What role or influence did athletic coaches have on your decision to pursue your particular sport(s)?
- What pressures did you face that encouraged you to prioritize your sport above other personal or family priorities, including school?
- As you started to play more competitively, how did your view of sports change?
- How did your view of sports change over time?
 - Probe: Did it change once you began playing competitively?
- Besides playing sports growing up, were you involved in any other activities? Why? Why not?
 - Probe: Did you ever feel like you had time to pursue other avenues?
- If sports/scholarship was not possible as an avenue for pursuing university, what were your alternative plans? Please explain.

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

- What questions do you have for me?

Second Interview

In this interview, we will discuss your pre and post-life as a college student-athlete. Attention will be given to your views once your athletic career was over.

- Describe your daily life as a college student-athlete.
- Tell me your WHY behind your getting into college athletics?
- What did you know about student support services on college campuses?
 - Probe: Provide examples of how student support services assisted you?
 - Probe: What support services did you have on your campus?
- What plan did you have for your life after your competitive career?
- What emotions and feelings did you have when you knew your competitive athletic career was over? Please explain.
- What outlook did you obtain from sports that prepared you to be successful in life?
 - Probe: Provide examples of how you were under-prepared once you transitioned to non-sport life?
 - Probe: Provide examples of how you were over-prepared once you transitioned to non-sport life?
- What factors led you to leave your sport? What support services would have been helpful for you?
- What have you seen as the most challenging things student-athletes face when leaving their sport?

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE



- How do you think academic institutions can best prepare student-athletes for the end of their athletic career?
- Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed?

Thank you so much for participating in this interview and capstone study. Can I contact you by phone or email should I have any additional questions?

Appendix D

Kevin C. Mendez

Human Subject Research Certificate

  **Completion Date** 04-Feb-2019
Expiration Date 03-Feb-2023
Record ID 30444742

This is to certify that:

KEVIN MENDEZ


Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Human Subjects Researcher (social-behavioral-educational)
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Texas Christian University

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.


Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wa385ae9e-fb91-426e-ae90-e2bea7e370c4-30444742

Dr. Don Mills

Human Subject Research Certificate



Completion Date 04-Jun-2019
Expiration Date 03-Jun-2023
Record ID 31833712

This is to certify that:

Donald Mills

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Human Subjects Research
Human Subjects Researcher
(social-behavioral-educational)
1 - Basic Course**

(Curriculum Group)

(Course Learner
Group)

(Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification
through CME. Do not use for
TransCelerate mutual recognition
(see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

Texas Christian University




Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wda2fc733-a826-488d-b239-ada94793cf9c-31833712

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Appendix E


Professional Conference Presentation Template

1



A Study on Student -Athlete Identity Foreclosure
Dr. J. L. Brubaker
2012 Conference on Identity
April 8, 2012


2



The Real Lived Experience

- Put yourself in the position...
- Imagine sitting in that chair...
- Student-athletes particular sport in some cases is their ultimate identity.

3




The Current College Landscape

- 42% of NCAA student-athletes go on to the professional ranks in Football and Men's Basketball
- 7% of Men's Basketball student-athletes make the professional ranks

Sport	Estimated Probability
Baseball	10%
Football	15%
Men's Basketball	7%
Women's Basketball	10%
Ice Hockey	10%
Other	10%

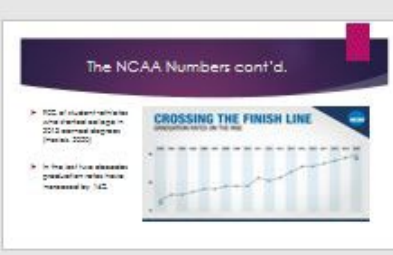
4



The NCAA Numbers

	2008	2012
# of Athletes	208	721
# of Student-Athletes	174,000	118,000


5



The NCAA Numbers cont'd.

