TRANSITIONING OUT OF SPORT: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT-ATHLETE

SUPPORT OR DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my former teammates and all other student-athletes who fulfilled their passion for sport, but endured the challenge of finding a new life purpose after leaving the college sport environment. Personally, as a former student-athlete, I had difficulties coping with the stressors of my retirement from competitive sports. The loss of my athlete-centered lifestyle, my sport-related community, and ultimately, my athletic identity left me feeling isolated. Even though there were services and programs offered within the athletic department to help prepare me for a new career, this programming was only available while I was still in school. Like many student-athletes, I largely focused on my commitment to sports while actively competing in college athletics and consequently, my development outside of the sports context (e.g. academically and professionally) was often a second-thought. As such, I did not take full advantage of the programming offered within student-athlete support or development services at my university. Therefore, I hope the findings of my study encourage the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and those within university athletic departments to provide evidence-based programming not only for current student-athletes, but for former student-athletes as well, especially for those who struggle to cope with this transitional period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Despite the substantial amount of literature on career transitions in sport, there is insufficient research examining the social support system within college athletics as it is an important resource for student-athletes, especially for their success later in life. Likewise, there are currently no studies exploring athletic retirement from the perspective of student-athlete support or development services, a section of athletic departments that provides programming for the success of their student-athletes. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to explore the implications of athletic retirement from the perspective of directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services of NCAA Division I universities. **Methods/Data Analysis:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants (n = 8) to explore their perceptions about the factors that lead to a successful or unsuccessful transition out of sport. Participants further described how their current services and programs helped student-athletes overcome the obstacles of this transitional period. **Results:** An inductive data analysis was used to organize participants' responses into themes and subthemes related to the original research questions. Although programming varied by institution, the participants observed that most of their student-athletes experienced a successful transition out of sport as their services and programs helped them effectively cope with the demands of athletic retirement. When participants did cite problems with the process of athletic retirement, they reported issues surrounding a salient athletic identity, such as a lack of career development, a sudden loss of the sport environment, and mental and physical health risks. Finally, participants believed that

evidence-based services and programs need to be implemented to meet the needs of both current and former student-athletes. Implications for the programming of student-athlete support or development services and future research are discussed.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSU   Boise State University

GC   Graduate College

TDC   Thesis and Dissertation Coordinator

NCAA   National Collegiate Athletic Association

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2017), more

than 480,000 student-athletes compete in college sports in Divisions I, II, and III, and of

those only a small percentage will continue on to professional or Olympic-level athletics.

For example, at NCAA-member schools, football has the greatest participation numbers

with 73,660 players; however, only 1.5% will play professionally in the National Football

League (NFL). The sport with the highest probability of student-athletes competing in

professional sports is baseball with 9.1% of college players recruited by Major League

Baseball (MLB) teams in the 2016 draft (NCAA, 2017). Although a large number of

student-athletes aspire to play professional sports, the vast majority end their participation

in competitive athletics following their final season of competition in college. Even for

athletes who compete in sports professionally, their careers are relatively short with 3.5,

4.8, and 5.6 years as the average career length in the NFL, NBA, and MLB, respectively

(Nelson, 2013). The shortened athletic careers of professional athletes are comparable to

the four years of eligibility for student-athletes who compete in NCAA-sanctioned sports.

Therefore, the majority of both amateur and professional athletes are likely to retire from

sport earlier than they had anticipated, a reality that is not often recognized by athletes

because their active involvement in sport overshadows the eventual end of their athletic

careers (Parham, 1993).

Although athletic retirement is inevitable for most student-athletes, this transition

out of sport is a potentially challenging process with athletic and nonathletic (e.g. social,

psychological, and physical) transitional demands (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). For student-athletes, the termination phase of their athletic careers is often an experience that involves a greater sense of loss, not necessarily of the sport itself, but a loss of their basic human needs (i.e. competency, autonomy, and relatedness), which were satisfied by their participation in sport for so many years (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Parham, 1993). Coakley (1983) defined athletic retirement as "the process of transition from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities" (p. 1). In general, transitioning out of sport involves an adjustment to a post-sport career for student-athletes (Parham, 1993). This transition to a "second career" or another area of interest requires student-athletes to explore their non-sport goals and interests. As such, this process leads student-athletes to redefine their self-identity as it is no longer supported by their intimate connection to sport (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Given the significance of athletic retirement on student-athletes' well-being, it is important to understand the factors influencing the quality of their retirement adaptation.

Theoretical Perspectives of Athletic Retirement

Early research on athletic retirement compared this transition to a crisis event often involving negative consequences (Lavallee, Kremer, Moran, & Williams, 2004). These studies approached athletic retirement from theoretical frameworks such as thanatology and social gerontology, and adopted the general psychology definition of a transition – "an event or nonevent which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus, requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). From these original theoretical viewpoints, the termination of an athletic career was compared to a social death, for which athletes were

isolated and rejected from their former sport group (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Retirement from sport was, therefore, viewed as a devastating transition with predominately negative implications (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009). Furthermore, it was often thought that athletes experienced "stages of grief" as they transitioned out of sport, which involved a systematic sequence of psychological reactions, including athletes denying the inevitability of their sport career termination, bargaining for a longer athletic career, and accepting the end of their career in sport (Lavallee et al., 2004, p. 216).

The current literature on athletic retirement, however, suggests that leaving sport is an important life-turning point that can positively influence an athlete's personal growth and well-being (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Researchers have shifted their understanding of athletic retirement from a singular event to a life process that affects an athlete's development both in and out of the sports environment (Stambulova et al., 2009; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Although a majority of athletes report a successful transition out of sport, an estimated 20% of retired athletes still have a traumatic experience (Lavallee, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill, & Edge, 2000). This statistic has important implications for the athlete population as 1 in 5 athletes are unable to effectively cope with their retirement from sport and thus, may need additional support during this transitional period. Additionally, only 9% of former college student-athletes reported as "thriving" in five elements of well-being (i.e. purpose, social, financial, community, and physical), according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being 5 View (Gallup, 2016). Gallup (2016) surveyed 1,670 former student-athletes, ranging in age from 22 to 71, to further examine the long-term effects of competing in college sports on student-athletes' overall well-being. Out of the five categories of well-being, these

former student-athletes were least likely to have financial security and good physical health at 38% and 41%, respectively. Despite nearly two-thirds (65%) of them having full-time employment, just over half (56%) of them felt a sense of fulfillment from their daily work. While there are amateur and professional athletes who successfully transition out of sport, this recent survey of former college student-athletes suggests that there are many who experience difficulties with their athletic retirement and thus, struggle in certain areas of their life.

The quality of adaptation athletes experience as they transition out of sport is influenced by a number of factors, including the exclusivity of their athletic identity, the voluntariness of their decision to retire from sport, and their ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Taylor & Olgivie, 1994). For example, athletes with salient athletic identities at the time of their retirement will likely encounter adjustment difficulties, such as an identity crisis, because their sense of self is no longer supported by their involvement in sports (Brewer et al., 1993). In contrast, athletes who broaden their self-identity to include non-sport goals and interests prior to their retirement often experience a healthier transition out of sport because they proactively disengaged from their primary role as an athlete (Lally, 2007). Therefore, an athlete's transitional outcome—successful or unsuccessful adaptation—is influenced by a complex interaction of both internal and external factors (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Conceptual Model of Athletic Retirement

In the conceptual model of athletic retirement, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) outline a five-step process of sport career termination that recognizes several factors related to the quality of adaptation of retirement. The first step of their model identifies the four

main causes of retirement from sport: age, deselection, injury, and free choice. The

second step involves the factors that are likely to add distress to athletes' adaptation, such

as their self- and social-identities and perceptions of control, whereas the third step

recognizes the more positive factors that lead to adaptive responses and thus, a successful

transition out of sport. These positive factors are described as the resources available for

athletes' retirement adaptation, including coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement

planning. Of these available resources, pre-retirement planning, is thought to have the

broadest influence on athletic retirement as career preparation or career development

introduces athletes to academic and vocational opportunities, increases their perceptions

of control, and reduces their financial stressors (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). These career-

related services and programs are primarily offered through the sport organization. Thus,

athletes' access to this type of organizational support, including the athletic departments

of universities, is an important resource for them as they transition out of sport.

The fourth step of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model recognizes that the quality

athletes' adaptation is not always a distressful transition, unlike the previous theoretical

perspectives of social gerontology and thanatology. Athletes who utilize their available

resources (i.e. coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning) are often better

prepared to cope with athletic retirement than those who encounter transition difficulties.

For athletes who encounter personal, social, or financial problems, intervention strategies

may provide further assistance to them during the end of their athletic careers. Some of

these athletes may experience more significant distress with their retirement from sport,

such as drug abuse, anxiety, or depression. Therefore, in the fifth step of their model,

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) provide treatment options for athletes who struggle to cope

with the process of athletic retirement. As previously stated, the services and programs directly addressing pre-retirement planning are the most effective interventions for athletes who lack the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully transition out of sport (Taylor & Olgilvie, 1994).

For student-athletes competing in NCAA athletics, several programs exist that aid in their transition process; however, they vary dependent on each university and its offerings. One such initiative started by the NCAA is the Life Skills program, previously known as the CHAMPS (Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success)/Life Skills program. This program provided schools the tools to implement programming committed to the holistic development of student-athletes through various activities, such as goal-setting, decision-making, and career planning (Goddard, 2004). The NCAA based these services and programs on five general areas: academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal development, career development and community service. The universities that participated in the Life Skills program were free to choose which programming elements they implemented for their student-athletes. These services and programs are typically offered through the unit of student-athlete support or development services of university athletic departments. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the process of athletic retirement from the perspectives of the staff in student-athlete support or development services of NCAA-member institutions.

Need of the Study

Despite the substantial amount of literature on career transitions in sport, an insufficient amount of research examines social support within the system of college athletics as it is an important resource for student-athletes during the end phase of their

athletic careers. Likewise, no studies explore athletic retirement from the perspective of directors and/or associate directors in student-athlete support or development services, a section of university athletic departments that works directly with student-athletes. The overall programming goal of student-athlete support or development services is to help student-athletes gain the necessary knowledge and skills for their success during and after their college athletics careers. Because of their direct involvement with the development of student-athletes, these individuals may provide an important perspective on student-athletes' transition out of sport. Yet, no evaluation systems exist to test the effectiveness of their services and programs for student-athletes. Additionally, research has shown that retiring athletes tend to look for support from outside the realm of athletics, even with the sport organization's positive influence on athletes' well-being (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Therefore, researching the transition out of sport from the viewpoint of the sport organization, in particular student-athlete support or development services, may help explain why many retiring athletes look for support from non-sport sources. Furthermore, the insight of staff within student-athlete support or development services may reveal the strengths and weaknesses of their current services and programs and thus, further stress the significance of their programming on student-athletes' retirement adaptation and ultimately, their overall well-being.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study was to explore the process of athletic retirement from the perspective of the sport organization as this type of social support offers services and programs (e.g. pre-retirement planning) to help student-athletes succeed after their college sport careers. This study collected qualitative data in the form of semi-structured

interviews from directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services of NCAA Division I institutions, a subject population absent from the current literature. The participants' responses provided a unique insight into the transition out of sport as well as a better understanding of their programming designed to assist student-athletes in coping with the termination of their athletic careers.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study pertained to how directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services perceived the process of athletic retirement for student-athletes. More specifically, participants described the factors involved in a successful and unsuccessful transition out of sport, listed the obstacles student-athletes likely encounter during the end phase of their athletic careers, and explained how their programming helps student-athletes overcome these transitional obstacles. Thus, the participants' responses provided information on the relationship between student-athlete support or development services and the quality of student-athletes' transition out of sport.

Operational Definitions

- Athletic Retirement: Coakley (1983) defined athletic retirement as "the process of transition from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities" (p. 1).

- Social Support: Shumaker and Brownell (1984) defined social support as "an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (p. 13).

- Director/Associate Director of Student-Athlete Support or Development Services:

  A staff member within the athletic departments of NCAA-member schools who

  assists with the programming of student-athlete support or development services.

Limitations and Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was the selected sample of directors and/or associate

directors of student-athlete support or development services from NCAA Division I

institutions of the United States. The participants within these athletic departments were

recruited because sports programs at the Division I level are the most competitive out of

the three major NCAA divisions (i.e. Division I, II, and III) and typically, have the most

financial resources for student-athlete support or development services. Moreover, the

participants' perceptions of the athletic retirement process may not represent those of

athletic departments from other universities and divisional levels. Another delimitation of

this study was the small sample size. However, the researchers purposefully stopped at

eight participants because of data saturation, which is characteristic of qualitative

research. Furthermore, the quality of interview data was contingent upon the participants'

willingness to respond with honesty and their ability to provide correct knowledge on the

topic of athletic retirement.

Significance of the Study

The information from this study helps fill a gap in the current literature on the

process of athletic retirement as it explores the student-athlete transition out of sport from

the perspective of the sport organization. Additionally, participants' responses revealed

the strengths and weaknesses of the services and programs within student-athlete support

or development services of NCAA Division I universities. For example, while their

comprehensive programming supports the development of current student-athletes, their programming efforts do not target the needs of former student-athletes, especially those who struggle to cope with this adjustment period. Therefore, it was concluded that the staff of student-athlete support or development services should implement services and programs to help former student-athletes throughout their transition out of sport. In addition, the participants highlighted the need for evidence-based programming within student-athlete support or development services to increase the effectiveness of their services and programs for both current and former student-athletes. The findings of this study provide suggestions for improved student-athlete programming and thus, further the research on athletic retirement with the qualitative perspectives of directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the research on career transitions in sport has approached the topic from a developmental perspective or "whole-person" approach with the course of an athletic career related to lifespan development both in and out of the sports context (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Stambulova et al., 2009). An athletic career is a "multiyear sport activity voluntarily chosen by a person" with the purpose of achieving peak performances in competitive events (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007, p. 713). Depending on the highest level achieved by either amateur or professional athletes, "career" can refer to competitive sports at local, regional, national, or international levels (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). To reach such competitive statuses, athletes must commit to their chosen sport in different domains (e.g. physical, social, and financial) for a long duration of time, sometimes an estimated one-third of their lifespan (Stambulova, 1994). This investment in sport can, therefore, contribute to the personal growth of athletes because an athletic career follows a sequence of stages and transitions analogous to their academic/professional, psychological, and psychosocial levels of development (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The potential overlap of these athletic and nonathletic stages and transitions may create difficult life situations for athletes (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Thus, it is important to consider the transitional demands of an athletic career while also considering those in the other domains of athletes' lives to better understand the entirety of an athletic career and the significance of retirement from the sports realm (Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001).

