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Qualitative Analysis of the Career Transition Experiences of Intercollegiate Athletes with High Athletic Identity: A Comparison of Athletes with High or Low Religiosity

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Qualitative Analysis of the Career Transition Experiences of Intercollegiate Athletes with

High Athletic Identity: A Comparison of Athletes with High or Low Religiosity

By

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Master's Thesis

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A Thesis
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Of the Requirements for the Degree
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Abstract

There is some evidence that athletes with high athletic identity experience psychological difficulties with organizing their life following competitive athletic retirement (Erpič et al., 2004). The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes with above average athletic identity and to also compare transition experiences between athletes with high religious faith (HRF) and low religious faith (LRF). Participants included 72 former intercollegiate athletes (69.4% female; M_{age} = 22.6 years; 84.7% White), who completed online surveys of athletic identity and religious faith, as well as open-ended questions about athletic transition. Inductive thematic analysis led to two higher-order categories for the transition experience (losses; difficulties) and for coping methods utilized during transition (e.g., filling the void; managing mental/emotional challenges). Additionally, five themes conveyed athletes' purpose of prayer during transition. *Loss of Sport* was the most commonly reported loss theme during transition for both the HRF and LRF groups. However, the most frequently reported coping method differed between the HRF group (*Physical Activity*) and the LRF group (*Maintaining Sport/Competitor Identity*). Two loss themes reported more frequently by HRF participants were *Loss of Sport Relationships* (HRF = 35%, LRF = 15%) and *Loss of Identity* (HRF = 24%, LRF = 0%). In conclusion, the findings support previous literature that athletes report several losses and difficulties post-retirement (Alfermann et al., 2004). Results are discussed in terms of recommendations for practitioners and suggestions for future research.

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Literature Review

Transitioning out of sport can be a challenge for some competitive athletes. For example, some athletes with high athletic identity experience psychological difficulties in post-athletic career adjustments and organizing their life after sport participation (Erpič et al., 2004). Spiritual well-being appears to be associated with coping; specifically, individuals with a greater spiritual well-being are more likely to cope positively to adverse situations and to have a healthier psychological profile (Hammermeister & Peterson, 2001; Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008). An athlete's spiritual behaviors, such as prayer, are factors that may influence the transition process. However, religiosity is a variable that has not often been investigated within sport transition literature.

The purpose of this review is to examine and describe research on athletic identity, religiosity, and transitioning out of sport. Initially, theories related to general identity and athletic identity will be defined and described from an elite/professional athlete perspective and a student-athlete perspective (i.e., intercollegiate athletes). Further, the review will outline terms, such as, religion and spirituality, and describe past research conducted on the relationship between religiosity/spirituality and athletic identity. In addition, literature related to religiosity and sport will be examined. Specifically, describing the research on religious/spiritual well-being in athletic populations, religiosity and coping capability, and prayer in sport. Moreover, the review will outline terminology and theories related to retirement, as well as studies on retirement from military positions, transitioning out of sport (retiring) for elite and intercollegiate athletes, and the one study that explored religious/spiritual athletes' experiences of transitioning out of sport. Lastly, this review will identify a need for more research on religiosity and coping with transition out of sport for former intercollegiate athletes.

Identity Terminology and Theoretical Framework

An individual's self-concept can include a variety of identity concepts (Nasco & Webb, 2006). Identity can be defined as "the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular roles" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226). Burke (1991) described identity as one's concept of who one is, in regard to a social role or social situation. Most individuals have a particular identity they prioritize or value; for some, it may be their athletic/academic identity; for others it may be their spiritual identity. At times, identity may change based on the social situation. The theoretical construct of identity is complex; thus, researchers have developed theories to explain how individuals create and incorporate their identity in a variety of scenarios. Although there are a vast number of theories related to identity, this review will include the most frequently employed theories when studying individuals' psychological experiences, which include: identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), and the identity control system (Burke, 1991).

First, identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) helps to explain the role identity has on self-categorization through the process of identification (as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000). Social identity is defined as an individual's understanding of belonging to a particular group or social category (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). As the basis of identity theory, identity is described as the meanings and expectations an individual has as an occupant of a particular social role (Stets & Burke, 2000). Understanding the meanings and expectations an individual has established in a role can provide researchers with an understanding of an individuals' identity. For example, if an individual values the sport they play, that might be a basis for the way the person identifies. These self-views are flexible meaning that, "it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories" (Stets & Burke,

2000, p. 224). Thus, if an athlete identifies as an athlete, they have the ability to modify that identity based on other social identifications. Specifically, the individual may classify themselves as an athlete when participating in sport but may identify as a student within an academic setting.

In their identity theory, McCall and Simmons (1978) also theorized that a negotiation process may occur, at various points in an individual's life (as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000). Specifically, they stated that relationships and roles can be related, but also set apart depending on the situation and the individuals involved. For example, an individual in a group may not view themselves as similar to peers in that group because of differing interests or obligations. In addition, these roles may be in opposition and individuals' interests may be competing with others, so the proper role (identity) can be achieved through the negotiating process (as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000). For instance, an individual on a sport team may not identify as an athlete, but their teammates might, which could lead to a negotiating process for that particular individual (i.e., the thought, "if my teammates identify as athletes then I am probably an athlete too"). Moreover, the previously mentioned individual may have other identities they choose, such as their religious identity. Yet if they continue to participate in sport, athlete identification may increase over time. McCall and Simmons (1978) proposed the concept of *prominence* as a possible contributor to an individual's choice to prioritize their identifications. They described prominence as a type of internal hierarchy, where individuals weigh the importance of their identities based on their values and tend to identify with the identity that is the most important to them. *Self-verification* is another component of identity theory, which is proposed to occur when other people begin to see an individuals' identity as the individual sees it (Stets & Serpe, 2013). The self-verification process will be discussed in more detail with the feedback control system later in the review (Burke, 1991). Overall, identity theory provides insight into how people

identify themselves, and identity theory describes a few of the factors that may contribute to how they choose to identify in a particular scenario.

The descriptions of self-identification within social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) are somewhat comparable to identity theory (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Social identity is defined as a portion of an individual's self-concept or identification that may occur due to their emotional attachment or membership to a particular social group (or groups; Tajfel, 1974). Moreover, the researchers who have tested social identity theory tried to explain how individuals identify socially, rather than just relying on their personal identities (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). *Social categorization* is an important concept relevant to this particular theory, which is defined as a process where individuals can be designated into a group (or groups; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Furthermore, researchers use information about social categorization to predict behavior; specifically, if individuals are categorized in a particular group, the theory indicates that they begin to be identified similarly to the group as a whole (i.e., similar characteristics and traits the group embodies). Afterwards, some individuals may lose or neglect some of their individual traits in order to become similar to their group (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). On the other hand, *social comparison* may provide an opportunity for people to determine whether they want to be a part of a group based on that group's characteristics (i.e., attitudes and behaviors; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Social comparison differs from social categorization, in that social comparison relates to how groups may define or describe themselves in order to distinguish themselves from other groups, whereas social categorization is a way in which individuals identify with a particular group (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). In social identity theory, the self is also described as reflexive and individuals are proposed to categorize themselves based on social situations or classifications (Turner et al., 1987).