- 100% of student-athletes who earned a degree in 2012 earned degrees (NCAA, 2012)
- In the last four decades, population-related decline exceeded by 100%

6



The Why Behind This Study

- Student-athletes describe most of their time playing a sport and that their identity has already been established, but their development outside their sport (Bassman, 2012)
- Student-athletes come from all over the world and are having to transition out of athletics and finding their true identity away from sport & their campus (Julian, 2011)
- Conversations with non-student-athletes about their college careers prepared to receive non-athletes (Bassman & Pritchard, 2012, p. 1)

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

7


The Why Behind This Study cont'd.

- Student-athletes need professional growth resources, not just they need academic resources, in order to develop holistically outside their sport (Liguori, 2012)
- Attention needs to be drawn to this subject matter in order to adequately provide student-athletes the opportunity to gain real-world experiences outside their sport
- The significance behind this exploration is what can be done to prepare student-athletes for life after their sport

8

The Research Question

What academic and professional support services are needed for Division I student-athletes to make a successful post-sport transition? Is identity foreclosure a real phenomenon among former student athletes?



9

The 3 "Buckets" of Literature

- Identity Formation and Identity Foreclosure
- Student Development Theories
- Student-Athlete Development

10

Identity Formation

- It is possible to identify formation is leading oneself within a social group and more importantly, internalizing the expectations of that group" (Saulman, 2014, p. 27)
- College students begin to embrace one they are and form a more complete picture of himself or herself in the appropriate social (Saulman, 2014,)
- Education needs to promote the development of student's social identities (self-concept, values, goals and orientation and skills for personal and social transformation that will help them navigate issues" (Enright, 2002; Furr & Caplan, 2005; Hernandez & Sargeant, 2012)

11

Identity Foreclosure

- A strong athletic identity is related to both identity foreclosure and lower career maturity (Brown, Chastain-Fender & Dorian, 2002, p.24)
- Four major factors that influence an individual's ability to cope with transition: the student, the self, support and strategies" (Sargeant & Johnson, 2012, p.2)
- "Unrealistic expectations regarding athletic potential, with them generally sports to be a viable avenue to fame and fortune, which undermines the pursuit of educational goals and result in career disappointment" (Casper, et al., 2002, p.208)

12

Student Development Theories

Theorists	Key Takeaways
Maslow's pyramid	Self-actualization level: requires a degree of trust, the appropriate developmental environment, and a safe (Maslow, 1954)
John Piagetian	Needs to be met in order to advance and achieve, should be met in a safe and secure manner (Piaget, 1950; Maslow & Maslow, 1950, p. 4)
Vygotsky's zone of proximal development	The distance between what the learner can do independently and what they can do with help and guidance (Vygotsky, 1978; Maslow & Maslow, 1950, p. 4)
Berkley's theory	"Personal needs are crucial: some understanding of their needs through a holistic approach to learning, teaching, and training, including strategy" (Maslow, 1954, p. 4)
Sergeant's developmental theory	"It is essential to understand the developmental needs of student-athletes and to provide them with a variety of support and resources" (Sargeant, 2012; Maslow & Maslow, 1950, p. 4)

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

13

Student Development Theories

Theorist	Key Takeaways
Arnett (2000)	Adolescent development is shaped by the appropriate environment. Adolescent behavior is shaped by social, cultural, and family factors.
Arnett (2000)	Adolescent development is shaped by the appropriate environment. Adolescent behavior is shaped by social, cultural, and family factors.
Arnett (2000)	Adolescent development is shaped by the appropriate environment. Adolescent behavior is shaped by social, cultural, and family factors.
Arnett (2000)	Adolescent development is shaped by the appropriate environment. Adolescent behavior is shaped by social, cultural, and family factors.
Arnett (2000)	Adolescent development is shaped by the appropriate environment. Adolescent behavior is shaped by social, cultural, and family factors.