An important resource for athletes as they transition from one stage to the next is social support (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The social support system of athletes as they actively compete comes primarily from their sports environment, including their coaches, teammates, and sport organization (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). These sport-related relationships developed throughout athletes' athletic careers are vital resources that can help them achieve their sport goals as well as provide support for their retirement from sport. Research has shown that career intervention programs are effective in assisting athletes with their transition out of sport as they include pre-retirement planning services and thus, help athletes develop non-sport goals and interests for post-sport academic and professional opportunities (e.g. Lavallee, 2005; Goddard, 2004; Stankovich, 1998). In the system of college sports, career-related programming is typically offered through student-athlete support or development services of university athletic departments. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the process of athletic retirement from the perspective of those within student-athlete support or development services. The following review of the literature includes research pertaining to sport career transitions, with a focus on the transition out of sport. An initial overview of the descriptive and explanatory models of athletic careers is provided. Next, the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) is outlined to highlight the factors influencing the quality of retirement adaptation among athletes. Finally, the resource of social support is discussed and current intervention programs related to the transition out of sport are listed.

Athletic Career Transition Models

The initial research on career transitions in sport has drawn from general transition models outside of the sport context. In particular, Sussman's (1971) analytic

model of retirement and Schlossberg's (1981) model of human adaptation to transition have been used previously. Both models acknowledge the multidimensionality of the transition process with interactive factors affecting adaptation in the workforce. For example, in the model of human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981) there are three factors involved in a transition: the perceived characteristics of the transition (e.g. whether or not the transition is expected), the characteristics of the individual (e.g. past experiences), and the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments (e.g. presence of social support). The interaction of these transitional elements determines what resources individuals use to cope with the transitional demands and consequently, produces the outcome of either a successful or unsuccessful adaptation (Schlossberg, 1981). The models of Sussman (1971) and Schlossberg (1981) provide the foundation for which past studies applied the transition process to athlete populations; however, these models were originally developed outside of the sports context, which makes it difficult for them to predict what enables athletes to successfully transition from one stage to the next.

Descriptive Models

Since the development of these general transition models, there have been several descriptive models that predict the specific transitions of an athletic career spanning from initiation to termination (e.g. Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Côté, 1999; Stambulova, 1994; Bloom, 1985). Within the context of sports, there are two types of transitions—normative and nonnormative—that athletes must cope with to progress through the stages of their athletic career or to adjust to sport career termination (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Normative transitions are relatively predictable events of an athletic career, such

as initiation into sport and the transition from amateur to professional sports (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). The last turning point in the careers of athletes, athletic retirement, may be the clearest example of a normative transition because it is an inevitable transition for all athletes. In contrast, nonnormative transitions are situation-specific and discrete events because they are caused by factors that are often unexpected (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). A season-ending injury or an unplanned "cut" or transfer from a team are examples of nonnormative transitions. Empirical studies provide evidence for six normative transitions of an athletic career, including 1) the beginning of sport specialization, 2) the transition to more intensive training in an athlete's chosen sport, 3) the transition from junior to senior or high-achievement sports, 4) the transition from amateur to professional sports, 5) the transition from culmination to the end of the athletic career, and 6) athletic retirement (Stambulova, 1994; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Stambulova et al., 2009).

<u>Explanatory Models</u>

For a successful adaptation of these transitions, athletes need to develop effective coping processes to balance the transition demands or barriers and resources (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). While the descriptive models of career transitions describe the typical stages and transitions of an athletic career, explanatory models help explain the factors influencing the balance between transition demands and resources, and later transitional consequences. There are several career transition explanatory models used in career transition research (e.g. Schlossberg, 1981; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994, 2001). According to these explanatory models, the transitional outcome—a successful transition or crisis transition—is contingent upon athletes' coping skills and how they adjust to the

particular set of demands. Transition resources (e.g. athletes' previous experiences, social support, and financial status) and barriers (e.g. lack of perceived control, an imbalance between sport and school/work, and interpersonal conflicts) are defined as the internal and external factors that influence effective coping (Stambulova et al., 2009). While transition resources help facilitate the coping process, transition barriers prevent athletes from coping successfully with the demands of a transition. An important characteristic of both resources and barriers is their dependency on the specific transitional situation, as a resource in one instance is perceived as a barrier in another (Stambulova et al., 2009). For example, athletes' athletic identity, which is the extent of their identification with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), is an important internal resource as they actively compete and move to the peak of their career, but it is a potential barrier as they transition out of sport. A successful transition occurs if athletes can effectively use the necessary transition resources to overcome the transition barriers, which can result in greater satisfaction with both sport and life (Stambulova et al., 2009). Conversely, a crisis transition takes place if athletes are unable to cope with the demands of a transition on their own and thus, requires additional psychological assistance and/or intervention strategies (Stambulova et al., 2009). Therefore, in every transition, it is critical that athletes have the resources available to ensure a positive move from the previous stage for adaptive sport and life outcomes.

Conceptual Model of Athletic Retirement

While some of these explanatory models are applicable to all transitions along the athletic career, the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; see Figure 2.1) provides greater detail of the last transition—career termination. Taylor and

Ogilvie have outlined a five-step model that incorporates aspects of previous theories and empirical findings to operationalize its components: 1) the causes of career termination, 2) the factors related to adaptation, 3) available resources, 4) the quality of adaptation, and 5) the need for interventions with distressful career transitions. This model considers athletic retirement as a process and not, like previous research influenced by theoretical frameworks such as thanatology and social gerontology, as a singular event with an abrupt end to the athletic career. Thus, rather than focus on the negative consequences of a "sudden" transition out of sport, this model focuses on the process of athletic retirement, which allows for the examination of a gradual modification in the behaviors, goals, and interests of athletes throughout the development of their athletic career. For example, a declining interest in sport was observed for both male and female student-athletes as they progressed through college with greater importance placed on other activities and interests, including their education and social life (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). This reprioritization of the three domains of the student-athletes' lives—sport, education, and social life— helped facilitate their transition out of sport as they expanded their interests beyond sport and demonstrated that student-athletes can take steps for their sport career transition prior to participation cessation. Furthermore, research has shown that student-athletes employ such coping strategies prior to retirement because of the anticipated loss of their athlete role (Lally, 2007). Thus, the more predictable nature of athletic retirement may provide student-athletes the opportunity to psychologically prepare for this last transition. Still, some student-athletes, specifically those who aspire to play professional sports, may not proactively prepare for their retirement from sport because they plan to continue their athletic careers. These student-athletes may be

considered more at risk for a crisis transition and therefore, may require further assistance

from student-athlete support or development services to succeed in their life after sport.
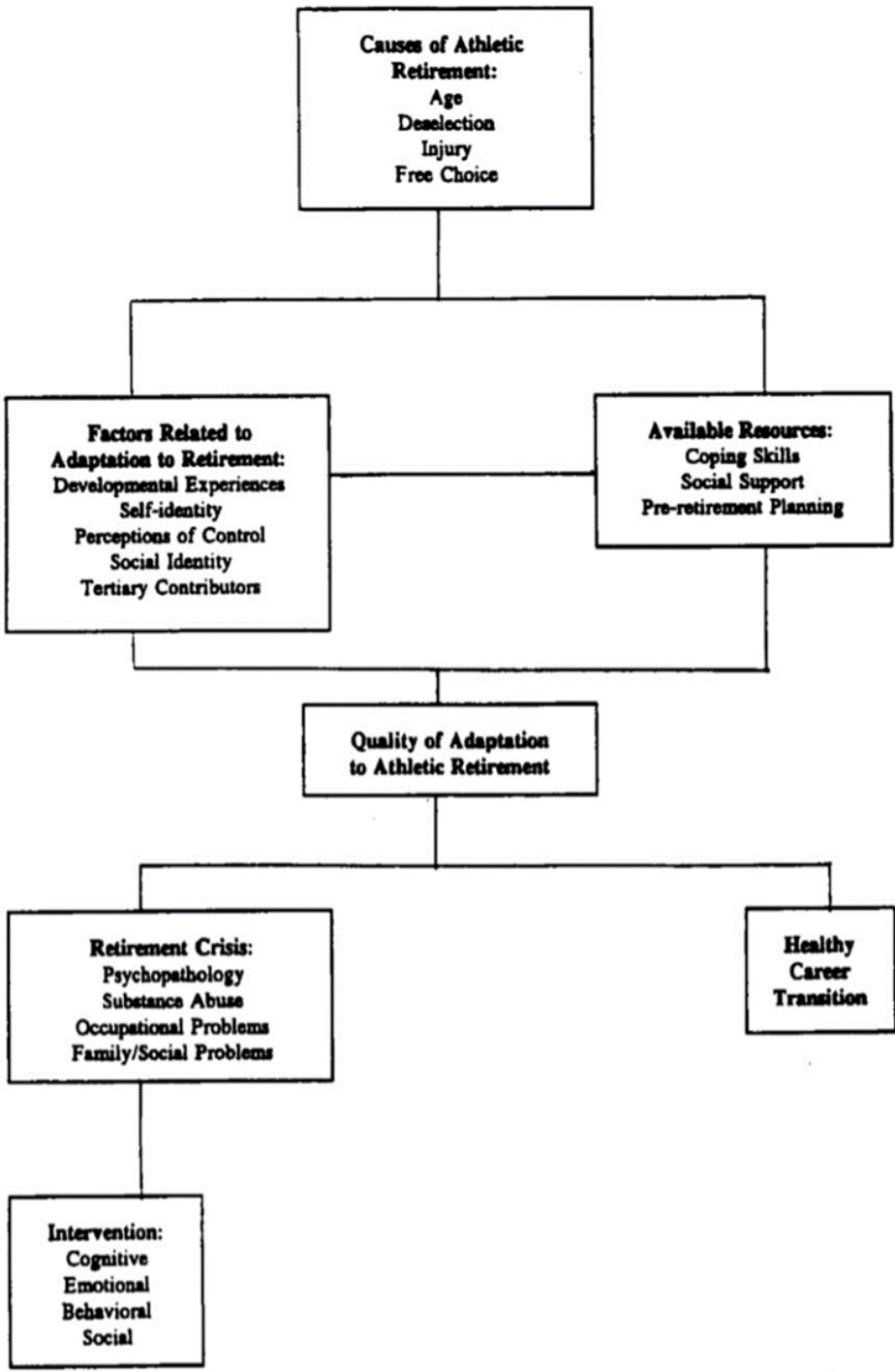
Figure 2.1   Conceptual Model of Athletic Retirement

Causes of Career Termination

    Age

    The first step in the Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) model identifies the four most

frequent causes of career termination: age, deselection, injury, and free choice. Decreased

performances associated with aging is a primary reason for retirement among older

amateur and professional athletes (Lavallee, Grove, & Gordon, 1997). There are

physiological (e.g. decline in physical capabilities), psychological (e.g. lack of

motivation), and social implications (e.g. loss of status) of the advanced ages of athletes

(Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The physiological influence of age is possibly most significant

for elite and professional athletes of older ages as the natural deterioration of the body

reduces their physical ability to compete at such high levels (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). In

contrast, the psychological and social components of aging may have greater influence on

college student-athletes' transition out of sport as the collegiate years involve important

developmental challenges, including strengthening personal competencies in multiple

domains of their life (e.g. academics, sport, and social), self-exploration, and satisfying

various relationships (e.g. professors, coaches, and friends; Parham, 1993).

    Deselection

    In addition to the consequences of age, the deselection process occurs at every

level of competition with high attrition rates among athletes wanting to compete at

collegiate and professional levels. An estimated probability of 1.0%, 2.1%, and 2.6% of

high school men's basketball, baseball, and football players, respectively, will compete

on NCAA Division I teams (NCAA, 2017). Similar statistics are reported for college

student-athletes moving on to professional sports with 9.1% for baseball, 1.1% for men's

basketball, and 1.5% for football. Moreover, the average length of playing careers for professional athletes is 3.5, 5.6, and 4.8 years in the NFL, MLB, and NBA, respectively, which is comparable to the four years of eligibility in the NCAA (Nelson, 2013). These statistics indicate that the duration of athletic careers for both amateur and professional athletes are relatively short, a possible consequence of deselection.

Injury

The third major reason for retirement in the Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) model is athletic injury. Research has shown that injury is a significant determinant of sport career termination for 5-27% of elite athletes (Ristolainen, Kettunen, Kujala, & Heinonen, 2012; Moesch, Mayer, & Elbe, 2012; Allison & Meyer, 1988). This unanticipated transition out of sport can result in adjustment difficulties, including social withdrawal, lower self-esteem, and negative emotions, such as fear and anxiety (Rotella & Heyman, 1986). In a sample of high school and college student-athletes, injury-related retirees had the most difficult adjustment to the transition out of sport in comparison to those who retired because of deselection and personal choice (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). The more problematic adjustment to the end of their athletic careers is likely due to the unexpected nature of injuries and consequently, the lack of psychological preparation for early retirement (Webb et al., 1998). Furthermore, retired athletes' quality of life is of concern after they leave the sport environment because of possible chronic pain from injuries attained during their athletic career (Gilmore, 2008; Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008). Thus, athletes with sport-related injuries or other health issues may need longer periods of time to adjust to their transition out of sport as they cope with the additional demands of physical problems (Gilmore, 2008).

<u>Free Choice</u>

A similarity among the consequences of injury, age, and deselection is that all three of these factors are considered involuntary or outside the control of the individual athlete (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Still, athletes do have the option to choose when they retire for personal (e.g. new life aspirations), social (e.g. spend more time with family and friends), and sporting (e.g. sport no longer provides enjoyment) reasons (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). This free choice to transition out of sport is the fourth major cause of career termination in sport. It is likely the most desirable causal factor of retirement because it is the voluntary decision of the athlete, which can result in a greater sense of personal control (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). However, the most frequently reported reasons for retirement from sport are due to involuntary factors (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Other reported causes of sport career termination include financial difficulties, family reasons, decreased motivation or performance, and the politics of sport (Lavallee, Grove, & Gordon, 1997).

<u>Factors Related to the Adaptation of Retirement</u>

<u>Developmental Contributors</u>

Regardless of the cause of athletic retirement, athletes must adapt to the many changes associated with this transition, including psychological, physical, financial, and job-related changes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The implications of these changes and the athletes' perceptions about these changes determines the quality of adaptation athletes experience during their transition out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). In the second step of their model, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) describe five factors related to the adaptation of retirement among athletes: 1) developmental contributors, 2) self-identity,

3) social-identity, 4) perceptions of control and 5) other tertiary contributing factors. The

first factor associated with an athlete's adaptation to the post-sport career life is

developmental contributors or experiences (e.g. the development of personal and social

identities, roles, and behaviors) that occurred prior to and during their sport participation

(Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The nature of these experiences can contribute to athletes' self-

perceptions and interpersonal skills, which in turn influence how well they adjust to the

end of their athletic careers (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). For example, the "single-minded"

pursuit of athletic success many athletes adopt during their athletic careers can result in a

self-identity derived almost exclusively from their involvement in sports (Taylor &

Ogilvie, 1994). This exclusive athletic identity may lead to limited development beyond

that of sport and consequently, result in more adjustment difficulties for athletes during

the end of their athletic careers (Brewer et al., 1993). Conversely, if retiring athletes are

provided career development services and/or counseling through resources of social

support, including the sport organization, their transition outcomes may be more positive

(Martens & Lee, 1998; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Parham, 1993). For student-athletes

approaching their graduation from school and sport, university career centers play an

important role in fostering an adaptive transition for them as career centers can provide

the necessary career preparation or development programs throughout student-athletes'

college sport careers (Martens & Lee, 1998).