Differing from identity theory, researchers of social identity theory postulate that individuals feel connected to a group or feel similar to other members of a group, through a social comparison process (Turner et al., 1987). For instance, individuals who act similarly to other members of the group are described in the theory as being the *in-group*, whereas individuals with differing beliefs are referred to as the *out-group* within social identity theory (Turner et al., 1987). Individuals that identify with a certain social group derive that identity as a large part of themselves (Stets & Burke, 2000). Similarly, an individual who plays basketball may begin to identify more as a basketball player if their teammates place a large part of their identity into their basketball participation.

To continue, another component of social identity theory is *social identification*, which is the idea that an individual may be included into some social groups yet be excluded from other social groups (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Social identification also may include a cognitive awareness and an emotional significance that possibly help in including oneself in a group, and the significance that membership has for that individual (Tajfel, 1974). According to social identity theory, individuals may undergo *depersonalization*, meaning individuals begin to become known as part of their social category (group) rather than maintaining their own unique personal identity (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Social identification and depersonalization may help to explain how individuals self-identify, self-categorize, and determine which groups to identify with.

Identity is complex, but social identity theory attempts to explain how individuals may manage their identity. First, *individual mobility* is a concept within social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) where individuals are described as having the opportunity to escape or leave a group, in order to seek another group to identify with (Tajfel, 1975). Ellemers and Haslam (2012)

described individual mobility by using a migrant worker as an example. In their example, a second-generation immigrant migrant worker may want to escape their old identification and pursue an education in order for them to be identified in a higher regard. Although this escape may help that particular individual change the way they are viewed by society that does not necessarily change their former group's standing (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). *Social creativity* is another possible way individuals can manage their identity. In particular, social creativity is, "a process whereby group members seek to redefine the intergroup comparison and by representing the in-group in terms of positive rather than negative characteristics" (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012, p. 383). The social creativity process does not necessarily change the status quo of the group, but rather it may help individuals cope with their identity or status in society. Lastly, *social competition* is when individuals utilize conflict as a way to address or modify their status quo (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). For example, jocks or athletes may be stereotyped as having lesser academic abilities; thus, an example of social competition would be if some football players try to change that representation by working hard in the classroom to get good grades. These previous theories give a brief picture of identity from two perspectives which are further explained by Burke (1991) in the identity control system.

Burke (1991) attempted to expand upon identity theory and social identity theory by proposing the identity control system with four components, which create a loop to explain what may influence one's identity, including: a) a standard, b) an input, c) a process that compares the input, and d) an output. As mentioned previously, there appears to be self-verification involved in this identity control system (Stets & Serpe, 2013). A s*tandard* or setting, is the perceived self-meaning an individual encompasses based on their identity or values. An individuals' standard influences their input or appraisal of the environment or situation. Furthermore, the *input*

describes how an individual perceives their environment by considering their self-meanings regarding the situation. For example, if an individual tends to be highly stressed (standard) they may appraise (input) an academic exam as a highly stressful situation, whereas individuals who tend to experience low levels of stress may not interpret that same exam as stressful. Next, when an individual analyzes their standard (set of self-meanings) to their input (appraisal) of the situation, it then leads to an output, which is defined as an individual's chosen behavior in regard to their standard and input. If an individual finds self-meaning within sport, they may be likely to base their success on their athletic performance. According to the theory, there are more positive psychological outcomes when there is congruence between the environmental inputs and an individuals' internal standards (Burke, 1991). The concept of an identity feedback loop is a way to explain how an individual establishes an identity and uses their own standard or beliefs as a basis for appraising and reacting to certain situations and circumstances. The identity feedback loop may be beneficial when attempting to understand the process an athlete may go through when determining their identity or identities and how their identity influences their choices in various situations.

In summary, there are several theories that define identity and its development. Identity is important because it may influence one's self-esteem and self-worth (Ellison, 1993; Stets & Serpe, 2013). In particular, according to social identity theory, individuals may behave in order to enhance their own self-evaluation as members of the group, which in turn could enhance their self-esteem (Turner et al., 1987). Self-worth can also be influenced by the group, not just by simply being a part of the group but rather by being accepted by the other members of the group as a member (Ellison, 1993). These examples appear to demonstrate that when individuals feel as if they are members of a group and are welcomed in, their own self-esteem and self-worth

increases. According to identity theory, if an identity for an individual is verified, positive

emotions tend to follow (Stets & Serpe, 2013). In addition, self-esteem and self-efficacy are also

influenced by an individual verifying their identity, which tends to occur when they are

performing that role well (Burke & Stets, 1999). All in all, Burke (1991) describes in their

identity control system that the individual establishes their own identity and uses their own

standard or beliefs as a basis for appraising and reacting to certain situations and circumstances.

Whereas, identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) describes the identification process for

individuals and the negotiating process some individuals utilize in certain social situations.

Lastly, according to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), the self is described as reflexive and

that individuals categorize themselves based on the groups they identify with. Given the

similarities, Stets and Burke (2000) argue that social identity theory and identity theory can be

combined. Previous researchers described three particular areas to link the two theories together,

given the similarities in their concepts, which included: 1) the theories definition of identity

(roles vs. categories; identity theory vs. social identity theory), 2) how identity is activated, and

3) the processes that may occur once identity is potentially activated (Stets & Burke, 2000).

These similarities make it reasonable to combine the theories. Taken together, these theories

provide the theoretical framework for understanding identity from a general perspective.

Individuals may have multiple identities, such as a religious student-athlete, who has (at least)

three core identities (i.e., student, athlete, and religion); however, an individual may identify with

one identity more than another identity or utilize all three depending on the situation.

      Athletic identity. Identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978), social identity theory

(Tajfel, 1974), and the identity control system (Burke, 1991) have informed sport-specific

investigations and theoretical constructs that are specific to the athlete experience. Athletic

identity has been defined as the "degree to which an individual identifies with their athletic role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). Athletes identify with their sport to varying degrees (Brewer et al., 1993). Some may regard their athletic identity as their main identity based on their competence, where others commit minimally to their athletic identity and focus in on other aspects of their life (Brewer et al., 1993).

Researchers expanded the construct of athletic identity to include a private and public dimension. Specifically, Nasco and Webb (2006) described the private dimension of athletic identity as the manifestation of an individual's self-perception based upon their beliefs or values (i.e., the individual values their athletic identity and includes that in their own self-concept). Whereas, the public dimension is described as how others perceive an individuals' identity (Nasco & Webb, 2006). An example of these dimensions could include an athlete who avoids expressing their political or spiritual beliefs (private dimension) because of their participation in sport, due to concerns of having conflicting views from their fans or a desire to fit in with everyone else on the team. An athlete may put more importance on their athletic persona and begin to restructure their other identities to match their athletic identity. Conversely, an athlete who enjoys being regarded as an athlete by the public, may participate in sport because of the attention it brings (Nasco & Webb, 2006). Since athletes tend to be in the spotlight when they perform, differentiating between athletes who choose the public and private dimension is an important indicator of the value they may place on their athletic identity or other aspects of their life. Athlete identification can play a role in various aspects of an individual's life. Although athletes identify with their sport to varying degrees, it is important to examine the relationship that higher athletic identity has on a variety of psychological outcomes, as athletic identity appears to predict athletes' behaviors or scores on other psychological constructs (Grove et al.,

1997; Giannone et al., 2017). Overall, the public and private dimensions are theoretical concepts that are used to explain the ways in which athletes choose to display their identity to others (Nasco & Webb, 2006).