14

Where I Gathered the Data

Institutional Data	Athletic Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Division I institution Total enrollment of under 10,000 undergraduate students 13:1 student/faculty ratio 59% female (41% male) with a 12% retention rate 116 undergraduate majors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17 Division I Athletic Sports Member of a Power 5 Conference Total of 500 student-athletes In 2020 they graduated 90 student-athletes \$5 million dollars in revenue in 2020

15

Who I Spoke To

Selection of Participants	Participant Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualifying survey up to 20 individuals Graduated/Retired no more than 10 years ago from Power 5 institution Multiple sport sample 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total of 8 former student-athletes (4 men and 4 women) Age range of 21 to 31 Played all 4 years and graduated

16

Participant Breakdown

Major	Age	Gender
Engineering	21	Male
Business	22	Female
Education	23	Male
Healthcare	24	Female
Humanities	25	Male
Physical Sciences	26	Female
Mathematics	27	Male
Life Sciences	28	Female

17

How I Gathered the Data

- Two open structured interviews that took place a week to two weeks apart from each other
- Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes in a quiet office, while being recorded
- Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes in a quiet office, while being recorded
- Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes in a quiet office, while being recorded

18

When I Gathered the Data

Year	Month	Day	Time	Location
2018	January	15	10:00 AM	Office
2018	February	20	11:00 AM	Office
2018	March	25	12:00 PM	Office
2018	April	30	1:00 PM	Office

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

25

Recommendations for Advisors and Support Staff

- Ask student-athletes in their different academic and professional classes during their time studying with them by having intentional crucial conversations regarding a plan of action outside their sport
- Start to challenge student-athletes to come transferable skills they can take with them and who they are outside their sport
- Make it a point to discuss topics with student-athletes that include major education, course structure that meet their interests, and professional/career readiness

26

Supporting Impactful Quote

- Participant 1:
"I think career services, I mean, I think teaching athletes how to leverage their skills that they develop from being athletes and learn how to leverage that in the professional world and showed that like either getting a job, and at college as you know how to channel the things that they're that that made them successful in the athletic careers... I don't know that transition is easy for a lot of people to make, I ended up really enjoying the fact that I was studying and working in it like the other major and I could step into which was pretty easy. But I think the transition can be tough for some people. So how very different worlds, like being an athlete and being in working professional. You know unless you're prepared for that then you could be off to the races as you can be kind of stuck in place here while."

27

Recommendations for Coaches

- encourage student-athletes to see coaches in a positive way and an opportunity and not as a barrier to them
- start to challenge the student-athletes to think that their coaches are not always going to be an obstacle and an opportunity to make them into a better person
- encourage student-athletes to see coaches as a role model and a mentor and not just as a coach
- start to challenge the student-athletes to see coaches as a role model and a mentor and not just as a coach
- encourage student-athletes to see coaches as a role model and a mentor and not just as a coach

28

Supporting Impactful Quote

- Participant 2:
"I think having more programs with student-athlete development and with life coaching. I feel like life coaching would be a good thing because it was honestly like someone just like turned off the lights, you know like you go home (when sport was done). Like nothing was there anymore, it's just like all right have fun doing it on your own now, which I feel like a lot of normal students in college learn that independence from leaving home and not having to count on parents or stuff like that, but for us it was almost like become more dependent on people because you know you have everything given to you. You're not technically allowed to go outside of university resources when you're an athlete."

29

Recommendations for Student-Athlete Development

- Agree with the participants, the student-athletes, to see what their needs are, programming sometimes seems to have hearing the input of these things that students, UICP, UICP, and other students
- Be visible and connect with student-athletes and meet student-athletes where they are
- Develop a career/education/health and game plan for student-athletes to help and assist them as they navigate their time in college. Make recommendations
- Have an in-house and professional development resources along with mental health support staff

30

Supporting Impactful Quote

- Participant 2:
"As far as normal campus, that we didn't have like a specific sports psychologist within athletes, but the psychology department or campus mental health center. They did have a sports psychologist that work with athletes and were able to go there and utilize their services as well, which I think was helpful and number of my teammates did use."