Self-Identity

The degree to which athletes define their self-identity in terms of their sports

participation is the second contributor to the quality of adaptation of retirement. Brewer,

Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) define athletic identity as "the degree to which an

individual athlete identifies with the athlete role" (p. 237). There is a positive association between athletic identity and sports involvement, whereby greater participation in sports predicts a stronger athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Further validation of the athletic identity construct was supported by Brewer and Cornelius (2001), who observed significantly higher athletic identity scores for athletes compared to non-athletes. Thus, greater identification with the athlete role is predictive of an increase in the perceived importance of sport behaviors, especially for athletes who compete at more competitive levels (Brewer et al., 1993). A stronger athletic identity is beneficial for the performances of competitive athletes as they advance to the peak of their careers because it allows for a narrowed focus on sports training and competition (Brewer et al., 1993), but may be detrimental as they approach retirement. A more difficult transition out of sport may, therefore, occur for athletes with an exclusive athletic identity because their self-identity is no longer supported by their involvement in sports (Brewer et al., 1993). Moreover, those with a strong athletic identity are more likely to interpret a given situation in terms of how it will influence their role as an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993). Thus, athletes may anticipate a sense of identity loss upon retirement, especially if career termination is predictable (e.g. the finite eligibility of NCAA athletics), and employ certain coping strategies to avoid an identity crisis (Lally, 2007).

Research has shown that most student-athletes actively explore interests outside of athletics as they enter the later years of their college career, with the most prominent area of self-exploration in non-sport career objectives for their immediate future (Lally, 2007; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002). This redefinition of the self prior to retirement is a possible means of "self-protection" to prepare for career termination

(Lally, 2007, p. 96). Because student-athletes are afforded educational and career opportunities outside of sport, they may find it easier to occupy roles beyond that of sport. In a qualitative study of student-athletes, Miller and Kerr (2002) found that as student-athletes transitioned into the role of a college athlete, their athletic identity became more salient, while their academic and social roles were compromised for their sports success. As the student-athletes neared the end of their college career, there was an observable shift in their identities as they readjusted their athletic goals and focused more on academics. A possible explanation for this change in identity (i.e. disengagement from the athlete role) is the realization that a professional sports career is no longer attainable and therefore, student-athletes reevaluated their self-concept (Lally & Kerr, 2005). Still, there are some athletes who do not proactively disengage from their athletic identity because of the possibility that it would devalue their overall experience as an athlete, or because they were forced to retire early due to involuntary factors, including deselection and injury. Consequently, these athletes may report more problems in the period following their retirement from sport (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

There are several studies that demonstrate the negative consequences for student-athletes with a salient athletic identity upon their retirement from NCAA sports (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). One example of these negative consequences is lower career maturity, which can lead to athletes unprepared for the transition to an occupational career (Houle & Kluck, 2015). Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, and Kiewra (1998) defined career maturity as "the extent to which an individual has acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to make intelligent, realistic career choices" (p. 475). Because student-athletes are expected to

fully commit to their role as an athlete, it is often difficult for them to explore other academic and social roles. It may be that the inherent structure of the college sport system promotes conformity to the athlete role and discourages athletes from exploring other identities (Martens & Lee, 1998). The roles of a student and athlete are, thus, thought of as competing identities, for which many athletes disproportionately invest in their sport (Lance, 2004). Therefore, an inverse relationship exists between athletic identity and career maturity, whereby stronger athletic identities predicts lower career maturity (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). Furthermore, athletes who maintain an exclusive athletic identity until their retirement from sport often experience anxiety with post-retirement career planning (Grove et al., 1997).

This role conflict many student-athletes experience may result in a limitation of life choices following their athletic retirement as they fail to consider their non-sport interests and employment options (Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013). The pressure to engage in the expected behaviors of athletes, which is likely due to the social recognition and praise of college sports, may further confirm student-athletes' sport-related sense of self (Lance, 2004). Moreover, the NCAA's "20-Hour Rule", which mandates a weekly maxim of 20 hr of "countable athletically related activity" during the period of in-season, is often exceeded by student-athletes. A 2011 NCAA report revealed that Division I student-athletes participated in athletic activities for more than 30 hr per week, with football players accumulating 43.3 hr, the highest weekly time commitment among all NCAA Division I sports. As student-athletes immerse themselves in their sport, likely at the expense of exploring other academic and social roles, they may experience identity foreclosure, a choice of identity made "without sufficient exploration or adequate

differentiation from early role models" (Raskin, 1998, p. 32). If student-athletes choose

not to proactively alter their self-identity or do not have time to explore alternatives due

to sport constraints, the loss of the athlete role may leave a void in their identity as they

transition out of sport (Lally, 2007). Thus, a premature state of identity foreclosure can

have negative implications for the personal growth of student-athletes beyond that of

sport and consequently, create an aversive situation for them as they transition out of

sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

<u>Social Identity</u>

Closely related to self-identity, and another factor related to athletic retirement, is

social identity. Because athletic identity is a multidimensional concept of the self that

includes social, cognitive, and affective constructs, the sport career transition process is

determined, in part, by an athlete's social identity (Brewer et al., 1993; Brewer &

Cornelius, 2001). In their conceptual model of athletic retirement, Taylor and Ogilvie

(1994) list social identity as one of the five contributors to the quality of athletes' sport

career termination. It is important to recognize athletic identity as a social role because

the extent to which an individual identifies as an athlete is influenced by others in one's

social environment, such as family, friends, coaches, and teammates (Heyman, 1987) as

well as other situational factors, including a poor competitive season (Brewer, Selby,

Linder, & Petitpas, 1999). The intensive media coverage of sports is another social

resource that can strengthen an athlete's athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Athletes

may appreciate the visibility of their sport while they actively compete because the

public's awareness of their athletic abilities and performances supports their self-worth as

an athlete (Nasco & Webb, 2006). However, the public nature of the athlete role can have

a detrimental impact on athletes' transition out of sport (Brewer et al., 1993). Without

this high-profile sports status, retired athletes may question their self-worth as it is no

longer supported in the public arena and thus, may experience a loss of their social

identity (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Furthermore, the heightened popularity of college

sports may exacerbate the issue of role-conflict for student-athletes, particularly for those

competing in revenue-producing sports, such as men's basketball, because of the

expectations to exhibit behaviors characteristic of a winning team (Lance, 2004). The

pressure to assume the role of an athlete under the scrutiny of media outlets may,

therefore, limit the opportunities of athletes to pursue their non-sport interests and goals

(Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Studies indicate that student-athletes who commit

seriously to multiple roles (e.g. the roles of both a student and athlete) develop more

broad-based social identities than those who choose to adopt roles in either the sport or

academic realms (Lance, 2004) and thus, these student-athletes likely experience a more

adaptive transition out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

    <u>Perceptions of Control</u>

    The fourth factor related to the quality of adaptation to sport career termination is

perceptions of control, which is an athlete's subjective feelings about the voluntariness of

their decision to retire (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The degree of perceived control in

relation to the four primary reasons for retirement is crucial for adaptation. Whereas the

free choice to retire is the voluntary decision of the athlete, the factors of age, deselection,

and injury are involuntary and outside of the athlete's control (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Although athletic retirement is a normative transition for athletes, there is the possibility

that it can still occur unanticipated. Athletes who experience an unexpected end to their

athletic career are often unprepared to cope with this transition and are, therefore, left feeling powerless over their decision to retire (Stambulova et al., 2009). As a result, this lack of control and preparation may adversely affect athletes' adaptation of retirement as they feel forced or threatened to retire from an activity that largely defines their self-identity (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Thus, it is important for athletes to feel more autonomous in their decision to retire because perceptions of control relate to the fundamental human need for autonomy (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), conditions that fully satisfy the three needs of human functioning—competence, autonomy, and relatedness— "are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being" (p. 229). Conversely, if these psychological needs are unfulfilled, then individuals may not function as effectively. An unsupportive context may, therefore, reduce their overall sense of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Applied to athletic retirement, the free choice to end participation in sport may create a more autonomy-supportive situation as this voluntary retirement is the self-directed action of the athlete. Research has shown that athletes who end their career freely have a greater sense of control and self-esteem, and higher life satisfaction (Webb et al., 1998). In addition, they often experience more positive emotions and less negative emotions in the period following their retirement (Alfermann, 2000; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Furthermore, athletes may proactively change their self-identity, renew social networks, and develop other non-sport interests when the time of their retirement is expected (Stambulova et al., 2009). Thus, planning for life after their athletic career can lead to a healthier transition out of sport for retired athletes (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Despite these benefits for a smoother

transition, only 40 % of athletes plan accordingly for the period following their retirement from sport, a possible consequence of denying the eventual end of their athletic careers (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004). In contrast, athletes who are forced out of sport may have a decreased sense of autonomy and thus, feel less competent in their ability to cope with the demands of their athletic retirement, especially if they have no plans for their new career (Stambulova et al., 2009). This absence of control can limit the personal (e.g. lack of self-competence) and social resources (e.g. absence of institutional support) of athletes and therefore, reduce their likelihood for a healthy adaptation to life after the end of their athletic career (Stambulova et al., 2009).

  <u>Tertiary Contributors</u>

  In addition to the factor of perceptions of control, there are other personal, social, and environmental factors related to the quality of retirement adaptation among athletes. Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) refer to these variables as tertiary contributing factors. These factors, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender, may act as additional stressors that exacerbate any challenges athletes encounter with their transition out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). For example, athletes who depend on their participation in sport as a primary source of financial support may perceive the end of their athletic career as threatening (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Research has shown that 34% of athletes have encountered financial difficulties during their retirement from sport (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Moreover, when the factors of minority status and gender interact with socioeconomic status, many athletes, in particular female athletes and those of racial minorities, are likely to experience greater distress during their transition out of sport because of fewer occupational opportunities (Hill & Lowe, 1974), especially within the

realm of sports (Lapchick et al., 2016). For example, in the Fall of 2016, a majority

(87.9%) of the leadership positions at NCAA Division I institutions were held by white

men and women, with only 17.5% of these positions held by women (Lapchick et al.,

2016). This overwhelming percentage of white males is demonstrated in other athletic

positions as well, such as university presidents (75.8%), athletic directors (78.9%), and

conference commissioners (90.0%; Lapchick et al., 2016). These limited professional

opportunities for retired female athletes and non-white participants may adversely affect

their retirement from sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Available Resources for Retirement Adaptation

      Coping Skills

      To effectively adjust to their life after the end of their athletic careers, athletes

must overcome the challenges arising from tertiary contributors and other factors related

to the quality of retirement adaptation among athletes (e.g. developmental contributors,

self-identity, social-identity, and perceptions of control) by utilizing any necessary

resources, including coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning (Taylor &

Ogilvie, 1994). In the third step of the conceptual model of athletic retirement, Taylor

and Ogilvie (1994) refer to these three elements as the primary available resources for

retirement adaptation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as "constantly

changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal

demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141).

In the literature on career transitions in sport, the most beneficial coping strategies for

transitioning out of sport are finding new interests, keeping busy, and exercising (Sinclair

& Orlick, 1993). This finding supports the importance for athletes to balance their sport

and non-sport activities during their athletic careers, so that they may have a more adaptive transition out of sport (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Other coping skills that help athletes with the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes of athletic retirement are goal-setting, relaxation training, and time management (Bruning & Frew, 1987). Athletes who effectively use these coping skills are better prepared for their post-sport career and thus, experience a more adaptive transition out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Social Support

The second resource found to facilitate the retirement process for athletes is social support (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The social support system for both active and inactive or injured athletes comes often exclusively from the sports environment because their social lives typically revolve around their involvement in athletics (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). During their athletic careers, coaches and teammates primarily provide support in the form of sports expertise, while family and friends provide more listening and emotional support (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Hardy, 1989). For injured athletes, athletic trainers and therapists play an important role in injury rehabilitation by helping athletes cope with the physical and psychological consequences of injury (Ford & Gordon, 1998). The sports association or organization is an additional source of social support for active and inactive athletes, especially for their recruitment, physical training, and performance outcomes (Thomas & Ermler, 1988).

As athletes transition out of sport, however, their social support system is mostly derived from their personal relationships outside the context of sports (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Retired athletes are no longer immersed in their sports environment, and may not have access to their previous sources of social support (Taylor & Ogilvie,

1994). Moreover, studies have shown that athletes are more likely to seek social support from family and friends outside of the sports context as they approach the end of their athletic careers (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Because many athletes experience feelings of isolation as they transition out of sport (Melendez, 2007), they may hesitate to seek help from their coaching staff, teammates, and sport organizations (Fuller, 2014). In a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies, Fuller (2014) reported that many former college student-athletes recognized the importance of social support, but avoided seeking assistance due to various factors, such as prideful behaviors, negative relationships with coaches, and a belief that others would not understand their experiences of transitioning out of sport. It has been suggested that the extent of athletes' athletic identities plays a role in whether or not they seek help with their athletic retirement (Fuller, 2014). For example, Grove et al. (1997) found that athletes with a stronger athletic identity were more likely to reach out for support during their transition out of sport, while Blinde and Stratta (1992) observed that athletes committed to their athlete role felt a sense of "invincibility" and thus, wanted to hide their distress from the public's eye (p. 4). Furthermore, sport organizations have, historically, been more concerned with supporting athletes as they transition into sport rather than out of sport, a consequence of viewing the athlete as an entity or product for business (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000; Thomas & Ermler, 1988). Therefore, retiring athletes may look outside the context of sport for other sources of social support as they are no longer intimately connected to their sport environment and consequently, feel unsupported by those within their sport organizations (Fuller, 2014; Lavallee et al., 2004; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Pre-Retirement Planning

As sport organizations recognize the humanistic needs of athletes and approach

the career transition process from a developmental perspective, more transition programs

are emerging to help athletes effectively adapt to their lives after they leave the sport

environment (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). Thomas and Ermler (1998) suggested that

sport organizations or institutions have the obligation to help athletes achieve both

athletic and nonathletic excellence because of the "moral imperative to develop human

resources through the athletic medium" (p. 149). Thus, the priority of sport organizations

should involve fostering a successful sport life and non-sport life for athletes (Thomas &

Ermler, 1998). There are numerous career transition services and programs currently in

place to help athletes overcome transitional obstacles as they end their participation in

sport. Most of these services and programs help athletes with career preparation and/or

development through various strategies. Social networking, job search strategies, and

CV/resume preparation are examples of some of the activities used to help athletes

develop their skills for the workforce (Lavallee et al., 2004). Career intervention is the

primary focus of these programs because pre-retirement planning is known to have the

greatest influence on athletes' transition out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Taylor

and Ogilvie (1994) identified pre-retirement planning as the third available resource for

athletes' retirement adaptation. Because pre-retirement planning includes activities that

expand the goals and interests of athletes beyond the context of sport, it can broaden their

self-identity, increase their perceptions of control, and reduce their stress from financial

worries (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Thus, athletes who participate in programming related

to pre-retirement planning or career development are often better equipped to cope with their sport career termination (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