Athletic identity has been studied within athletes of various competition levels. For instance, Williams and Wiechman (1997) examined 389 high school athletes' (males 168, females 128) athletic identity in relation to ethnicity, gender, year in school, competition level, and athletic experience. Their participants (49% European-American, 21% Mexican-American, 10% African-American) most commonly competed in basketball ($n = 278$) and soccer ($n = 108$). The researchers utilized the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer et al., 1993), which examines the strength of athletic identity. Williams and Wiechman (1997) found that athletic identity increased as the participants' competitive level increased; specifically, individuals participating in varsity sports had a higher athletic identity than those on the freshman team. Male athletes had a stronger or higher athletic identity than females, and Mexican-Americans had a higher athletic identity than European-Americans and African-Americans. Yet, European-Americans had a higher athletic identity than African-Americans did. It is noteworthy that individuals who expected to play beyond high school and into college had stronger athletic identity than individuals who did not expect to play collegiately (Williams & Wiechman, 1997). In another study on athletic identity, Gill et al. (2013) examined gender differences within former intercollegiate athletes and non-athletes. The researchers studied two athlete samples, one group of 56 former intercollegiate student-athletes from a Division I institution as well as intercollegiate student-athletes ($n = 18$) and non-athlete alumni from a Division III university ($n = 31$). The majority of the participants were female ($n = 68$), and the remainder were male ($n = 37$). The researchers utilized the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale among other surveys (AIMS;

Brewer et al., 1993). The researchers found that Division I and Division III male athletes and

male non-athletes had higher athlete identification than females in each respective classification.

Division I and Division III athletes both identified as having stronger athletic identities than non-

athletes in the study. However, athletic identity scores between Division I and Division III

athletes were not statistically significantly different. Similarly, Kissinger et al. (2011) studied

athletic identity in 338 community college student-athletes (46.3% European-American, 36.8%

African-American) from 25 different universities across the United States. The results indicated

out of the three sports included that baseball players had the lowest athletic identity, football

players had the second-highest athletic identity, and basketball players had the highest athletic

identity as measured by the AIMS. Lastly, African-American basketball players had the highest

athlete identification out of all the student-athletes in the study. These studies had a few

limitations, which included a limited number of sports represented (Williams & Wiechman,

1997) and two of the studies were both in the same geographical location (Gill et al., 2013;

Williams & Wiechman, 1997). Based on the aforementioned studies, male athletes and non-

athletes have higher athletic identity than female athletes (Gill et al., 2013; Williams &

Wiechman, 1997). In addition, basketball players at the community college level had the highest

athletic identity and African-American basketball players had the highest identification out of all

of the sports included (Kissinger et al., 2011). A common limitation from these studies was that

effect sizes were not reported (e.g., Gill et al., 2013). Finally, survey studies are limited, in terms

of the depth survey studies cover from the athlete's perspective, thus qualitative studies could

provide more in-depth, rich data (Gill et al., 2013; Williams & Wiechman, 1997).

Researchers have also examined the athletic identity of athletes who compete outside of

the college structure. For example, Horton and Mack (2000) studied 236 marathon runners (176

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males, 60 females) with a mean age around 40 years old who were running consistently for an average of 11.2 years. Results from the participants' responses on several surveys, including the AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993), demonstrated that individuals with higher athlete identification rated their athlete role as more important than individuals scoring lower on athletic identity. On the other hand, there was no evidence that marathon runners with higher athletic identity were neglecting other portions of their life (e.g., family and work). Higher athletic identity scores were correlated with more social isolation, less social activity, and less time spent with family or non-running friends. Lastly, higher levels of athletic identity were associated with a greater overall commitment to running and greater enjoyment of running. The results of this study suggest that if individuals have higher athletic identity they may isolate from non-running friends, which may make it difficult to transition out of sport with limited social support.

Overall, these studies reveal relationships between athletic identity and a variety of demographic factors and sports. In conclusion, it appears that athletic identity varies depending on the athlete's sport and gender. Although athletic identity may be important for some individuals, other individuals may gravitate towards other identities. For instance, some athletes may seek a higher power during their sport and their religiosity may be their primary identity.

Religion: Background Terminology and Theoretical Concepts

Religion and spirituality are often sources of meaning, purpose, or identification for individuals (Balague, 1999). Yet, religion and spirituality are hard to define, thus previous researchers have debated the definitions of religion and spirituality for quite some time (e.g., Mosley et al., 2015). Scholars and researchers have defined the terms in a variety of ways and often use spirituality and religion interchangeably (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Mosley et al., 2015; Saroglou, 2011). For this study, the terms will be defined as follows. Religion is defined

as, "a system of beliefs in divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals directed toward such a power" (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975, p. 1). In addition, religion commonly includes traditional behaviors, such as attending church and worship services, reading the sacred books within that religion, and following the rules of that particular religion. Religion can also be described as organizational and with a set structure (Storch et al., 2001). For example, most religious organizations have standards or guidelines when making moral decisions. Spirituality, on the other hand, is typically defined in a broader sense than religion. For example, Dillon and Trait (2000) defined spirituality as, "experiencing the presence of a power, a force, an energy, or a God close to you" (p. 91). Yet, Hawks et al. (1995) defined spirituality as connecting with others to find purpose in life and having a relationship with a God or higher power. Hyman and Handal (2006) described spirituality as an internal, subjective, and divine experience. There are many more definitions of spirituality in the literature, but for the purposes of the current study, spirituality will be defined using Hawks and colleagues (1995) definition, since it provides a concise definition. Further, spirituality encompasses feelings of the supernatural rather than behaviors such as attending church services (Hawks et al., 1995).

For the purposes of this review and current study, the focus within religion and spirituality will be on Christianity. PEW Research (2014) reported that around 70% of the United States population identified as Christian. This statistic demonstrates that there are other religious organizations in the United States, and thus many athletes who identify with different religious outside of Christianity. However, this review will only cover literature on Christian athletes given that the target population for the current study is Christian athletes, in order to compare to past studies in sport psychology, which include athletes who are predominantly Christian.

One model that explains the complexity of religious structure for all religions was established by Saroglou (2011) who described four distinct dimensions of religion which include: a) believing, b) bonding, c) behaving, and d) belonging. According to Saroglou (2011), these four dimensions can be applied to all religions. The first dimension, *believing* is one of the fundamental components of religion, which is a relative belief or connection to an external transcendence. Believing also encompasses the meaning-making process for world views, and the way individuals find meaning in their lives. The second dimension, *bonding* includes the emotional dimension of religion, specifically incorporating self-transcendent experiences that combine what the individual perceives to be connecting with others and the transcendent. Additionally, individuals in the bonding dimension, use private prayer as a way to connect with their religious deity/deities, and they use worship and pilgrimages as a public display of their religious commitment. The third dimension, *behaving* includes the morality of religion, such as individuals trying to follow the moral guidelines (rights and wrongs) that their religion institutes. Societal and religious moralities differ for individuals and tend to be independent of each other. Specifically, one individual may perceive a world matter differently than another member of their same church. The fourth dimension, *belonging* involves feeling related to other groups or community members. The purpose of belonging is to help religious individuals build a unique community to help them grow in their own spiritual life (Saroglou, 2011). These four dimensions help to explain diverse aspects that are incorporated into religious practice but could vary from individual to individual. Although there is certainly a vast array of complicated understandings, definitions, and theories of religion and its role in people's lives than simply these four dimensions, the model helps to illustrate some of the main facets of religion.