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

31

Recommendations for Non-Athletic Department Staff

- Educate faculty and staff on what life is like from the student-athlete perspective
- Facilitate a faculty/staff mentorship program with student-athletes
- Place an emphasis on mental health services that can support student-athletes

32

Lasting Impact

- Provide assistance to help student-athletes working through identity foreclosure
- Leave something behind that can challenge student-athletes to develop their identity that does not involve their sport
- Remember the story...we have all been there before...

33

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

- Informed consent was administered to participants and was read verbally to them before interview one started
- Participants remained confidential and 7 quoted pseudonyms were used
- Member checking was conducted and transcripts were sent to participants
- After transcription and member checking the recording will be destroyed

34

Questions???

Appendix F

Conference Program Proposal

Kevin C. Mendez Conference Program Proposal

Program Overview

1. Program Title:
A Study on Student-Athlete Identity Foreclosure

2. Program Type (select one):
 Lecture presentation
 Roundtable discussion
 Panel
 Poster

3. Program Setup Needs (select all that apply):
 Computer
 Projector and screen
 Flipchart & marker
 Other (describe):

Program Abstract:

This program will share the results of a study of the student-athlete experience, especially focusing on post competition experience. The design of the study was based on the theoretical work of student development theorists, NCAA data and identity foreclosure studies. Student-athletes were invited to engage in the research study where they shared their experiences before, during and, if applicable, after college. From the study, it became clear that student-athletes, without exception, suffered from “identity foreclosure” when their athletic career ended. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations have been developed for the athletes, coaches, other athletic department personnel and university staff. This presentation will share the results of the study while also sharing the recommendations for methods of lessening

the impact of identity foreclosure for student-athletes. The program will present findings and recommendations while providing opportunities for attendees to share their insights and discuss the recommendations.

Program Details

1. Program Abstract:

This program will share the results of a study of the student-athlete experience, especially focusing on post competition experience. The design of the study was based on the theoretical work of student development theorists, NCAA data and identity foreclosure studies. Student-athletes were invited to engage in the research study where they shared their experiences before, during and, if applicable, after college. From the study, it became clear that student-athletes, without exception, suffered from “identity foreclosure” when their athletic career ended. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations have been developed for the athletes, coaches, other athletic department personnel and university staff. This presentation will share the results of the study while also sharing the recommendations for methods of lessening the impact of identity foreclosure for student-athletes. The program will present findings and recommendations while providing opportunities for attendees to share their insights and discuss the recommendations.

2. Primary learning outcomes/ objectives of your session (Up to 4):

- 1. Participants will understand the concept of identity foreclosure for student athletes**
- 2. Participants will be able to identify strategies to lessen the impact of identity foreclosure**

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

- 3. Participants will recognize institutional programs that could be implemented for student athletes.**
 - 4. Participants will be able to identify barriers to implementing programs designed to lessen the impact of athlete identity foreclosure.**
3. Briefly describe how your program relates to the conference theme and at least one of the guiding topics above:

Because NACDA has the mission of providing educational opportunities for those in the intercollegiate athletic administration realm, my program relates to theme because it details directly how to understand, identify strategies and implement support services to assist student-athletes as they go through identity foreclosure.

4. Describe how audience members will participate in your program: Question and answer session.

Audience members will have the opportunity to have a Question and Answer session at the end. Additionally during the presentation they will be asked though provoking questions in a group setting and be asked to report back out on the discussion they had.

5. Describe your program, including an outline of the program (maximum 400 words):

This program will discuss the student-athlete experience and the phenomenon of identity foreclosure among Division I student-athletes. The program will briefly examine the student development literature including Schlossberg, Chickering, Magolda, Astin and others to describe the challenges of the college experience. These theories will then be applied to the unique experiences of collegiate student-athletes and the relationship to identity theory and identity foreclosure. The program is based on a qualitative study of Division I student athletes and involved an examination of the athlete's pre-college experiences, their experiences during college and the post-competition challenges.