The fourth step of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model recognizes that athletic retirement is not necessarily a distressful transition for all athletes. Rather, a successful transition out of sport is primarily contingent on the utilization of the available resources that were previously mentioned, including athletes' coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Athletes who effectively use these resources are more likely to experience a successful adaptation. In contrast, retiring athletes who encounter problems beyond their abilities to cope may require additional psychological assistance and career interventions. Regardless of whether the stressor is related to athletes' physical, psychological, or social well-being appropriate intervention strategies may reduce the likelihood of athletes encountering issues upon their retirement from sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Career Intervention Programming

The final stage of the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) is the intervention for athletic retirement difficulties. Athletes who encounter major transitional problems may need additional support through intervention programming (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Some intervention services and programs have encouraged career preparation or development prior to the termination of athletes' sport career because athletes who preemptively develop life skills are more likely to avoid issues as they adjust to this next step in their lives (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Lavallee et al., 2004). These career intervention programs are available through a wide range of organizations in the sports world for elite, professional, and amateur athletes (Lavallee et

al., 2004). Within the college sports system, the athletic department, specifically student-athlete support or development services, is the primary source of these intervention services and programs for graduating student-athletes. According to Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001), this assistive programming for student-athletes should "help them [athletes] develop their occupational interests, skills, abilities, values, and lifestyle preferences" (p. 5). Therefore, appropriate intervention for athletes at any level of sport would reduce their risk for a crisis transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Some of the more advanced programs for elite and professional athletes include the Australian Athlete Career and Education Program (ACE), Olympic Job Opportunities Program (OJOP), and Game Plan. These career and education programs provide a variety of services to help athletes develop their "social, educational, and work-related skills" (Anderson & Morris, 2000, p. 61). The Australian ACE program, which has provided the basis for many other international interventions, has been in place since 1995 with the goal of enhancing both sport and non-sport opportunities for Australia's elite athletes (Anderson & Morris, 2000). The strategies of the ACE program include an assessment of the individual athlete's developmental needs, career and education planning, and program integration with the services of ongoing programming in state institutions. A key aspect of the program is its proactive approach to the transition out of sport, rather than a reactive one, as the ACE program encourages athletes to become independent and self-reliant and thus, more confident in their abilities to manage the demands of competitive sports (Anderson & Morris, 2000). The format of the Australian ACE program has been adopted by other countries for elite-level and Olympic athletes, including the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). In a study

conducted by Anderson (1999), the significance of the Victorian Institute of Sport ACE

program was examined for participating athletes over a 12-month period. The athletes in

the program reduced their negative mood states in the first few months following their

initiation into the program and sustained these low levels throughout the duration of the

study. In contrast, the athletes who were not involved in the ACE program experienced

inconsistent mood states throughout the year. Moreover, the performance self-ratings of

the participating athletes were higher than those who were not in ACE. The results of this

study, therefore, suggest that elite athletes are likely to benefit from more comprehensive

career and education programming, such as ACE.

Similar to the holistic approach of the ACE program, one of the leading career

assistance programs for college student-athletes was the former Life Skills program of the

NCAA, which helped student-athletes achieve a balanced life of academic, athletic, and

personal excellence (NCAA, 2017). This program, previously known as CHAMPS/Life

Skills, aimed to prepare student-athletes with transferrable life skills for the development

of student-athletes during and after their athletic careers (NCAA, 2017). Goddard (2004)

reported that the NCAA Champs/Life Skills program was based on five general areas: (1)

academic excellence, (2) athletic excellence, (3) personal development, (4) service, and

(5) career development. A key feature of the program was its malleability, as universities

modified any aspect of the program to fit the specific needs of student-athletes (Goddard,

2004). Examples of the program's services included career planning and improving study

skills, goal setting plans, and the ability to time manage (Goddard, 2004). Although there

is widespread acceptance of the Life Skills program across universities (Anderson &

Morris, 2000), the use and effectiveness of this program has not been adequately

investigated. One study that examined the impact of the NCAA Life Skills program, as it was known as CHAMPS/Life Skills, was done by Goddard (2004). The results of this study demonstrated its effectiveness at the University of North Texas (UNT) as student-athletes found all aspects of the program (e.g. self-esteem and leadership development) to be positive and thus, found value in the CHAMPS/Life Skills program. Another study examined the perceived programming needs of student-athletes based on the five basic commitment areas of the CHAMPS/Life Skills program (Arvan, 2010). This study revealed that male student-athletes had a greater perceived need for programming related to their academic and service development than female student-athletes, which may help universities develop more effective services and programs for specific student-athlete populations.

The low number of studies evaluating the NCAA Life Skills program is a reflection of the limited research on the use and effectiveness of career development services, in general. One study that has looked at career development in the university setting, conducted by Stankovich (1998), investigated the effectiveness of a general career development program for student-athletes. Over the course of one quarter (e.g. three months), 25 fourth and fifth year student-athletes were enrolled in a career-related course that trained them in six areas, similar to those of the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program: (1) identity exploration, (2) goal setting, (3) decision making, (4) communication skills, (5) career training skills, and (6) future planning. Following the completion of the course, student-athletes reported higher career maturity scores and lower athletic identity scores and were, therefore, better prepared to make decisions regarding their future educational and job-related options. This study is restricted in its

generalizability because of its small sample size and unstandardized course offerings for the career development of student-athletes. As with the previously mentioned studies on the NCAA's Life Skills or CHAMPS/Life Skills program (Goddard, 2004; Arvan, 2010), other researchers may have trouble replicating these studies because of the unique nature of programming curriculums. Because universities have adapted the NCAA Life Skills program to fit the specific needs of their student-athletes, there are no standardized services and programs used among NCAA-member universities. This program variation across schools may explain why there is a lack of research assessing the effectiveness of career-related services and programs for student-athletes, despite the substantial amount of literature demonstrating the importance of career development and intervention programming for an adaptive transition out of sport. Thus, investigating the perspectives of directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services may provide further information on the strengths and weaknesses of the current services and programs available to student-athletes.

Summary

Although there is insufficient research examining the use and effectiveness of the programming for the career development of student-athletes, there are studies signifying the importance of career intervention programming for the quality of athletes' retirement from sport. The majority of these career development services and programs are offered to athletes through the sports organization, an important source of social support for athletes. For college student-athletes, these services and programs are primarily available through the unit of student-athlete support or development services within university athletic departments. Because most career development programming includes services

related to pre-retirement planning, which is possibly the most influential resource for an

adaptive transition, it is important for retiring athletes to take advantage of these

programs. Furthermore, there is currently no research investigating the process of athletic

retirement from the perspective of the athletes' social support system, in particular the

perceptions of the sport organization. Within the college sport system, the viewpoint of

the sport organization, namely, the athletic department, may add important information to

the current literature on athletic retirement because of its role in programming for the

holistic development of student-athletes. Thus, the perceptions of staff within student-

athlete support or development services may reveal why certain services and programs

are available or unavailable to student-athletes and therefore, why some student-athletes

successfully transition out of sport while others struggle during this adjustment period.

Given the lack of research on the effectiveness of career development programming and

the absence of the sport organization's perspectives in the literature, the current research

may not adequately address the process of athletic retirement. Therefore, the primary aim

of this study was to explore the transition out of sport within college athletics from the

perspective of the sport organization. In particular, this study examined the athletic

retirement process from the viewpoint of directors and/or associate directors of student-

athlete support or development services at NCAA Division I institutions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Participants

Eight participants (male = 4, female = 4) were interviewed to further explore the

process of athletic retirement for college student-athletes. As NCAA Division I sports are

generally recognized as the most competitive of the three major divisions (I, II, and III),

the athletic departments within these top-level schools likely receive more funding for

their programming offered within student-athlete support or development services. Thus,

the participants were employed within the athletic departments of NCAA Division I

universities and represented six conferences from across the United States. Participants in

this study were employed in various aspects of student-athlete support or development

services (positions were not limited to one domain), including academics (n = 5), life

skills (e.g. personal development, career development, and community service; n = 7),

and compliance (n = 2). The mean age of the participants was almost 40 years old (M =

38.86, SD = 6.52). Additionally, the participants averaged just over five years in their

current position (M = 5.13, SD = 3.31) and just under fourteen years within a university

athletic department in any capacity (M = 13.63, SD = 2.45). Each of the participants

identified a number of tasks they were responsible for in their position, which typically

included programming for the personal development of student-athletes, community

outreach, monitoring of NCAA by-laws, tracking of academic progress and graduation

success rates, assistance of coaches' recruiting efforts, and oversight of departmental staff

and day-to-day operations.

Instruments

An interview guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for the full interview guide). Because the method of interviewing allows participants to share their firsthand knowledge and experiences of a phenomenon (Silverman, 1993), the participants' responses provided a unique insight into student-athletes' transition out of sport. Along with a demographic section to collect general background information, the interview guide included items related to the study's original research questions. The set of items connected to the first research question referred to participants' perceptions about athletic retirement. More specifically, participants described the factors involved in both a successful and unsuccessful transition out of sport. One example of these interview questions was "What do you perceive are some of the characteristics that make student-athletes effective in transitioning out of sport?" The second research question addressed the challenges of athletic retirement and thus, participants responded to the following question, "What obstacles do you think student-athletes may encounter during their transition out of sport?" The final set of items on the interview guide concerned student-athlete programming. Because the third research question asked participants to explain how their services and programs help student-athletes overcome transitional obstacles, participants provided a detailed description of their programming. A sample question was, "Do you have any mechanisms to follow up with student-athletes to see how their transition out of sport went once they are no longer enrolled?"

Procedures

Approval from Boise State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to the beginning of the study (see Appendix B). Participants were recruited

through snowball sampling from student-athlete support or development services at NCAA Division I institutions. The researcher first recruited a participant who they had contact with and asked the participant if they knew of other directors and/or associate directors of NCAA Division I universities who may be interested in contributing to the study. This process was followed at the conclusion of each participant interview.

Each participant was first contacted through an initial email, which informed the participant of the study's general purpose and procedures and asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. If no response was received from this original form of contact, the participants were contacted with a follow-up email. For those who agreed to participate, an email was sent to them with a digital copy of the consent form that provided information about the research study, including its purpose, procedure, and potential risks and benefits of participation. All interviews were conducted via phone and lasted approximately 45-60 min. During the interviews, the researcher used basic audio software (Audacity) to record the interviews and took notes to capture the participants' key ideas on the transition out of sport.

Research Design and Data Analysis

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings and, subsequently, sent the transcripts to the participants to invite them to make corrections, additions, or deletions to their interview. Following any corrections or additions from the participants, the researcher read through these transcripts to become familiar with the data, a critical initial step in analyzing qualitative data (Jones, 2015). While reading the transcripts, the researcher highlighted meaning units that applied to the study's purpose of better understanding the student-athlete career transition process. The

meaning units were organized according to the three research questions of the study for further analysis. Following the organization, meaning units were grouped into larger themes using an inductive data analysis. After coding was complete, the researcher reread the interviews to identify any further statements that may fit the codes and subsequent themes, a method of axial coding recognized by Jones (2015). To increase the reliability of the initial coding, after the primary researcher first completed this coding, a secondary coder verified all higher-order themes and when there was disagreement, discussed any themes until consensus was achieved. To aid in the interpretation of the final coding for each research question, visual displays were created with generalized themes and subthemes.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The participant interviews were structured around the study's original research questions. Specifically, (1) how do the directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services perceive the transition out of sport, in general, for their student-athletes; (2) what obstacles do student-athletes encounter during their transition out of sport; and (3) what programs and services are available to help student-athletes overcome these obstacles and thus, experience a more successful transition out of sport? The results of this study were, therefore, organized into three sections corresponding to the research questions. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used in place of the participants' names to ensure their confidentiality (e.g. Participant One, Participant Two, Participant Three, etc.).

RQ1: Successful and Unsuccessful Transitions

To truly understand the significance of athletic retirement on the well-being of former student-athletes, participants provided their perceptions of both a successful and unsuccessful transition out of sport (see Figure 4.1 at the end of this section for all themes). Their responses to this first research question related to two aspects of athletic retirement: transition definitions and transition factors. First, participants defined a successful and unsuccessful transition out of sport based largely on examples of their former student-athletes. Specifically, participants pulled from experiences working with student-athletes who had been successful in the past as well as those who had been unsuccessful. Second, participants described the factors that influenced student-athletes'

transitional outcomes. More specifically, they talked about the characteristics, skills, and sport environments of student-athletes that lead them to either a successful or unsuccessful transition out of sport. Despite participants speaking about successful and unsuccessful former student-athletes, they focused more of the conversation on those student-athletes who had a successful transition. It is important to note that even though participants spoke more on successful student-athletes, these perceptions were largely subjective because they currently have no methods of collecting data on the well-being of their former student-athletes within their programming. Thus, the participants' responses were based on anecdotal evidence for which the majority was characteristic of student-athletes who successfully transitioned out of sport.

<u>Definition of a Successful Transition</u>

When participants defined a successful transition out of sport, all of them talked about employment as one key to success. In these individuals' opinion, former student-athletes who obtained a job after graduating from college were successful, especially if they enjoyed their work. It was further suggested that the gainfully-employed former student-athletes were more likely to be self-sufficient or independent, and financially secure. In addition to meaningful employment, several of the participants talked about the importance of developing new relationships and maintaining a support group as markers of success. Participants explained that student-athletes with strong communication skills and a support system were better prepared for the transition out of sport because they could network within their career field, seek advice from their support group and thus, effectively manage their new social experiences. Participant One commented,

> …the expectation that comes along with relationships, and we can say faculty to student, we can say coach to athlete, we can say academic advisor, mentor,

student-athlete, that they are used to direct and human dialogue that accompanies young adult life…their ability to manage multi-faceted lives at an early age, you know, the rigor has prepared them for the pace of modern-adult, young-adult life more than a non-athlete peer.

The various relationships student-athletes create during their college athletic career may help them acquire the necessary social skills to successfully navigate the transition into the fast-paced life of adulthood, possibly more than their non-athlete peers. Therefore, participants described successful former student-athletes as those who stay connected with their support group from college and establish healthy relationships with a variety of people. Other elements in the participants' definition of a successful transition were earning a college degree, having a plan for what comes next, and being mentally and emotionally stable.