Religiosity and spirituality in athletic populations. Religiosity has been examined with athletic populations in comparison to non-athlete peers. For example, the strength of religious faith was studied by Storch et al. (2004a) in 226 undergraduate students (57 athletes; 26% female, 74% male; M_{age} for athletes 20 years, M_{age} for non-athletes 20.3 years). Participants were mainly European American (75%), African-American (8%), and Hispanic (11%). The researchers utilized the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire-Short Form (Plante et al., 2002), which measures strength of religious faith. Athletes reported a greater strength of religious faith than non-athletes (Storch et al., 2004a). Another study by Storch and colleagues (2001) examined the intrinsic aspects of religion for college student-athletes and non-athletes. For this study, 248 undergraduate students (61.7% female, 67.3% Caucasian) from a university in Florida participated. The Duke Religion Index (Koenig et al., 1997) was utilized by the researchers to examine religiosity of the participants. Intrinsic religiousness is defined as the integration of an individuals' religiousness to their life (Koenig et al., 1997). Participants' responses on the Duke Religion Index demonstrated that athletes reported higher levels of organizational and intrinsic religiousness than non-athletes. On the other hand, male non-athletes reported lower non-organizational, intrinsic religiousness, and organizational religiosity than female and male athletes as well as female non-athletes. Also, both male and female athletes attended more religious services than male non-athletes (Storch et al., 2001). Both studies had similar limitations, including that participants were from a Division I university in the south and were predominantly White (Storch et al., 2001; Storch et al., 2004a). However, based on the findings of the previous studies, it seems that athletes attend more religious services than male non-athletes (Storch et al., 2001), and it appears that athletes have greater religious faith than non-athletes (Storch et al., 2004a), but the researchers did not report any effect sizes. Overall,

these researchers provided insight into the relationship between religiosity and college athletes compared to their non-athlete peers. More studies, however, are needed on samples that include athletes from various regions of the country and include more division levels (i.e., NAIA, Division II, NJCAA).

Another component that researchers are interested in is an individuals' well-being, specifically within spirituality and religion. Spiritual or religious well-being was defined by Buford et al. (1991) as an individual's perception of their religious life in terms of quality, which can be either high or low. Researchers have described religious well-being for intercollegiate student-athletes by incorporating a model that discusses domains that relate to facets of their daily life (Seitz et al., 2014). These domains for an athlete include their athletic, academic, and social life, which all play a role in a student-athlete's religious life (Seitz et al., 2014). Athletic influences on the individual can include relationships with teammates, coaches, opponents, and the importance of winning as a college athlete. In regard to academic influences for the individual, these may include professors, classmates, and tutors. Lastly, an athlete's social life may influence their religious life such as, the importance an athlete puts on their social status, expectations others have of them (i.e., attending parties), and the churches/religious organizations they are a part of (Seitz et al., 2014). All of these factors can possibly influence an athlete's religious life. For example, if an athlete has teammates that are also religious this may persuade them to join religious organizations. Although these influences (e.g., athletic, academic, and social life) may not be true for every religious athlete, their academic, social, and athletic life can play a part in their religious life.

Researchers have examined spiritual well-being in a variety of populations. Specifically, Hammermeister and Peterson (2001) examined health-related characteristics and spiritual well-

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being by using surveys with 462 college students (181 males, 281 females, M_{age} 22.3 years, 83.8% White) who attended two separate colleges in the Pacific Northwest. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS; Ellison & Smith, 1991) and a few other scales were administered by the researchers. The researchers found that spiritual well-being was positively correlated with health factors (i.e., high spiritual well-being decreased the likelihood of marijuana use and alcohol abuse). Moreover, participants who scored higher on the spiritual well-being scale were more likely to have healthier psychosocial profiles than individuals who scored lower on spiritual well-being. Loneliness and self-esteem best positively predicted spiritual well-being, meaning that high scores on loneliness and self-esteem predicted low spiritual well-being, and hopelessness also contributed with a two percent variance. Individuals who had a stronger spiritual well-being scored lower on loneliness, self-esteem, and hopelessness than individuals who had a lower spiritual well-being score (Hammermeister & Peterson, 2001). Taken together, it appears that spirituality could potentially be helpful for decreasing the likelihood of abusing alcohol and using other substances.

Religious Identity and Athletic Identity

Thus far, the review has included the definitions of religion and spirituality and the theoretical explanations of identity. This section outlines the work of past researchers who merged these two components together to further understand the relationship between religiosity and identity in athletics. Specifically, in college athletics there is a trend of student-athletes speaking out about their religious beliefs or faith on social media (Seitz et al., 2014). These examples demonstrate that more athletes may be willing to share their religious beliefs, which may mean that their religious faith is core to their identity.

Prayer and sport. The topic of prayer has been studied in sport psychology literature, both to understand athletes' (Czech & Bullet, 2007; Czech et al., 2004) and coaches' use of prayer (Egli et al., 2014), as well as to examine the relationship between prayer and team cohesion (Murray et al., 2005).

Prayer has been examined in sport from the perspective of athletes. Czech and Bullet (2007) examined 19 Division II Christian athletes (9 men, 10 women, M_{age} 19.6 years), at a mid-western institution. Eight of the participants identified as non-denominational (i.e., not identifying in a particular Christian denomination), four as Catholic, two as Lutheran, two as Mormon, as well as one Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist. Participants completed surveys that examined prayer, spiritual beliefs, and the researchers observed the participants' prayer meetings. Participants' survey scores demonstrated that they perceived that prayer helped them trust and relax during stressful times. Based on the prayer observation, an overwhelming majority of the athletes (17 out of 19) prayed for safety, to play to the best of their ability, and to give glory to a higher being after success rather than praying to win. Lastly, 16 out of the 19 athletes thought that competitiveness and playing hard or aggressive is part of playing sport and that their religious beliefs did not impact their ability to perform in that manner. Based on the findings, it appears that athletes utilize prayer as a coping mechanism during stressful times. In a similar investigation of athletes' use of prayer, Czech and colleagues (2004) used open-ended interviews with nine Division I intercollegiate athletes (4 females, 5 males) from a variety of sports who all were White and Christian. From the interviews the researcher identified four themes which included: performance-related prayers, prayer routine, thankfulness, and acceptance of God's will. Prayer was described as a performance enhancer, meaning athletes saw prayer as a way to decrease anxiety and promote strength in order for them to play their best.

Participants also thanked God for the opportunity to play sport. The final theme was acceptance of God's will; most of the athletes thought that the outcome of games and their ability was under the influence of what God intended (Czech et al., 2004). Taken together, prayer appears to be used by Christian athletes as a way to honor God and give God glory in sport rather than praying for wins. Also, using prayer helped participants to cope with stressful situations. There were similar limitations found in both of these studies. One common limitation was that participants either attended a faith-based institution (Czech & Bullet, 2007) or were from the Mid-west, which is often considered the Bible belt of the United States (Czech et al., 2004). Another common limitation was that in both studies, athletes participated on championship or nationally ranked teams; it could be easier for individuals to trust in God when their team is performing well. Therefore, it is important to study the topic of prayer in athletes who have varied levels of competitive success.