The study participants were student-athletes at a Division I institution. They represented a variety of sports and included both women and men. NCAA data was used to assist in framing interview questions. A narrative qualitative study describes the methodology used by the researchers.

The results of the study indicated that while the student-athlete experience had some differences, there were significant commonalities including, without fail, the experience of identity foreclosure when the playing career had ended. Identity foreclosure can be defined as a time when one's primary understanding of oneself is challenged and changed. Without an environment that supports the transition to a new understanding of oneself can be difficult and, in some cases, disorienting. The student-athletes provided several insights about their experiences and proposed several ideas that could be used to make the transition from athlete as a primary identity to another, more broadly defined identity.

As a result of this study, several recommendations have been developed for the purpose of enriching the student-athlete environment and the easing the transition to post-competition living. These include recommendations for student-athletes, for coaches, for other athletic department personnel and for institutional (non-athletic) faculty and staff. The implementation of these recommendations would result in better preparing student-athletes for life but also provide a richer student environment leading to greater self-efficacy and more self-sufficiency.

The program presentation will allow time for discussion of ideas, insights and questions from the audience.

Resources

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STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Vita

Kevin C. Mendez

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/KevinCMendez

EDUCATION

Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX

Doctorate of Education, Higher Education Leadership May 2022

Focus on Student-Athlete Identity Foreclosure

Lynchburg College, Lynchburg, VA

Master of Education, Educational Leadership May 2012

Bachelor of Arts, Major: Sport Management Minor: Coaching May 2010

Professional Certifications: NCAA Compliance/Athletic, STRONG Career Interest Inventory

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Texas Christian University, Athletic Academic Services Office Fort Worth, TX

Director of Football Academic Services September 2021- Present

Texas Christian University, Athletic Academic Services Office Fort Worth, TX

Director of "Guest Coach Experience" Program May 2018-Present

Texas Christian University, Athletic Academic Services Office Fort Worth, TX

Men's Football Academic Advisor January 2020- August 2021

Texas Christian University, Athletic Academic Services Office Fort Worth, TX

W. Basketball, Volleyball, Swim & Dive, M. Tennis Academic Advisor May 2018- January 2020

Texas Christian University, Neeley School of Business Fort Worth, TX

Business Academic Advisor March 2015-May 2018

Texas Christian University, Neeley School of Business Fort Worth, TX

Director of Neeley Navigator Peer Advising Program August 2017-May 2018

Virginia Commonwealth University, University College Richmond, VA

Undeclared Academic Advisor June 2012-March 2015

Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, VA

RAMS Connect Peer Mentor Program January 2014-March 2015

Lynchburg College Lynchburg, VA

STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Graduate Assistant, Academic and Career Services

August 2010-May 2012

NCAA ATHLETIC EXPERIENCE

Lynchburg College

Assistant Golf Coach

Golf Coach Apprentice

Lynchburg, VA

May 2010- May 2011

August 2009-May 2010

Lynchburg College

Division III Student-Athlete Men's Basketball

Team Captain

Three-year Letterman

Two-time "Lynchburg College Athlete of the Week"

Member USA International Team Overseas

Lynchburg, VA

Seasons 2007-2010

2009-2010

2007-2010

Summer 2008

Elmira College Men's Basketball Team

Division III Student-Athlete Men's Basketball

Penn-State Behrend All-Tournament Team

Elmira, NY

Season 2006-2007

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Collaborative Educational Programs for the Americas (CEPA) Conference

Thinking outside the box: What small colleges can do to generate revenue

San Antonio, Texas 2016

UT-Arlington Advising Association 19th Annual Conference

Advisor help needed! Where to turn? Ask your professional mentor: The true effectiveness of engaging advisors through mentoring

Arlington, Texas 2015

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) National Conference

Engaging transfers: A transfer peer mentor program that gets results

Orlando, Florida 2010

NACADA Regional Conference

Transfer-Mation: A transfer orientation program that works

Charlottesville, Virginia 2011