Definition of an Unsuccessful Transition

While participants defined a successful transition out of sport with more positive experiences of student-athletes, they defined an unsuccessful transition out of sport with negative outcomes. For example, participants explained that unsuccessful student-athletes may develop mental and physical health issues, including depression, substance abuse, and extreme weight gain or loss, whereas successful student-athletes maintain a healthy status both physically and mentally. Additionally, participants considered student-athletes who failed to achieve their professional aspirations as unsuccessful, especially if they had no back-up plan for their future. Many of these student-athletes, who hoped to play sports professionally, had not developed an alternative career path and thus, when their college athletic careers ended, they had nothing to fill the void of not playing competitive sports. Participant Six commented,

> If you listen to a lot of former athletes, they always talk about trying to find something to fill that void…I think the ones that struggle the most are the ones at the high-profile sports, who have aspirations of playing professionally, and when they transition out, that reality doesn't actually come into play and so, they have not prepared adequately. They don't have a plan B. The plan has always been, I'm going to be a professional athlete and when that's not a reality, then that transition is definitely a lot more difficult…

In relation to this lack of a plan or vision for the future, participants discussed unemployment as a marker for an unsuccessful transition because student-athletes who fail to obtain employment likely still feel the loss or void of not playing competitive sports anymore. Interestingly, many participants regarded former student-athletes as unsuccessful if they obtained a job, but it was unfulfilling. Participant Five used the terms "floundering" or "bouncing from jobs" to describe an unsuccessful transition out of sport. It was further suggested that the hiring process may be more difficult for student-athletes who never graduated because most full-time jobs require a minimum of a bachelor's degree and thus, create an additional barrier for these individuals.

Successful Characteristics, Skills, and Sport Environments

After the participants defined the aspects of successful and unsuccessful transitions, they described the contextual factors that lead student-athletes to a more successful or unsuccessful transition out of sport. Participants named a number of aspects that would be important in the process of athletic retirement and these fit in one of three major themes, namely, student-athlete characteristics, the skills they developed, and the sport environment established for student-athletes (see Figure 4.1). In terms of student-athlete characteristics that would aid in a successful transition out of sport, participants thought student-athletes should be "hardworking, coachable, resilient, responsible, and have a growth mindset". Several participants recognized hardworking as an important

characteristic of successful former student-athletes, especially for those who put forth

effort in preparation for the transition out of sport. Participant Five explained,

> So, the fact that they did put effort in as a junior toward the mock-interview, they
> did put effort in toward getting an internship heading into [their] senior year, that
> kind of thing will help it [transition out of sport] go smoother at the end.

Thus, it was suggested that hardworking student-athletes may have a more effective

transition out of sport because they proactively engaged in career-related activities.

Additionally, when participants listed the characteristic of coachable, they referred to

student-athletes' ability to receive and accept constructive criticism or feedback.

Furthermore, participants included student-athletes' willingness to get outside of their

comfort zone, learn from failures, and take risks as part of a growth mindset. Participant

Three commented,

> They're used to doing what they're good at, but being vulnerable and willing to
> try and get out of their comfort zone is huge because the more you do that, the
> more confidence you get.

Participants highlighted the importance of a growth mindset because many student-

athletes have insecurities with situations outside of the sport context, such as career

development. Thus, for student-athletes to successfully transition out of sport, they must

be willing to confront new challenges and experiences and understand that these

challenges will help them improve their career-related skills and, ultimately, reach their

professional goals.

Participants also described skills student-athletes should develop that would aid in

a successful transition out of sport. These skills included "career skills, interpersonal

skills, and critical thinking skills". When participants talked about interpersonal skills,

they referred to student-athletes' skills of communication, relationship-building,

teamwork, and leadership. For example, participants explained that many student-athletes were used to working on teams toward a common goal, so they knew how to forge relationships with teammates, and could transfer these teamwork skills to the workforce. Moreover, participants mentioned career skills like resume and cover letter writing that would help student-athletes find employment easier. Lastly, critical thinking skills were explained as a way to help student-athletes with the task of problem-solving or developing strategies to achieve their desired results or objectives and would, therefore, help them be successful as a working professional.

Finally, along with student-athletes' skills and characteristics, a supportive sport environment was recognized as an important element of a successful transition out of sport. The sport environment was further divided into the sport structure and sport community. In relation to the sport structure, several participants observed that student-athletes in "non-revenue-producing sports" or equivalency sports (e.g. track and field, cross-country, tennis, soccer, and swimming and diving) were more likely to have a successful transition out of sport. Participant Four explained,

> Again, our equivalency sports typically have a higher rate of getting hired right away…because most of them do work during their career in college, so they've already made some connections. They've already done some networking because they've had to do that to pay for school. I think that it's given them a step up.

Student-athletes within these "non-revenue-producing sports" were thought to transition out of sport more effectively than other student-athletes because they realized that the end of sport was near for them and thus, prepared for the transition with experiences directly beneficial to work. Additionally, the participants thought that the sport community, including the student-athletes' team culture and level of engagement with the programs and services, contributed to a successful transition out of sport. In

particular, student-athletes with coaches and teammates who held them accountable for their responsibilities as a student and athlete were more likely to be successful. For example, Participant Two commented,

> I think that some of our sports have coaches who have really high expectations and hold their students accountable and talk like - if you can't get this done in the classroom or be consistent on the court, then you're not going to be consistent in life.

Thus, a team culture with high expectations for success in academics and athletics may help student-athletes become better prepared for the transition out of sport. Furthermore, participants recognized that student-athletes with higher levels of program engagement (e.g. student-athletes who participated in the services and programs of student-athlete support or development services) were more successful in the transition out of college sports because they completed activities that helped with both their personal and career development.

Unsuccessful Characteristics, Skills, and Sport Environments

For an unsuccessful transition out of sport, participants listed the negative characteristics, skills, and sport environment of student-athletes that further complicate the process of athletic retirement. In addition to some negative characteristics that created challenges in the retirement process, participants noted that if certain student-athlete characteristics and skills were missing it might lead to an unsuccessful transition out of sport. These missing skills included a lack of effort, a lack of confidence, and a lack of career skills. When participants described lack of effort, they referred to student-athletes who never put the time into developing the necessary career skills to obtain a job after leaving college. The characteristics explained as being especially problematic for the transition process were a salient athletic identity or victim mentality. For example,

participants talked about how student-athletes, especially those with professional

aspirations, often think their self-identity was derived only from sport. As such, they had

a lack of confidence in situations outside of the sport environment and therefore, may

experience a loss of identity when they transition out of sport. Participant Eight

commented,

> …everyone saw my value in the sport that I played, I leaned on that, and that was
> my self-worth and now my self-worth is taken away because I'm not able to
> compete any longer, so I don't find value in me anymore.

Participants further suggested that student-athletes with a salient athletic identity

were often unprepared for the workforce because they focused so much of their energy on

athletics and not on their preparation for a career. In addition, the time commitment of

college sports can make it difficult for student-athletes to manage their time among their

responsibilities as a student and an athlete. Participant Three explained,

> …they're told everyday all day long where to go for different meetings and
> practice, and homework, and study hall, and trainers…that when they have an
> hour off, they kind of want to take an hour off.

Thus, the rigorous schedule of student-athletes may make it more difficult for them to

participate in other non-sport activities. Furthermore, participants commented that

student-athletes with a victim mentality may struggle more with the transition because

they place blame on others for being unprepared. Student-athletes with this "you failed

me" mentality do not take responsibility for their unsuccessful transition out of sport.

Therefore, Participant Eight emphasized the importance of encouraging "them to be a

victor, not a victim."

In regard to the sport environment, participants explained that an unsuccessful

transition involved unsupportive or overbearing coaches and student-athletes who are not

held accountable. While coaches who are overbearing may not allow their players to be

independent, coaches who are unsupportive may not care about their players' career and

personal development outside of sport. As Participant Three suggested,

> You can have great students, but if there's no culture…they may not do it [engage
> in their personal and career development]. I think that that does matter. I think it
> starts at the top, I think it really matters what the coaches do, and then the leaders,
> and then the people on the team.

Participants recognized a top-down effect that occurs within teams that can decrease the

quality of student-athletes' retirement from sport if their coaches and team leaders do not

value their development. Moreover, participants observed that student-athletes who are

not held accountable by their support system within the athletic department (e.g. coaches,

teammates, and academic advisors) struggle more with the transition out of sport. Thus,

participants highlighted the importance of a supportive sport environment for the

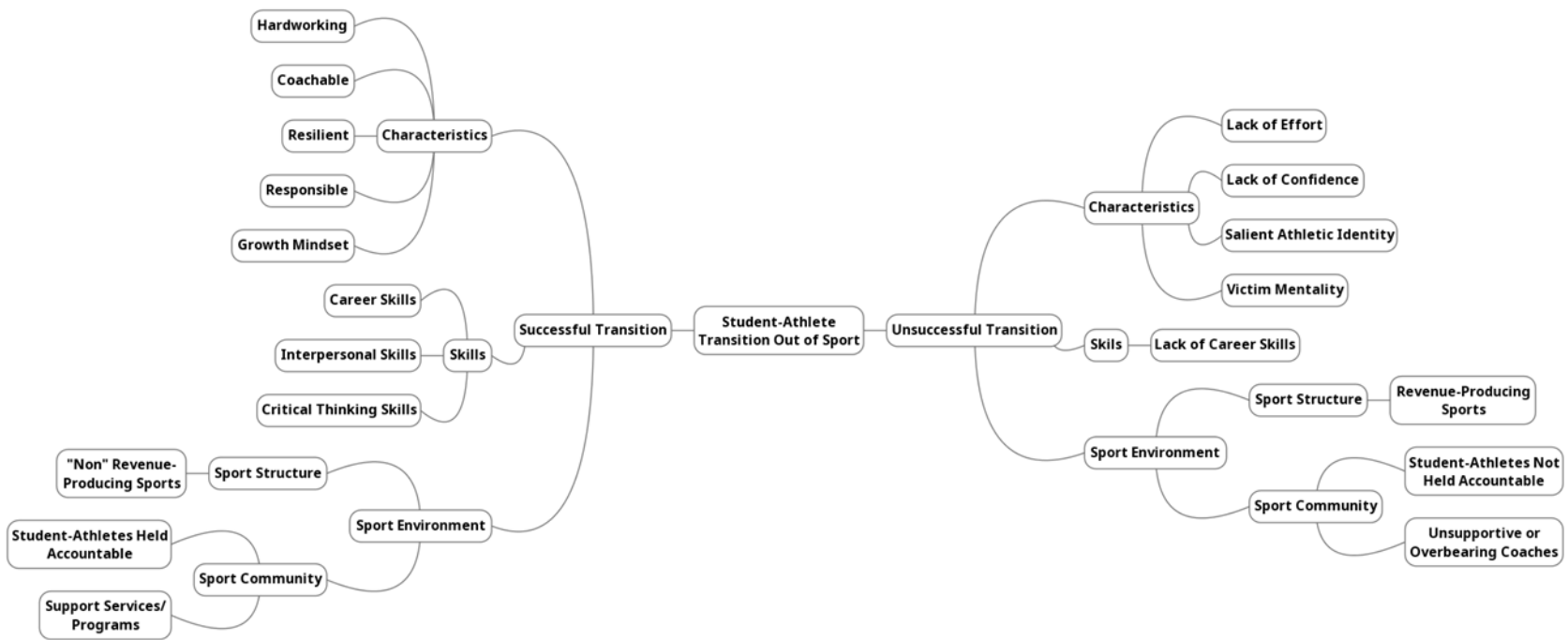continued development of student-athletes.

Figure 4.1   Factors of a Successful and Unsuccessful Transition Out of Sport

RQ2: Transition Obstacles

While the first research question focused on the general factors involved in a

successful and unsuccessful transition, the second research question addressed the

obstacles that student-athletes encounter as they transition out of sport. The participants

listed four primary obstacles: athletic identity, lack of career development, sudden loss of

the sport environment, and health risks (see Figure 4.2 at the end of this section for all

themes). Each of these main themes also had subthemes. Although participants identified

these obstacles as independent barriers to the process of athletic retirement, they

explained how three of the obstacles—lack of career development, sudden loss of the

sport environment, and health risks—were more prevalent if a salient athletic identity

was present as well. Participants observed that student-athletes who strongly identified

with the athlete role had a greater risk of encountering the other obstacles. The obstacles

to the transition out of sport is further explored in the following sections.

Athletic Identity

For the obstacle of athletic identity, participants identified both internal and

external elements. Participants related the internal aspect of athletic identity to student-

athletes' self-identity. For example, the extent to which student-athletes identify with the

athlete role is a potential barrier for them because a salient athletic identity may keep

them from developing any non-sport interests or goals. Consequently, these student-

athletes are more likely to experience a sense of identity loss once they no longer play

their sport. Participants described the external aspect of athletic identity as the influence

of others' perceptions about student-athletes. For example, the social recognition

surrounding sports teams and players can intensify student-athletes' athletic identity,

especially for those in revenue-producing sports. Thus, this athletic fanbase can create problems for student-athletes as they transition out of sport because they lose their distinction as an athlete and the acknowledgement of their sport accomplishments. Participant Five commented,

> …but certainly, once you leave the college environment people who meet you, they won't identify you in that way [as an athlete]…they won't identify you as a soccer player, as a 5,000-meter runner, or whatever the case may be, that's just not, they don't know you in that way, and you start to be seen differently than you see yourself. During the four years in the college environment, everyone is pretty much seeing you as you present yourself. You have gear, you're practicing, training, travelling, competing, juggling school, etcetera and so, that's your identity, and then very quickly it's over.

Participants viewed college sports as an environment that reinforces student-athletes' identification with the athlete role; however, when student-athletes leave this athletic context, they lose their recognition as a student-athlete and thus, often experience an identity crisis.

<u>Lack of Career Development</u>

The second major theme that arose within the topic of transitional obstacles was a lack of career development. Participants explained that many student-athletes do not have the career-related skills to successfully enter the workforce. They further suggested that athletic identity is a partial cause of student-athletes' stunted career development. For example, student-athletes with an exclusive athletic identity may not see the value in preparing for life after sport, especially if they aspire to continue their athletic career at the professional level. Consequently, student-athletes prioritize their sport-related activities over other academic- and job-related opportunities and thus, never develop the skills necessary for their career development. Participant Four explained,

> I do think it is an identity piece that for so long they've only ever been known as an athlete, and there are opportunities to be involved in college, be it through outside clubs or doing things like that, or maybe going on a study abroad that I think a lot of people would like to take advantage of and participate in, but because of the demands of their sport, they either don't have the time, or the schedule won't allow. I do think they miss out on a lot of those opportunities that the general student-body has access to and it really does create a bit of an identity crisis.

While there are extracurricular activities offered in college, student-athletes may choose not to partake in these opportunities because they are preoccupied with their sport or they do not have time outside of the sport context. For these student-athletes, their career preparation or development may, therefore, suffer at the expense of their exclusive involvement in college athletics.

Sudden Loss of the Sport Environment

The third primary obstacle of the transition out of sport was recognized as the sudden loss of the sport environment. Participants perceived that the suddenness of athletic retirement was especially problematic because of student-athletes' strong connection with their sport community and sport structure. As part of the loss of the sport community, participants referred to student-athletes losing their social support group within the athletic department, including their coaches, teammates, and academic advisors. Additionally, participants observed that student-athletes in revenue-producing sports often lose a sense of support from their fanbase. Participant Eight explained,

> In a sense of, when you played your sport people knew you and so, you have all these followers sometimes with your social media, and especially in certain sports, like football and men's basketball, and all of the sudden people see you and they're like, hey, how you doin', good to see you, or you start losing followers because you're no longer in the sport, and that can be like, whoa, I thought you liked me for me and now I'm losing all these followers because after three or four years, you know, you don't, in your mind, you don't matter anymore.