Team cohesion is another factor that may or may not be influenced by religious behaviors, such as prayer. Thus, Murray and colleagues (2005) studied 92 Division I female softball players (87.6% European American; 89.9% Catholic/Protestant, 1.1% Jewish) from multiple Southeastern universities (6 teams, 3 state schools, 3 private schools) in the United States. Participants completed surveys that assessed team cohesion and prayer. Participants indicated high levels of team cohesion for all teams, and all but one of the teams utilized prayer. Team prayer was completed frequently prior to competition (71.8%), less consistently after competition (43.6%), and 55.2% reported praying before practices. A majority of the athletes stated that team prayer was a beneficial way to bring the team together. Additionally, Egli and colleagues (2014), used interviews to understand the prayer experiences of six Division I head coaches (3 males, 3 females; 5 European-American and 1 African-American) of women's teams

who identified as Christians. One key theme from participants' interviews was that prayer was used by the participants with the team to create unity with players, mainly because the coaches believed that prayer was a way to bond individuals on the team together (Egli et al., 2014).

An important finding from these studies is that prayer was utilized as a way to decrease anxiety, to trust and to relax during stressful situations. Prayer also appears to be an important aspect of some athletes' pre-performance routines (Czech & Bullet, 2007), coping with athletic situations (Czech et al., 2004), and increasing cohesion on a sports team (Murray et al., 2005). Within a team setting, prayer was included frequently prior to competition and coaches stated that prayer was a way to unify the team (Egli et al., 2014; Murray et al., 2005). Prayer has not been studied in relation to transitioning out of sport, thus it may be important to investigate whether or not prayer is used by former athletes to cope with sport retirement. If prayer is used, studies are needed to understand athletes' perceptions of the utility or effectiveness of using prayer during transition. Retirement is a large stressor for some individuals, so there may be similar findings in that context, but it remains largely unknown at this time what role prayer and religion play in athletes' transition out of competitive sport.

Qualitative investigations of religiosity and athletic identity. Occupying both the athlete role/identity and the Christian role/identity can be complicated. One concern coaches have reported is that Christian athletes may not take the pursuit of athletic excellence seriously and that sport success is not the number one priority in their life (Stevenson, 1991). Although athletic identity and religious identity may differ, there appeared to be an increase in the number of Christian athletes professing their faith while participating in sport (Stevenson, 1991).

Considering an individual with both an athletic identity and religious identity, Stevenson (1991) investigated the dual role of being a Christian and an athlete with 31 Evangelical

Christians (23 males and 8 females) from the western provinces of Canada who were former or current athletes at either the intercollegiate or professional level. The researcher conducted interviews in order to create theoretical concepts to explain athletic and religious identities. According to Stevenson (1991), based on participants' responses, three identities for Christian athletes were found: 1) segregated type, 2) selective type, and the 3) committed type. The first role identity is the *segregated type*, a few athletes identified that they need to compartmentalize their two roles (i.e., athletic and religious identity) as distinct and separate, mainly because they did not know how to integrate sport and religion. The *selective type* was the most common for participants. According to Stevenson (1991), individuals who are in the selective role still incorporate religion into sport but tend to neglect their Christian role in important ways within sport. Four specific ways athletes utilized these selective limits were as a crutch (using Christianity during emotional times in sport), obeying the rules of the game, playing the game with the right attitude, and using their "mandate to witness" (using sport as a way to showcase Christ to others; Stevenson, 1991, p. 368). Lastly, Stevenson (1991) described the *committed type*, which was only represented by a few of the participants, and they believed that their faith was superior to all other activities in their life and should be a prominent component of who they are in sport (Stevenson, 1991). The previous findings from the researcher demonstrated that athletes may have two identities, a religious identity and an athletic identity when participating in sport. Yet, the findings also show that athletes, even if they are participating in a Christian organization, still may not incorporate their religious identity into their sporting world. A limitation of the study was that individuals were professional and intercollege athletes. These groups have different athletic identifications, time demands and experiences, and an additional identity for intercollegiate student athletes (e.g., academic identity. Thus, it may be beneficial to

focus on one group to be able to make generalizations about that particular group. Also, this study was conducted in Canada, which does not include other countries where there may be cultural differences found.

Another component that can be discussed with religion is religious well-being. Seitz and colleagues (2014) examined seven Christian student-athletes' (four males, three females) religious well-being. These participants (ages 24-27) were from a major Division I secular institution in the south and the majority of the individuals won at least one conference championship and five of the individuals won an NCAA championship. Semi-structured interviews were completed that took approximately 75 minutes. A majority of the participants reported that they struggled at maintaining their religious well-being during college, and a few of the participants felt that their religious well-being thrived during the middle of life trials. On the other hand, some of the participants identified their faith as growing stronger during college. When interacting with non-religious teammates, four of the participants indicated that it helped them grow stronger in their faith because their beliefs were challenged by others. Regarding academics, no major effect was identified by the participants from their professors, tutors or classmates on their religious well-being. Most of the student-athletes thought they were well-known by other students because of their athletic identity. In regard to athletic outcomes, some of the participants felt a freedom from pressure. Additionally, five of the participants identified as having a strong work ethic and two participants stated that their religious well-being affected their ability to better cope with injury. According to participants' interview responses, secular campuses had a negative effect on religious well-being of intercollegiate student-athletes, thus weakening their faith while in college (Seitz et al., 2014). Based on the previous finding, Christian athletes who attended a secular university were more likely to have a lower perceived

religious well-being, which may be due to a lack of religious resources or insufficient ways to pursue religious identity while attending a university. Since there is minimal research on religious athletes, coaches and Certified Mental Performance Consultants (CMPCs) may need more information on how to support religious athletes.

Investigating the experiences of athletes who identify as religious can be beneficial for understanding their purpose, values, and possible interpretation of why they participate in sport. Thus, Mosley and colleagues (2015) examined five practicing Christian athletes' experiences (four identified as African American and one identified as black and from the Bahamas) of integrating sport participation with their faith. At the time of the study, all participants were competing across various sports including track and field, football, and basketball either at the Olympic level, semi-professional or intercollegiate level, and ages of participants ranged from 21 to 26 years old. Similar to the previous studies on prayer (Czech et al., 2004; Czech & Bullet, 2007), playing for God was a prominent theme in the interviews of all participants in this study, specifically that their athletic ability was a gift from God and their opportunity to participate in sport was also seen as gift from God (Mosley et al., 2015). Individuals who have these beliefs are considered to be the committed type of Christian athlete (Stevenson, 1991). Some of the athletes stated that representing God well included hard work, having faith, and staying humble in order to use their sport as a platform to recognize God. Moreover, two of the participants identified meaningfulness in regard to pain, suffering, and sacrifice, meaning that they saw these trials as an opportunity God provided them (Mosley et al., 2015).

Overall, athletes who incorporate their religious faith into their sport appear to find meaningfulness in pain and suffering, which would be considered as the committed type (Mosley et al., 2015; Stevenson, 1991). If athletes utilize their faith as a way to cope, it could be

beneficial when they experience an adverse situation in sport and could possibly help with their

sport. Yet, there are few studies that have examined how religion can help individuals cope.

Religious athletes and coping. Religiosity may have an impact on one's ability to cope

with adverse situations. This section describes research on religion or spirituality and coping in

athletic populations.