This loss of the sport community is also related to the obstacle of athletic identity because former student-athletes lose their strong sense of identification with the athlete role that was once supported by so many of their followers. In regard to the loss of the sport structure, many participants described a drastic shift in lifestyles from student-athletes in college to working professionals in the "real world". Participant Three commented,

> I think that transition of everything you're good at just ending, it's kind of they, I don't want to be dramatic and say they go through a mourning, but it's kind of like everything they know is not there anymore, and so, their team, their coaches, their structure, their exercise, their nutrition, their travel, everything is just gone…

Because the lives of student-athletes are structured down to the hour each day with academic and athletic activities, they face the challenge of planning their own schedule around a new lifestyle when they leave the college environment.

Health Risks

Finally, participants listed health risks as potential obstacles to the transition out of sport. For example, former student-athletes may experience problems with their mental health (e.g. anxiety and depression) or physical health, such as extreme weight gain or weight loss. These health concerns of former student-athletes could be a result of the previously mentioned obstacles because the loss of student-athletes' athletic identity and sport environment can exacerbate the challenges associated with their retirement from sport. Participant Four explained,

> Sports have been their life, so…I think some people train so hard that they just stop working out altogether, and that can lead to other mental health issues, like depression or some type of medical issue.

Up until the end of their college athletic career, student-athletes have spent the majority of their life within the context of sports and thus, have become accustomed to the

rigorous lifestyle of an athlete. Consequently, student-athletes may struggle to adjust to life after sport and as a result, develop unhealthy conditions that decrease their mental and physical health.
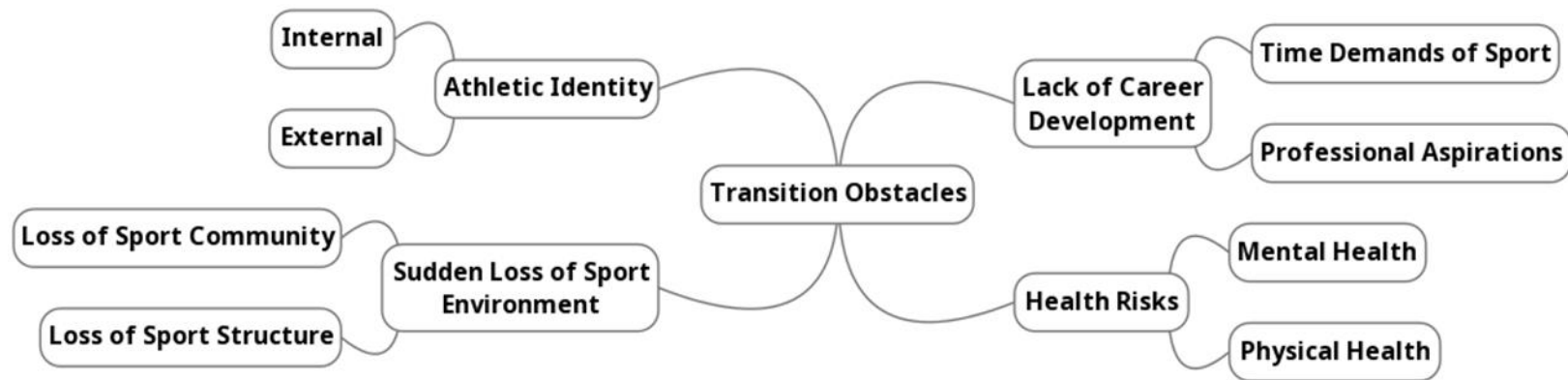
Figure 4.2   Obstacles of the Student-Athlete Transition Out of Sport

RQ3: Support Services and Programs

The final research question focused on the services and programs offered through student-athlete support or development services. Participants responded to four general interview questions: (1) what services and programs do you have in place to help student-athletes through the transition out of sport; (2) how do these services and programs relate to the obstacles of the transition out of sport; (3) do you have any mechanisms to follow up with student-athletes to see how their transition out of sport went once they are no longer enrolled; and (4) if you had all the time and resources in the world, what would you provide to student-athletes who are transitioning out of sport? The participants' programming for student-athletes is further explored in the following sections.

List of Services and Programs

Participants briefly described their programming offered to student-athletes (see Table 4.1 for all themes). It is important to note that this is a complete list of the services and programs that were reported by the participants and may not be a full list of the programming at each institution. That is, participants were asked about their services and programs in general and not about specific programming. Some of the participants may not have mentioned all of their programming available to student-athletes and thus, participants may have some of the services and programs listed in the table below, even though they are not marked. Furthermore, the participants' programming varied on whether student-athletes' participation was optional or mandatory. Participants with optional services and programs explained that they wanted to encourage self-improvement through student-athletes' voluntary participation, whereas participants with mandatory programming wanted to increase buy-in from student-athletes and coaches,

and requiring participation would ensure student-athletes knew the athletic department valued their programming efforts. Interestingly, two participants mentioned that their programming included a combination of both optional and mandatory elements. While underclassmen were required to participate in certain activities, upperclassmen were free to choose which activities they wanted to attend.

Table 4.1   **List of Services and Programs Reported by Participants**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Career Preparation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community Service	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Financial Workshops	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
Health and Wellness Education			✓				✓	✓
Orientation or Freshman Transition Program	✓							✓
Personal Development	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Senior Transition Series							✓	✓
Social Media Literacy	✓		✓					
Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student-Athlete Study Abroad Program						✓		
Student-Athlete or Summer Internship Program		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Athlete Participation*:	O	M	O	C	C	O	M	O

*Programming Optional (O), Mandatory (M), or a combination of optional and mandatory programming (C).

The areas of programming mentioned most frequently were career preparation, personal development, and community service. Career preparation included resume and cover letter workshops, mock interviews, career fairs, business etiquette dinners, and professional headshots. For personal development, the participants listed a variety of activities that help student-athletes discover their strengths and weaknesses, explore their non-sport interests and goals, and identify their behavioral and leadership styles. One example of this is applying the StrengthsFinder Test or the Dominance, Inducement, Submission and Compliance (DISC) Profile to help student-athletes recognize professional opportunities that best match their strengths, and behavioral and leadership styles. For example, Participant Eight commented,

> We want you to learn who you are. We'll do StrengthsFinder. What are your natural five strengths? We help them discover their values. What are your core values and how do you live through those lines? What's your behavior style or your leadership style? We do DISC, which enables them to understand that there's four different behavioral styles that people have. Which one is yours and how do you work with others?

The third program type most frequently mentioned was community service, which involved student-athletes participating in activities for the betterment of their community and its members. While the programming aspects of career and personal development have a strong focus on student-athletes' self-improvement, participants explained that the overall purpose of community service is for student-athletes to become engaged with their community in a leadership role. Participant Three mentioned,

> I would say the main things are serving and doing something outside of yourself, being a leader and being aware of what's going on in your community…I think that's super helpful for the rest of your life. Whatever our community service is, it's not about signing autographs and taking pictures; it's about actually doing things to make something better.

Similar to the programming goal of community service, participants explained

that the overall intentionality of their services and programs is to "humanize the

experience" of athletics and prepare student-athletes for success upon their graduation.

Another programming aspect frequently referenced by participants was Student-Athlete

Advisory Committee (SAAC). SAAC was described as an important opportunity for

student-athletes to practice their leadership skills. Other services and programs were

mentioned as well, but their availability varied significantly. For example, some

participants discussed health and wellness education for student-athletes that involved

classes covering various topics, such as drug and alcohol abuse, anxiety, and dating and

relationships. A couple of participants talked about a senior transition series that included

career and life skills activities (e.g. classes or workshops on professional networking,

health benefits/insurance, and nutrition) targeted to senior student-athletes. A unique

aspect about the senior transition series was the discourse on athletic identity. Participant

Seven explained,

> As a part of that senior transition series we also have our sport psychologist do a
> piece about retiring from sport. She kind of walks them through what that looks
> like…It's all about the identity piece and to kind of make sure that they don't just
> put all their eggs in one basket of identifying as a student-athlete and finding out
> who they are. She does a lot of different things around that.

Several of the participants highlighted athletic identity as an obstacle to the

transition out of sport; however, only a few participants mentioned programming that

addressed athletic identity specifically, with the exception being the senior transition

series. Other services and programs listed by the participants included financial

workshops, orientation for incoming freshmen, social media literacy, student-athlete

study abroad, and summer internships.

Programming Relationship to Transition Obstacles

After participants provided a brief overview of their programming, they explained how these services and programs related to the transitional obstacles they identified previously in the interview. Participants described four ways in which their programming supported student-athletes through the transition out of sport (see Figure 4.3 for all themes at the end of this section). More specifically, they explained that their services and programs helped student-athletes confront the end of their sport career, establish and maintain a support system, develop skills needed for the transition, and create a multi-dimensional self-concept.

First, participants pointed out that their programming helped student-athletes confront the end of their sport career. Many student-athletes may not think or talk about the eventual end of their athletic career because they have a strong focus on their sport, especially during their final collegiate season. Therefore, one of the programming goals was to encourage student-athletes to start thinking about the transition out of sport and subsequently, help them realize that there is life after the end of their college athletic career. Participant Five commented,

> …we feel like we're impacting and making a difference on what I referenced
> earlier about kind of that stunted career development and the realization that you
> will have another 40 to 60 years of life. Through our programming we're trying to
> help them realize that.

Thus, student-athletes who confront the end of their athletic career are better prepared for the transition out of sport because the realization of their retirement from sport helps them take the next steps with career preparation.

Second, participants explained that their services and programs helped student-athletes maintain a support system and establish new relationships. For example, student-

athletes who are actively engaged with the programming often stay connected with their

academic advisors and other supportive personnel in the athletic department. Student-

athletes with this strong support group may, therefore, feel more comfortable seeking

advice during their transition out of sport. In addition, student-athletes who complete

internships learn how to be a contributing member of a team in a work environment.

Several participants explained that these career-related experiences provide student-

athletes the opportunity to utilize their teamwork skills in a professional context and thus,

establish relationships with new colleagues.

Third, participants suggested that their programming involved skill development.

More specifically, student-athletes develop interpersonal skills as well as practical skills

for their future career. For the development of interpersonal skills, student-athletes learn

how to communicate in a business setting, interview for a job, and network with

professionals, through various career preparation activities. Moreover, student-athletes

learn practical skills, including how to acquire a car loan, balance a checkbook, and

create a professional profile on social media. Participant One explained,

> You're not going to come out with a finance degree from our personal finance
> workshop, but you might also not be afraid to sit down with a car dealer and get a
> car when you get your first job, or know how to save money if you do go and play
> oversees for a year or two, or understand the concept on a down payment on a
> house.

Therefore, an important aspect of programming is student-athletes' development of

interpersonal and practical skills that will help them be successful in the next stages of

their life.

Finally, the participants explained that their services and programs help student-

athletes create a multi-dimensional self-concept. It is important for student-athletes to

develop other identities along with their athletic identity, so the loss of the athlete role is

not as severe for them when they transition out of sport. Participant Six commented,

> …those programs help you identify as something other than an athlete because
> you're not doing anything athletically. You're looking at yourself as a student,
> and as a future, whatever your career is going to be, a future accountant, a future
> engineer, a future athletic director, whatever the case may be. It gives you a
> chance to look at yourself in another light.

Thus, the programming within student-athlete support or development services helps

student-athletes expand their self-identity beyond athletics and consequently, lessen the

severity of this transitional period.

Follow-Up with Former Student-Athletes

In addition to describing the services and programs available to current student-

athletes, participants were asked about their programming for former student-athletes. In

particular, participants were asked if they had any mechanisms to follow up with former

student-athletes to see how they were transitioning out of sport. All of the participants

responded that their programming did not include a systematic way to check in with

former student-athletes. Several participants described various alumni events that help

student-athletes stay connected with their sport team; however, these programs for alumni

are often geared toward donation and fundraising instead of supporting student-athletes

during their retirement from sport. Additionally, participants explained that individual

staff members try to stay connected with former student-athletes through social media.

Despite these informal attempts to maintain relationships with former student-athletes,

the participants explained that they do not have any current mechanisms to track the well-

being of their former student-athletes. To help ensure the success of student-athletes

following their graduation, the majority of participants indicated that this is something they are or will try to implement into their programming.

Potential Programming Opportunities

The final part of this research question related to participants' ideas about improving programming opportunities for student-athlete support or development services (see Figure 4.4 for all themes at the end of this section). Participants were asked, "If you had all the time and resources in the world, what would you provide to student-athletes who are transitioning out of sport?" Two major themes emerged from this question: program enhancement for current student-athletes and program implementation for former student-athletes.

First, participants explained that they would enhance the services and programs for current student-athletes through facility updates, curriculum improvements, and additional positions. In terms of facility updates, participants mentioned they would have a larger building for the athletic department and update other building aspects. To advance the curriculum of their programming, participants explained they would target more of the services and programs on career preparation, diversity awareness, and financial literacy. Moreover, the new positions participants listed were a career or transition counselor, a full-time student-athlete development coordinator, a communications team, a graphic arts team, and a research team. Interestingly, the need for a research team related to a theme consistent of every participants' programming: a lack of evidence-based practices. Participants explained that they would hire a research team to evaluate their services and programs with the overall goal of implementing the most effective programming for their student-athletes. Participant Five stated,

> I will say the only thing missing is the research to back it up…if someone came to me and said, I'd like to hire one or two career counselors for our student-athletes, I would want to analyze, is that going to work? What are the metrics? Are they getting jobs? What does that mean from a really practical standpoint? Are they getting jobs, are they going to grad school, are they joining the military, how quickly are they doing that, etcetera…

Second, participants mentioned that they would implement services and programs to help former student-athletes with academic and professional opportunities. These opportunities for former student-athletes included continuing education, internships, and job placement. In terms of continuing education, Participant Two talked about funding a program for former student-athletes who want to come back and earn their college degree. Additionally, Participant Four talked about starting a bridge program to help student-athletes navigate their first year or two out of sport. In this program, student-athletes would enroll immediately following their final academic semester to gain professional experience through internships. Furthermore, many participants explained that they would create a follow-up survey to collect data on former student-athletes. Participant Five commented,

> …we would have like a healthy database where we are following up to ask the right questions about how the transition is going, whether that's jobs, family life, living arrangements…I would have our own version of this here at the school that we could use because what that does is help us with recruiting when we're able to say we survey our former student-athletes, we have a very good return rate, and here's what we find, and I think we'd find good stuff, right, and if we don't find good stuff, then that guides us in our programming, knowing what the gaps are, and you could then provide the proper intervention.

Participants explained that systematically tracking the different variables of the transition out of sport could benefit former, current, and future student-athletes. Thus, incorporating services and programs that are research-based may be the first step needed to better prepare student-athletes for a successful transition out of sport. Finally, participants

mentioned that they would increase their alumni outreach to target former student-athletes who are unsuccessful with their retirement from sport. Instead of focusing on financial aspects of alumni groups, it was suggested that varsity clubs for alumni should include assistive services for former student-athletes who are struggling with the process of athletic retirement.
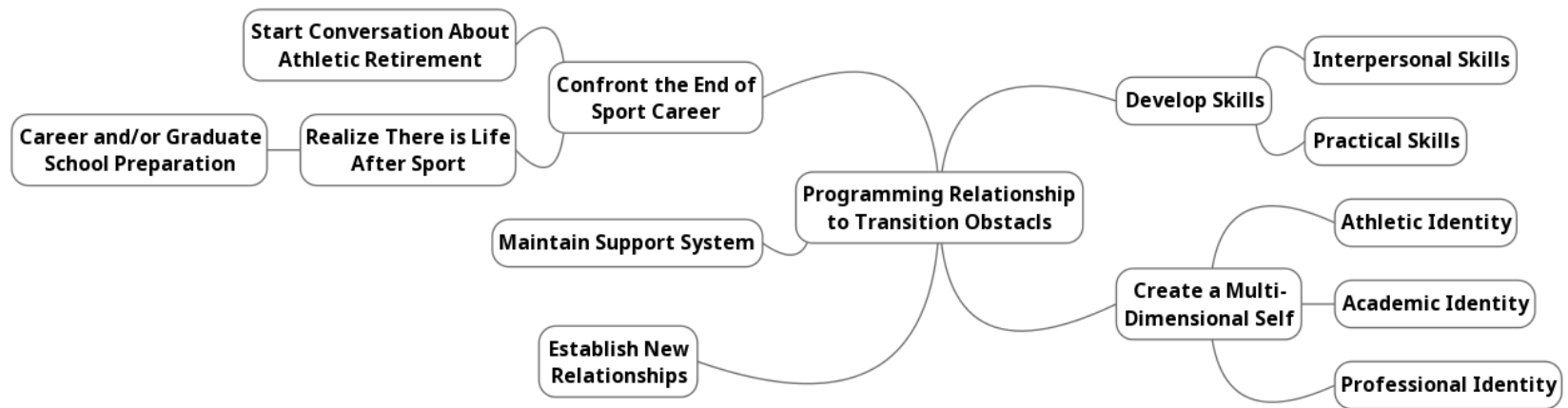
Figure 4.3   **Programming Relationship to Transition Obstacles**
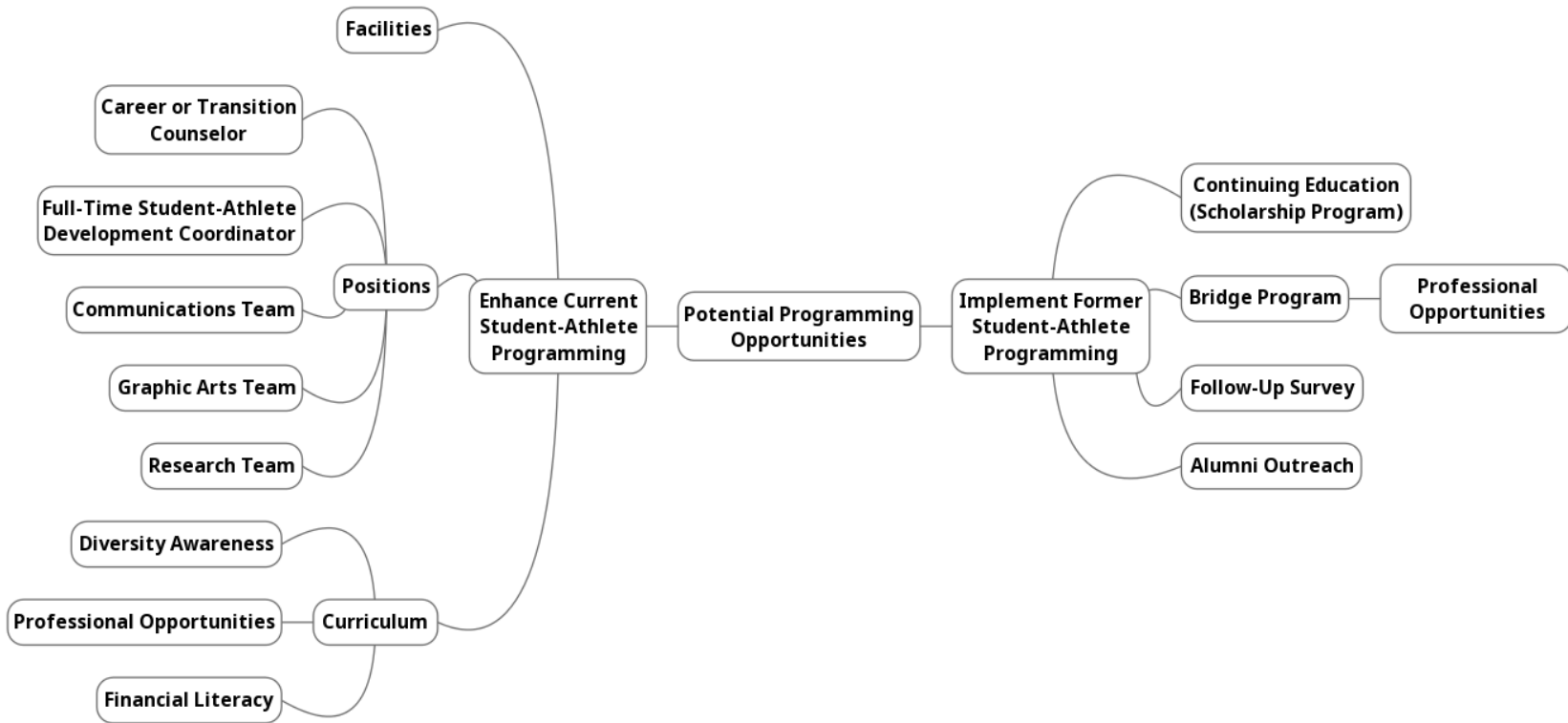
Figure 4.4   Potential Programming Opportunities for Current and Former Student-Athletes

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the transition out of sport from the perspective of those involved in creating the programming of sport organizations, an important resource of social support for athletes. In the college sports system, specifically within the athletic department, the unit of student-athlete support or development services is a primary source of support for student-athletes. Thus, interviews were conducted with directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services from NCAA Division I universities. Participants' responses were connected to the study's original research questions: (1) how do directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services perceive the transition out of sport, in general, for their student-athletes; (2) what obstacles do student-athletes encounter during their transition out of sport; and (3) what programs and services are available to help student-athletes overcome these obstacles, and thus, experience a more successful transition out of sport? As previously mentioned, the participants' responses were largely based on anecdotal evidence because they have not been able to track student-athletes' well-being during this transitional period, which is something that needs to be done. For the purposes of the discussion, the findings of this study were summarized according to these three research questions and related to the current literature on career transitions in sport.

Summary of RQ1

As part of the first research question, participants defined a successful and unsuccessful transition out of sport and further explained the factors involved in each of

these transitions. It is important to note that the transition out of sport is a subjective process and therefore, the success or failure of athletes' retirement from sport largely depends on individuals' definitions of success. As such, the literature on athletic careers generally defines a successful transition as athletes' satisfaction with their sport and life (Stambulova et al., 2009). Despite the subjective nature of athletic retirement, consistent themes emerged within the participants' definitions of a successful and unsuccessful transition out of sport. Their definition of a successful transition included former student-athletes who were gainfully employed, self-sufficient/independent, and mentally, emotionally, and financially stable. In addition, successful former student-athletes earned their college degree, stayed connected with their support group, developed healthy relationships, and established a plan for their future. For an unsuccessful transition out of sport, participants included negative outcomes in their definition, such as unemployment and mental/physical health issues. Former student-athletes who failed to achieve their professional aspirations, especially those with no backup plan for their future, were also considered unsuccessful. This largely matches with Stambulova's definition of success because participants reasoned that former student-athletes who fell short of their career- or sport-related goals were unsatisfied with their life, whereas those who succeeded in achieving their goals had greater life satisfaction. Therefore, former student-athletes' level of satisfaction with their life depends on their effectiveness to cope with transitional obstacles and thus, the "general feeling of adjustment" to their retirement from sport (Stambulova et al., 2009).

Participants further differentiated successful and unsuccessful transitions by describing three aspects that influenced student-athletes' quality of adaptation out of

sport: student-athlete characteristics, their development of skills, and sport environments established within the athletic department or team. For the characteristics of successful former student-athletes, participants observed that they were hardworking, coachable, resilient, responsible, and had a growth mindset. Additionally, participants noticed that former student-athletes were successful if they had career skills, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking skills. Contrary to these positive characteristics and skills, participants described an unsuccessful transition out of sport with an absence of these characteristics and skills. For example, former student-athletes were more likely to struggle with the coping process of athletic retirement if they had a lack of effort, a lack of confidence, a salient athletic identity and a victim mentality. Furthermore, participants explained that unsuccessful former student-athletes had a lack of career skills.

The description of these characteristics and skills that would influence athletic retirement is largely unexplored in the current literature. One construct that has received a large amount of attention is athletic identity, which has traditionally been of particular interest in individualist cultures, such as North America (Stambulova et al., 2009). These studies on athletic identity have demonstrated the negative consequences of a more salient athletic identity for athletes' retirement from sport, such as lower career maturity (Murphy et al., 1996), role conflict (Martens & Lee, 1998), and identity foreclosure (Raskin, 1998). Outside of athletic identity, explanatory models of career transitions in sport, such as the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), do not describe specific characteristics and skills that lead athletes to either a successful or unsuccessful adaptation. Instead, these models provide a more general explanation for the outcomes of athletic retirement. One parallel with the past literature could be made with

Stambulova et al. (2009), who explained that athletes' retirement adaptation depends on their use of available resources to overcome transitional obstacles. According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), the available resources of athletes that help facilitate the process of athletic retirement are coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning. Therefore, it could be suggested that student-athletes with more "successful" characteristics and skills are better equipped to cope with the transition out of sport because they utilized their available resources (e.g. the social support and pre-retirement planning programming of student-athlete support or development services) to acquire these characteristics and skills and thus, effectively worked through any transitional obstacles or barriers.

The findings of this study relate to Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of athletic retirement in additional manners. In the third step of their model, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) recognized coping skills as one of the resources that influence the quality of athletes' retirement adaptation. In past studies, the most beneficial coping strategies for athletes were identified as finding a new interest, keeping busy, and exercising (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Even though these coping strategies differ from the previously mentioned skills of the participants in this study, the skills of successful former student-athletes may influence the quality of their transition out of sport. For example, student-athletes' development of career skills, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking skills may help them maintain a busy schedule with extracurricular activities as they pursue non-sport goals and interests. In relation to the research on athletic identity, athletes with a salient athletic identity have been shown to have a less adaptive transition out of sport (Brewer et al., 1993). Participants in this study explained this downside of an exclusive

identification with the athlete role when describing unsuccessful former student-athletes. Participants mentioned that student-athletes with a more salient athletic identity may experience an identity crisis upon their retirement from sport, a trend recognized previously by Brewer and colleagues (1993) within the college athlete population.

In terms of the sport environment, participants explained that the sport structure and sport community influenced student-athletes' transitional outcome. Regarding the structure of sport, participants observed that there were a greater number of student-athletes in "non-revenue-producing sports" that successfully transitioned out of sport than student-athletes in revenue-producing sports. Participants thought that student-athletes in "non-revenue-producing sports" were better prepared for athletic retirement because they realized that competing in professional sports was not a viable option for them. These student-athletes, therefore, planned for their future with pre-retirement planning, another important resource in Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of athletic retirement. Unlike the success of student-athletes in "non-revenue-producing sports", the student-athletes in revenue-producing sports may find it difficult to develop a plan for their future, especially if they aspire to play professional sports (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Research has shown that student-athletes in revenue-producing sports often exude the behaviors typical of athletes rather than other non-sport roles (Lance, 2004). Thus, many of these student-athletes adopt an exclusive athletic identity instead of a multidimensional self-concept (Lance, 2004) and consequently, limit their non-sport opportunities (e.g. jobs) of their future (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Furthermore, the participants of this study explained that the sport community, specifically the team culture, influenced student-athletes' quality of adaptation. For example, participants

observed that student-athletes who were held accountable for their responsibilities as a student and athlete by their coaches and teammates were more likely to have an effective transition out of sport than student-athletes who were not held accountable. Participants further mentioned that the higher levels of accountability within a team helped student-athletes meet the expectations for both academics and athletics because they were encouraged to participate in the services and programs of student-athlete support or development services. Like the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), participants emphasized the importance of a supportive environment for the overall success of student-athletes. In addition to coping skills and pre-retirement planning, Taylor and Ogilvie identified social support as one of the three resources that help facilitate athletes' transition out of sport. Therefore, it seems that the support offered through the sport organization, in particular athletes' teammates, coaches, and student-athlete support or development services, is an essential element for an adaptive transition out of sport for student-athletes.

In summary of the first research question, it is important to recognize that the participants believed that the majority of their former student-athletes were successful with their retirement from sport. This higher success rate of their former student-athletes reflects the trend of only 20% of retiring athletes struggling with the transition out of sport (Lavallee et al., 2000). Similar to the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), participants recognized the negative factors of athletic retirement, but focused more on the positive aspects of this adjustment period. This optimistic perspective of the transition out of sport may have implications for the programming offered through student-athlete support or development services. For

example, participants may encourage student-athletes to participate in their services and programs because they understand the value of building the resources in student-athletes that allow for a successful retirement from sport. Thus, student-athletes who are engaged in programming may feel more competent in their ability to overcome transitional obstacles and therefore, experience a successful transition out of sport.

Summary of RQ2

For the second research question, participants identified four primary obstacles to the transition out of sport: athletic identity, a lack of career development, a sudden loss of the sport environment, and health risks. In terms of athletic identity, participants further separated this obstacle into internal and external elements, a distinction comparable to the cognitive and social structures identified by Brewer and colleagues (1993). While the cognitive role (i.e. internal aspect) of athletic identity refers to how individuals process information based on their athletic functioning, the social role (i.e. external aspect) acknowledges the influence of others' appraisal on individuals' athletic self (Brewer et al., 1993). Therefore, the athletic identity of student-athletes is affected by both their sense of self and others' perceptions in the context of sport. In addition, the internal and external nature of athletic identity relate to the factors of self-identity and social-identity identified in the second step of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model. For example, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) recognized that athletes' self-identity can deter them from exploring other non-sport identities in preparation for the transition out of sport. Retiring athletes with a self-identity derived primarily from their involvement in sports may perceive the loss of their athletic identity as a significant threat to their overall sense of self (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Thus, athletic retirement may seem like an impossible task to recover

from because retiring athletes may feel lost with a self-identity that is no longer supported by their sports participation. (Park et al., 2013; Grove et al., 1997; Brewer et al., 1993). In relation to the social aspect of athletic identity, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) explained that many athletes are primarily socialized in the sports environment and therefore, these athletes define themselves in terms of how others perceive them based on their status as an athlete. This is often exacerbated for athletes in revenue-producing sports who have a greater number of followers that praise them for their athletic accomplishments (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Brewer et al., 1993). Therefore, a salient athletic identity may complicate the process of athletic retirement for student-athletes because they lose their sense of worth as an athlete in non-sport contexts and consequently, they face the challenge of redefining their self- and social-identities.