Perera and Frazier (2013) examined the experiences of religious and spiritual individuals

with life adversity through multiple questionnaires. Within this study, undergraduate psychology

students (85% women, 77% European-American; 77% in the potentially traumatic event group

[PTE], 82% in the non-potentially traumatic event group [no-PTE]) who attended four different

universities completed surveys at two different times (T1 = 1528 participants; T2 two months

later = 1281 participants). The researchers found that there were no significant differences in

spirituality or religiosity between T1 and T2 but there was a small decrease in religiosity in the

no-PTE group. Lastly, an increase in religious commitment and positive or negative spiritual

change was associated with increases in distress for the PTE group (Perera & Frazier, 2013).

There were a few limitations from the study including a sample that was not very religious and

the traumas may not have been severe enough to require coping mechanisms.

To understand the relationship between spirituality and coping, Ridnour and

Hammermeister (2008) conducted a study on athletes (68% female, 32% male, M_{age} 19.9 years)

who attended a Division I university and played a variety of varsity sports including track,

tennis, soccer, volleyball, football, and basketball. A Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS; Ellison,

1983) and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28; Smith et al., 1995) were utilized by

the researchers. Individuals who scored high on the SWBS were more likely to score high on the

subscales of ACSI-28, which may mean that individuals with higher spiritual well-being may

have a better ability to cope with athletic stressors or vice-versa, those who cope well may have the capacity to be spiritual. In addition, the variables influenced by stronger spirituality were coping with adversity, freedom from worry, goal setting/mental preparation, and confidence achievement motivation. There was a difference between the low-spiritual group and the high-spiritual group on these four aspects. Individuals with a stronger spiritual identity had healthier psychological profiles than individuals who were not as spiritual, which may enhance their ability to battle through challenging situations in sport (Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008).

In a qualitative study on religiosity and coping, Ronkainen and colleagues (2019) studied how two athletes integrated their religious identity with their athletic identity, how these identities coexisted, and how their life story had shaped their overall identity. The researchers conducted a life story interview with participants in order to provide a holistic approach that allows the individual to provide insight into their perceptions of events rather than the researchers'. The first participant, Vincent was a 36-year-old former professional ice hockey player, who identified as Catholic and is a French Canadian. The second participant, Lucas was a 34-year-old distance runner who identified as a Protestant Christian and is from a Nordic country. According to their interviews, neither of the participants described God as providing them with the opportunity or talent to play their respective sport and both individuals felt that sport should be separate from their religious identities (i.e., selective commitment; Stevenson, 1991). Vincent stated that the values associated with religion (i.e., humility, justice, and being a good person) are contradictory to the nature of elite sport (Ronkainen et al., 2019). While journeying through life transitions, each participant tended to distance themselves from religion, due to teammates being non-religious or not having the opportunity to attend church on Sunday's because of games. Lastly, they were committed to their values outside of sport and both believed

that God does care about how they conduct themselves within sport as well (Ronkainen et al., 2019). The study provides insight into the influence religiosity has on Christian athletes during sport. These findings also may help explain the importance cultural differences have on how frequently religiosity is incorporated within athletics. Specifically, most churches have different theological backgrounds depending upon the country and traditions of specific cultures (Ronkainen et al., 2019) and these athletes were from different Christian denominations. However, one limitation was that interviews were conducted from a broad story perspective rather than specifically asking each individual to focus on the role religion has had on their life transitions, such as coping in sport. Lastly, since there were only two participants, and both were Christian men, it makes it difficult to draw generalizations from this study to broader groups of athletes.

The previous studies had a few limitations. One of the previous studies utilized a cross-sectional design which does not allow for directions or inferences to be made (Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008). Another limitation is that one sample was not very religious (Perera & Frazier, 2013) and that many of the studies lack religious diversity and tend to use Christian athletes (Ronkainen et al., 2019). Another limitation is that some of the researchers utilized a broad story approach, which may be challenging for the participants to remember exactly how they were feeling during those time periods (Ronkainen et al., 2019). Perera and Frazier (2013) indicated that religious commitment may be utilized as a coping strategy for handling adverse situations. Individuals that have a stronger religious identity may possibly cope efficiently and adequately when challenging athletic situations unfold. The researchers from one study suggested as a conclusion that interventions could focus on spirituality rather than religious involvement for handling adverse situations, such as connecting with others, finding purpose in

their life, and building their own personal relationship with a higher deity, instead of just participating in traditional religious practices (Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008). These studies are useful but there is a lack of research on how religious athletes cope with a major life stressor like retirement from competitive sport. The next part of the review will include theories related to retirement and other research on athletic retirement for non-religious and religious athletes.

Theoretical Explanations of Retirement

Change and transitions are different for many individuals. Researchers have proposed theoretical models to explain personal difficulties associated with retirement. For example, Schlossberg (1981) created a model, which is not sport-specific, to analyze human adaptation to transition. Although Schlossberg's model is not a sport-specific model, it can be applied to athletes. Schlossberg (1981) stated that several factors influence adaptation to transition including: role change, affect, source, timing, onset, duration, and degree of stress. First, *role change* was described as an individual transitioning out of sport and trying to figure out their new identity without sport. *Affect* was described as positive or negative and depends on the circumstances of transition. For example, a person getting fired will experience negative affect if they enjoy their job. Next, *source* refers to whether the transition was internal (their choice) or external (due to outside factors), individuals tend to adapt quicker to internal sources rather than external sources (Schlossberg, 1981). *Timing* refers to when events happen in an individuals' life (i.e., graduating from college or getting married), and *onset* of retirement includes whether the transition was gradual or sudden. Within the theory, *duration* includes permanent, temporary, or uncertain situations; purportedly, changes that are permanent will be perceived differently than a transition that is only temporary. According to Schlossberg (1981), the degree of stress depends on the individual and their ability to cope with stressful situations. These various situational and

personal characteristics can help to explain or predict an athlete's experience of transition out of sport.

Researchers created another model that explains retirement, specifically for athletes transitioning out of sport. Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of athletic retirement consists of five steps that are involved in the athletic retirement process: 1) causes of retirement among athletes, 2) factors related to adaptation to retirement, 3) available resources for retirement adaptation, 4) quality of adaptation to retirement, and 5) interventions for athletic retirement difficulties. Causes of retirement among athletes consist of chronological age, the deselection process, injury, and free choice. According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), the primary cause for athletic retirement is age and specifically the decline in performance due to aging. Another contributor to retirement is the deselection process, which tends to happen when individuals are unable to perform at their current level, or unable to advance to the next competitive level (i.e., transition from college to the pros). Injury is also a significant cause of retirement and can lead athletes to experience an identity crisis when their career is ended due to an injury. Lastly, free choice is another important cause of retirement and to end a career on one's own terms is the most desirable of the aforementioned factors.