The second primary obstacle of athletic retirement was recognized as a lack of career development. Participants explained that student-athletes' stunted career development was a negative consequence of their exclusive athletic identity because they prioritized their sport over future job-related opportunities. The tendency for student-athletes to invest more in their sport than other academic and social roles is supported in the current literature as Murphy and colleagues (1996) found an inverse relationship between athletic identity and career maturity. Student-athletes with a salient athletic identity upon their retirement from sport may not have acquired the necessary career-related skills to succeed in the workforce and consequently, may experience higher levels of anxiety with post-retirement career planning (Grove et al., 1997). Thus, participants considered a lack of career development as a transitional obstacle, especially for student-athletes who place greater value on their role as an athlete.

The third major transitional obstacle was a sudden loss of the sport environment, which participants identified as another negative consequence of an exclusive athletic identity. Participants further separated the sport environment of student-athletes into their sport community and sport structure. For the sport community, participants explained that former student-athletes often lose their social support within the athletic department, such as their coaches, teammates, and academic advisors, because they are no longer directly connected to these individuals. Although social support was mentioned in the third step of the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), it was referenced as a primary resource for retiring athletes, instead of a potential obstacle. Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) explained that the system of support within the sport organization may facilitate the transition out of sport; however, retired athletes may not have access to these previous sources of social support from the sport organization, which may lead to additional challenges for athletes. Former student-athletes may feel unsupported by the athletic department after they leave the sport environment (Fuller, 2014; Lavallee et al., 2004) and therefore, look for support outside of the sport context, such as their family and friends (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Moreover, student-athletes in revenue-producing sports may lose a sense of support from their fan base that once strongly reinforced their athletic identity. For these student-athletes, the loss of their sport community may be more severe because of the higher levels of social recognition tied to their sport. Thus, former student-athletes in revenue-producing sports may lose their popularity as an athlete and be more at risk for the challenges of this transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Furthermore, former student-athletes with a salient athletic identity may have greater difficulty with their adjustment to a "non-athlete" lifestyle. Participants explained that the

loss of the sport structure involves a drastic shift in lifestyles from a student-athlete in college to a working professional in the fast-paced life of adulthood. Because student-athletes with a stronger athletic identity place greater importance on their sport behaviors (Brewer et al., 1993), they may perceive the challenge of adapting to a new lifestyle as more difficult when their college athletic careers end.

Finally, participants mentioned the mental and physical health of former student-athletes as potential obstacles to the transition out of sport. These health risks are related to the last step of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model, which recognizes the need for appropriate interventions to help athletes who experience trauma with the athletic retirement process. Taylor and Ogilvie suggested that athletes with significant forms of distress should work with a professional, such as a sport psychologist, to reduce any psychological, emotional, behavioral, or social stressors. In addition, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) found that retiring athletes often used exercise as a coping mechanism to maintain their physical health. Thus, it is important for student-athletes to receive support during their transition out of sport to help them successfully cope with the mental and physical stress of athletic retirement.

Summary of RQ3

For the third research question, participants responded to four questions: (1) what services and programs do you have in place to help student-athletes through the transition out of sport; (2) how do these services and programs relate to the obstacles of the transition out of sport; (3) do you have any mechanisms to follow up with student-athletes to see how their transition out of sport went once they are no longer enrolled; and (4) if you had all the time and resources in the world, what would you provide to student-

athletes who are transitioning out of sport? In response to the first question, participants listed their current programming offered to student-athletes. The most frequently mentioned services and programs were career preparation, personal development, and community service, which fulfill three of the commitment areas of the former NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program: career development, personal development, and service. Additionally, the programming initiatives at participants' institutions and those of the CHAMPS/Life Skills program have similar goals to prepare student-athletes with the necessary knowledge and skills for success during and after college athletics. Despite these general programming similarities, other aspects differed among the participants' services and programs because of various factors, including financial resources, size of school, and number of staff. A marked difference among the participants' programming was their approach to student-athletes' participation. For example, several participants explained that their services and programs were either required or voluntary, while only two participants indicated their programming included a combination of both optional and mandatory elements. The NCAA does not have standard programming or regulations for the services and programs of student-athlete support or development services. This lack of consistency makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of various services and programs implemented across universities. Because there are no programming guidelines of the NCAA, a lack of evidence-based programming exists within the unit of student-athlete support or development services in these collegiate athletic departments. One of the few studies that evaluated a career transition program for student-athletes highlighted the need for more empirical data to not only increase the reliability of this research, but to further demonstrate the value of programming within university athletic departments, in

particular student-athlete support or development services, for the success of student-athletes (Stankovich, 1998).

For the second part of this research question, participants identified four ways in which their services and programs helped student-athletes work through transitional obstacles. First, participants explained that their programming helped student-athletes confront the end of their sport career. While research has shown that some student-athletes shift their focus to academics as they near the end of their college athletic career (Miller & Kerr, 2002), other student-athletes who have a strong focus on their sport often never think about their athletic retirement. Consequently, these student-athletes do not proactively disengage from the athlete role and therefore, experience more problems with the transition out of sport (Lally & Kerr, 2005). Second, participants mentioned that their services and programs helped student-athletes maintain a support system and establish new relationships in the workforce. The importance of maintaining social support during the transition out of sport is directly related to the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) as Taylor and Ogilvie mentioned social support as an available resource for retiring athletes. The participants of this study explained that former student-athletes who built relationships within the athletic department were more comfortable seeking advice from this support system to overcome transitional obstacles. Third, participants commented on the skills student-athletes developed through their active involvement with the support services and programs, specifically those related to career development. Along with social support, athletes' skill development was included in the third step of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model. More specifically, Taylor and Ogilvie identified coping skills and pre-retirement planning as two other resources that retiring

athletes could use to develop vocational skills and prepare for a new career path. Finally, participants explained that their programming helped student-athletes create a multi-dimensional self. The participants' services and programs required student-athletes to participate in activities outside of the sport context and thus, develop non-sport interests and goals. Similarly, Taylor and Ogilvie mentioned how important it was for athletes to broaden their self-identity through pre-retirement planning. The parallels drawn between the participants' services and programs and the resources of Taylor and Ogilvie's model suggest that student-athletes who proactively engage in the programming of student-athlete support or development services are utilizing their available resources (i.e. coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning) to prepare for their transition out of sport. Furthermore, the fact that these resources are typically available in a majority of the services and programs may explain why a majority of student-athletes are successful with their retirement adaptation.

The final two aspects of this research question related to the programming at the participants' universities for current student-athletes as well as student-athletes who had made the transition out of sport. More specifically, participants were asked how they would enhance their services and programs for current student-athletes and what programming they would implement for former student-athletes. Participants explained that they would strengthen their current services and programs through facility updates, curriculum improvements, and additional personnel. Interestingly, participants listed a research team as a beneficial addition to their programming. Because of the lack of evidence-based practices within their services and programs, participants suggested that a primary focus of future research should be the systematic evaluation of their

programming. In addition, university athletic departments are largely left on their own to develop these services and programs for their student-athletes because the former NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program does not provide standard programming for student-athlete support or development services. Although a few studies found positive implications of the services and programs for student-athletes' development (Goddard, 2004; Stankovich, 1998), future research is needed to assess how well student-athlete support or development services are meeting the needs of their student-athletes.

In terms of programming for former student-athletes, participants explained that their services and programs are targeted to current student-athletes rather than those who have already graduated. This approach to programming is, historically, what other sport organizations have done. For example, Stambulova and colleagues (2009) explained that organizational support is highest when athletes are actively competing, but decreases when their participation in sport ends, a possible consequence of the financial aspect of sports (Thomas & Ermler, 1988). Moreover, sport organizations have been known to show greater concern for athletes who are transitioning into sport rather than out of sport (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). Therefore, retiring athletes tend to find support from other non-sport sources because they may feel a sense of isolation from their sport organization (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Melendez, 2007). This lack of organizational support for retiring athletes may explain why some former student-athletes struggle after they leave the college sport environment. Many student-athletes choose not to participate in the programming of student-athlete support or development services because they do not have time to attend and/or prioritize their sports activities over these support services and programs. Consequently, they may have difficulty navigating the transition out of sport

because they have not fully utilized their available resources, such as coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Even though these student-athletes failed to take responsibility of their own development, they should still have access to the programming that helps them acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed as a working professional. Therefore, participants described potential programming that would help former student-athletes with more academic and vocational opportunities. These services and programs included continuing education, internships, and job placement. Furthermore, participants mentioned that they would increase alumni outreach to further support their former student-athletes during their retirement from sport. Although participants mentioned that the majority of their student-athletes experience a successful transition out of sport, this observation is based on anecdotal evidence because there are no formal follow-up programs in place to track the actual percentage of successful transitions. Thus, several participants listed programming that would increase outreach to support the needs of their former student-athletes.

Limitations

A notable limitation of this study was the selected sample of directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services from NCAA Division I universities across the United States. Participants were recruited from the athletic departments of NCAA-member schools at the Division I level because of their greater financial resources for sports programs in comparison to institutions at lower divisional levels. As such, the participants' perceptions about athletic retirement may not accurately represent those in the athletic departments at other Division II and III schools. Additionally, this study is limited to the context of athletic retirement within the college

sport system of the United States. Research has shown that a number of factors, such as competitive levels, sport-type, and gender (Park et al., 2013) as well as cultural differences (Stambulova et al., 2009), influence athletes' transition out of sport. For example, while the educational system is relevant to the sport system in North America (e.g. student-athletes' retirement from college sports), it is not used as a marker for the transitions of athletes' athletic careers in Eastern European countries (Stambulova et al., 2009). Thus, theoretical frameworks used to approach transitions of athletic careers vary across national and international contexts. Furthermore, the quality of data from the interviews was contingent upon participants' willingness to respond with honesty and their ability to provide correct knowledge on the topic.

Future Research

Apart from the limitations of this study, it holds important implications for future research on athletic retirement. The findings of this study demonstrate the need for program evaluation as a lack of evidence-based programming exists within student-athlete support or development services. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of the services and programs for student-athletes, the programming efforts of student-athlete support or development services should be systematically evaluated. Moreover, further research is needed to validate the findings of this study. The present study examined the process of athletic retirement from the perspective of the sport organization, specifically directors and/or associate directors of student-athlete support or development services, which no other studies have done thus far. Lastly, future research should concentrate more on specific aspects of the transition out of sport within college athletics. This study covered a wide range of topics for athletic retirement (e.g. successful versus unsuccessful

transitions, transitional obstacles, and programming). Thus, other studies should narrow their focus on certain topic areas, such as the process of retirement from sport for transfer student-athletes or the differences among Fall-, Winter- or Spring-sport student-athletes, to examine these potential themes in greater depth.

Conclusion

The participants of this study recognized that the student-athlete transition out of sport presents a number of challenges surrounding an exclusive athletic identity, such as a lack of career development, a sudden loss of the sport environment, and health risks. To help student-athletes overcome these transitional obstacles, participants offer services and programs at their universities with a strong focus on student-athletes' personal and career development. Participants explained that student-athletes engaged in this programming are more likely to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively cope with the demands of athletic retirement. Even though a large percentage of student-athletes have a successful transition out of sport, several are not getting their needs met by these services and programs and thus, the programming within student-athlete support or development services may require greater attention in what could support these student-athletes. In addition, there are only a few studies that systematically assess the effectiveness of these services and programs. Therefore, researchers should evaluate the services and programs currently offered to student-athletes and, when needed, enhance the programming with evidence-based practices. Furthermore, the participants of this study recognized the need to extend their programming to former student-athletes. Because sport organizations have the moral obligation to foster a supportive environment for the success of athletes' in and out of the sport context (Thomas & Ermler, 1998), former student-athletes who struggle

with the transition out of sport should have continued access to these support services and programs. The findings of this study shed a new light on athletic retirement within the college sport environment and revealed both strengths and weaknesses of the current programming within student-athlete support or development services. The next steps in student-athlete programming should include the implementation of evidence-based practices for both current and former student-athletes to ensure their continued success after the end of their college athletic careers.

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    Technology.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographics

1. What is your age?

2. How many years have you worked in your current position?

    a. Can you describe your roles and responsibilities as a _____ (job

    title)?

3. Besides your current position, what other positions have you held in an athletic

    department either here or at other institutions?

4. How many years in total have you worked within an athletic department?

Obstacles of the Transition Out of Sport

5. What do you perceive are some of the obstacles that student-athletes face as they

    end their participation in NCAA sports?

    a. Of these obstacles, what do you feel are the most prevalent among retiring

    student-athletes, and why?

Programming of Student-Athlete Support or Development Services

6. What services and/or programs do you have in place to help student-athletes

    through the obstacles that you've described?

    a. Are these services and/or programs available to all student-athletes or are

    they for certain groups, such as fifth-year players or injured players?

    b. Can you tell me more about when these services and/or programs are

    offered to student-athletes, for example, are they offered throughout their

    college athletic careers or during specific years of enrollment?

    c. How do student-athletes find out about and/or access these programs? For instance, are some services and/or programs required or optional?

    d. Do you perceive any patterns or trends in student-athletes seeking these services and/or programs? In particular, do you see trends in certain student-athletes using these services more than others based on their sport, year in school, gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status?

Success and Unsuccessful Transitions

7. Do you have any mechanisms to check-in or follow-up with student-athletes to see how their transition out of sport went once they are no longer enrolled?

    a. (YES) Can you tell me about this process? For example, how often are you conducting these follow-ups and what information are you seeking?

8. Do you perceive, in general, that the student-athletes at X University are successful in transitioning out of sport?

9. For student-athletes who are successful, can you provide a few examples that help illustrate what a successful transition looks like?

10. Are there certain student-athletes at your university who have had more successful transitions than others?

    a. For example, do you see differences based on the sport a student-athlete plays, their gender, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status?

11. For student-athletes who aren't successful, can you describe or provide a few examples of what an unsuccessful transition out of sport looks like?

12. What do you perceive are some of the characteristics that make student-athletes effective in transitioning out of sport?

13. If you had all the resources and time in the world, what would you provide to student-athletes who are transitioning out of sport?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add about your position within student-athlete support or development services, the services and/or programs offered at X University, or sport career termination for student-athletes, in general?

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

Research for this project was approved by Boise State University's Institutional

Review Board, protocol #103-SB17-037.