Another component described in the conceptual model of athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) is the factors related to adaption of retirement. First, developmental contributors play a role in the interpersonal skills and self-perceptions necessary to adapt positively to athletic retirement. An intervention that occurs earlier on in the personal and social lives of athletes can possibly contribute to the quality of adaption. According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), the most prominent influence on adaptation is self-identity or degree to which an athlete identifies based on their athletic achievements. The loss of athletic identity can be detrimental to adapting

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effectively, especially if athletic identity is the sole basis for how an individual identifies. Next, the perceptions of control can be essential when understanding the choice, the former athlete had on leaving their sport and if that was in their control. Social identity can also affect the quality of adaption from sport. For example, if an athlete has only learned to interact socially as an athlete it may narrow their context to sports only (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

There may be some available resources for athletes when they enter retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) claimed three resources can influence effective adaptation from sport, which included, coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning. Coping skills that are effective could decrease the likelihood of difficulties faced during retirement. The quality of adaptation depends on an individuals' ability to handle these changes by utilizing positive coping skills (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). After an athlete completes their career, their sources of social support may decrease as they may no longer be in contact with teammates and coaches, so investing in alternative social support groups could be beneficial for coping with retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Lastly, pre-retirement planning has been found to have the widest positive influence on the quality of retirement adaptation (Schlossberg, 1981). Some activities athletes may participate in included pre-retirement planning are continuing education, social networking opportunities, and occupational or investment endeavors (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Again, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) explained that the quality of adaptation to athletic retirement depends on coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning, and the incorporation or absence of coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning will either help the athlete enter a healthy transition or experience stress upon retiring. Emergence of negative mental health outcomes (i.e., depression and anxiety) for elite level or intercollegiate

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athletes may be due to the larger investments they put into their sports compared to individuals at lower competitive levels (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Additionally, other researchers have found that collegiate athletes suffer from depressive symptoms. For example, Wolanin et al. (2015) investigated the frequency of depressive symptoms in 465 current Division I collegiate athletes (43.1% male, 35.2% freshman, 88% White), and 23.7% of the participants reported depressive symptoms. Moderate to severe depressive symptoms was reported by 6% of the participants (Wolanin et al., 2015). Thus, it is important to recognize that a quarter of collegiate athletes may be experiencing depressive symptoms. All in all, the conceptual model of athletic retirement sheds some light on the importance of understanding some of the factors related to athletic retirement, factors related to adapting to transitions out of sport, resources to cope with retirement, the quality of adaptation, and some possible interventions for dealing with sport retirement. The next two sections will discuss research findings on the role pre-retirement planning has on adjustment and satisfaction for former military personnel and athletes. The reason to review research on military personnel is because they have several similarities to athletes, combined with the fact that pre-retirement planning has not been studied significantly in athletic populations. Specifically, they need to perform under pressure and tend to transition out of their careers at a younger age than most other individuals in other occupations, which parallels the young age at which most athlete's transition out of highly competitive sport.

     Retirement planning and career maturity: Military personnel and athletes. Military personnel often retire at earlier ages than the general public and may experience difficulties with their transition to civilian living. A few studies have examined the influence of pre-retirement planning on military personnel's adjustment.

First, Fuller and Redfering (1976) examined the impact of rank, years retired, and the degree of pre-retirement planning on retired participants' adjustment. Within this study, 226 officers and 141 enlisted personnel (all men) were recruited to fill out questionnaires that included: ten questions related to pre-retirement planning and questions on the retiree's attitude towards their transition. Results from the participants' responses indicated that officers, on average, retired at 56 years old, and the enlisted personnel retired, on average, at 49 years old. Also, there was a significant negative relationship between degree of planning and adjustment to retirement, meaning that individuals who scored higher on degree of planning (i.e., prepared for their retirement) had less difficulty adjusting to life post-retirement. Similarly, Spiegel and Schultz (2003) examined the relationship between pre-retirement planning and retirement adjustment in 672 retired naval officers (98% male). Results indicated that military officers who prepared for their retirement adequately were more satisfied and adjusted well to retirement. Also, the participants found that having knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are readily transferable to work as a civilian to be satisfying and helpful to adapting to retirement. The aforementioned studies examined the importance of pre-retirement planning on adjustment and satisfaction with retirement for former military and naval officers (Fuller & Redfering, 1976; Spiegel & Schultz, 2003). These studies revealed that pre-retirement planning can help with adjusting to civilian life (Fuller & Redfering, 1976; Spiegel & Schultz, 2003). The next section will outline elite athletic retirement and the challenges some athletes face when transitioning out of their sport.

Career planning is another important factor related to transitioning out of sport effectively (Lally & Kerr, 2005). Lally and Kerr (2005) examined the relationship between athletic identity, student role identity, and career planning on undergraduate student-athletes from a large

Canadian University (4 male, 4 female, ages 22-24) who were either in the fourth or fifth year of their education. Participants completed two retrospective interviews six months prior to graduation and one month prior to graduation. Participants' stated that their career plans were similar to their athletic role, meaning their career plans were related to their aspirations of playing at the professional level. Furthermore, participants reported that they wanted to be recognized by their athletic role and felt that their athletic goals required great investment. Many of the participants were no longer interested in pursuing a sports career after college as they reached their senior year, and they acknowledged that sports were such a large part of their identity that they did not put much emphasis into their academic performance. This study's themes suggest that within this sample, the majority of the student-athletes tend to have more mature career plans as they enter their fourth and fifth year of schooling, and as their athletic identity declines, they are able to pursue other goals outside of sport (Lally & Kerr, 2005). According to the study, since some of the participants knew they were no longer going to compete after college it appears that they switched their identity to an academic identity and placed their focus on future non-sport jobs or educational opportunities instead (Lally & Kerr, 2005). On the other hand, Murphy and Petitpas (1996) compared athletic identity, identity foreclosure, and career maturity utilizing surveys, including the AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993). The researchers found that identity foreclosure and athletic identity had an inverse relationship with career maturity, individuals with high athletic identity and high identity foreclosure were more likely to score lower on career maturity. Within the study, there were 124 intercollegiate student-athletes (99 men and 25 women) who all attended a Division I institution full-time with ages ranging from 18-24 years old. Participants competed in football (37.9%), men's and women's basketball (6.5%), and men's ice hockey (4.8%; Murphy & Petitpas, 1996). Females scored

lower on athletic identity and identity foreclosure, but scored higher on career maturity than males, whereas varsity athletes and those from revenue-producing sports had higher identity foreclosure and athletic identity with lower career maturity than their counterparts (Murphy & Petitpas, 1996). It appears that fans may have influenced the athletic identity for those individuals participating in revenue-producing sports (e.g., football and men's basketball) more so than individuals from sports that were not as revenue-producing (Murphy & Petitpas, 1996).

Based on athletes' reports in these two studies, it appears that transitioning out of sport for athletes with higher athletic identities can be difficult and challenging (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Murphy & Petitpas, 1996). There is some evidence that student-athletes struggle at planning out their career, especially when initially arriving at their university but they appear to have more mature career plans as they enter the later portion of their intercollegiate career (Lally & Kerr, 2005). However, some limitations of these studies include that the researchers did not examine the earlier part of athletes' intercollegiate careers and there was not a non-athlete comparison group (Lally & Kerr; Murphy & Petitpas, 1996). The sample size for one study was small thus making it important to research these factors with a larger sample size (Lally & Kerr, 2005) and the other study utilized a cross-sectional design (Murphy & Petitpas, 1996). Another limitation is that there were more males in comparison to females in the study. Thus, including a more diverse participant group, such as including more females as well as incorporating more sports could enhance the generalizability (Murphy & Petitpas, 1996).

Athletes' experiences of retiring from elite and professional sport. At some point during most athletes' career, they will have to transition out of their sport and into something new. Grove and colleagues (1997) conducted a survey study to understand how athletes cope with career transition, the role sport identity plays in an athletes' quality of adjustment with

retirement, and lastly how athletic identity influences coping strategies used during career transitions. Participants included 48 (28 females, 20 males) retired Australian national or state team members, who competed in a variety of sports (e.g., basketball, cycling, gymnastics) and on average retired at 25.21 years old. Participants' scores on the AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993) were negatively related to pre-retirement career planning and positively related to zetephobia (i.e., fear of seeking future career plans). These results indicate that either athletes who did not plan out their career prior to retiring from sport were more likely to be anxious about post-athletic career decisions, or that being less anxious allowed individuals to plan their career. Finally, athletes who scored higher on the AIMS (i.e., higher athletic identity) were more likely to engage in avoidance-oriented coping strategies (e.g., denial). Moreover, strong and exclusive athletic identity was positively correlated with utilizing denial as a coping strategy after retirement in that sample (Grove et al., 1997). Within another elite athlete sample, Lavallee et al. (1997) utilized a micronarrative approach (e.g., AIMS, COPE inventory, questions related to retirement adjustment) and found a strong positive correlation between athletic identity at the time of retirement and the degree of positive/adaptive emotional adjustment and social adjustment in 15 former elite amateur athletes (11 females and 4 males). The participants had retired on average at 22.66 years old (had been retired on average of 3.05 years at the time of the study) from a variety of sports, including cycling, gymnastics, hockey, rowing, swimming, track and field, and volleyball. Another finding contradictory to Grove and colleagues (1997) was that lower scores in athletic identity post-retirement were associated with a greater amount of account making (i.e., confiding in others during loss and higher scores in athletic identity were positively correlated with current negative affect; Lavallee et al., 1997). Overall, these researchers explain that athletes had to adjust emotionally to their transition out of sport. Specifically, some athletes

utilized prayer as a way to decrease their anxiety and handle stressful times, whereas other

athletes who had high athletic identity utilized denial as a coping strategy (Czech & Bullet, 2007;

Grove et al., 1997).

Factors outside of athletics and inside of athletics may influence the transition experience

for athletes. For instance, Erpič and colleagues (2004) examined the importance of athletic and

non-athletic factors on retiring from sport in a sample of 85 former elite Slovenian athletes (31

females, 54 males, average retirement age= 25.95 years old) who participated in Olympic type

sports, including, alpine skiing ($n = 16$), basketball ($n = 14$), handball ($n =11$), track and field (n

$= 9$), and a variety of other sports. Using surveys, the researchers found that some of the

participants (26%) had not thought about life beyond their sport and these participants perceived

themselves as having high athletic identity, which was related to psychological difficulties in

post-athletic career adjustments and organization of their post-sports life. Five positive factors

after retirement included graduation, transitions related to their family, the birth of a child,

starting a relationship with a significant other, and achieving goals on a personal level (Erpič et

al., 2004). The most common difficulty faced was at the psychosocial level (e.g., missing the

athlete lifestyle; Erpič et al., 2004). Alfermann and colleagues (2004) also found that female

athletes reported less negative emotions from transitioning out of sport and a longer duration of

adaptation to their athletic career ending compared to males. Their survey study included 256

former athletes from Germany (retired on average at 27.2 years old), Lithuania (27 years old),

and Russia (19.6 years old), who competed at the national or international level in track and

field, swimming, and ice skating to name a few (Alfermann et al., 2004). German athletes in the

study planned their retirement more than the Lithuanian and Russian athletes. Additionally,

planned retirement was associated with more positive emotions and less negative emotions after

retirement, shorter duration of adaptation to post-career, and higher satisfaction with their career. Lastly, Lithuanians had a significantly higher athletic identity than both groups during their career and roughly half of the athletes mentioned that their life changed after their sports career ended and they needed to adjust (Alfermann et al., 2004). In conclusion, participants' results demonstrated that individuals who scored higher on athletic identity had a difficult time transitioning out of sport into their career. However, female participants in these studies experienced less negative emotions when they transitioned out of sport. Lastly, athletes who planned for retirement reported more positive emotions and athletes who scored higher on the AIMS experienced more anxiety when navigating their career choices (Grove et al., 1997; Lavallee et al., 1997).

These studies shed some light on elite level athletes' retirement and the athletic and non-athletic factors that may influence transition out of sport. All of these studies used surveys, but more information could be gathered by using qualitative studies. Specifically, by utilizing qualitative studies more in-depth information can be gathered. Moreover, participants may have diverse experiences that cannot be fully addressed via quantitative surveys. Lastly, many of the participants had been retired for several years, thus it may be beneficial to recruit people closer to their transition time since those experiences may be fresh in their mind.

Intercollegiate athletic retirement. Intercollegiate athletes appear to have some similar struggles when transitioning out of sport as elite athletes (Giannone et al., 2017). As detailed below, athletic identity plays a role in intercollegiate athletes' experiences during transition out of sport.

For example, athletic identity has been studied in relation to the experience of psychiatric symptoms in retired intercollegiate athletes. Giannone and colleagues (2017) examined the

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relationship between athletic identity following retirement from sport and depression or anxiety in 72 participants (54 female, 18 male, M_{age} 22.1 years) from five different universities in Western Canada who participated primarily in soccer (36%) and basketball (13%). The researchers measured athletic identity at Time 1, and they measured anxiety and depression at both Time 1 (T1 = 1 month into final season) and Time 2 (T2 = 3 months following retirement). Athletic identity at T1 (pre-retirement) was not related to psychiatric distress at T1 and T2. Athletic identity at T1 did not predict depressive symptoms in post-retirement at T1 (Giannone et al., 2017). Although athletes' AIMS scores during their competitive season did not predict depressive symptoms in post-retirement, hierarchal regression analysis demonstrated that following retirement from sport, athletic identity significantly predicted anxiety symptoms. Specifically, athletic identity was found to be a significant predictor of experiencing anxiety post-retirement (T2; Giannone et al., 2017). The present study had a few limitations. For instance, individuals were interviewed three months after completion of their final season, which may not be an adequate amount of time to assess depressive and anxiety symptoms since the athletes may still be involved with their former team. Another way to assess anxiety and depressive symptoms is utilizing qualitative methods. Qualitative questionnaires may provide more insight into how retirement may cause former athletes to feel anxious since it can provide more details on their experiences or a better understanding of athletes' own perceptions of their own experiences.

Menke and Germany (2019) studied the experiences of athletic retirement with 14 former Division I football and basketball players (5 did not graduate from college, the majority identified as Black), utilizing a phenomenological approach that included open-ended interviews. Researchers identified three major themes including Coping with Transition, Gains or Strengths,

and Loss of Identity. Many of the participants in the study felt that transitioning out of sport was difficult and experienced feelings of loss. On the other hand, some participants indicated that they found a shift in meaning since finishing their sport career, and they used their athletic experience to their benefit for their own non-sport career. Some of the athletes thought of their sport retirement as a relief and reported that their life had entered normalcy again. Many participants had difficulty coping with the transition out of sport and two of the respondents used the term depression when discussing their experiences after career transition. The participants reported that their athletic identity was central to their lives prior to retirement and the identity change brought on intense levels of distress and feelings of loneliness. The unexpected loss of sport appeared to make many of the participants wish they would have prepared for their transition out of sport. Many of the participants wished they had opportunities to talk about career planning while they were playing sports. However, many of the athletes discussed using their competitive drive in their jobs after they transitioned out of sport. Limitations from this study included the fact there were no females, basketball, and football were the only sports represented (which were both revenue-producing sports), the participants were only from a Division I university, and the researchers utilized a cross-sectional design (Menke & Germany, 2019).

On the other hand, Lally (2007) used longitudinal interviews on identity and retirement from sport and found that participants were preoccupied with the impact of not being considered an athlete anymore as well as how important that athlete role was to them. Participants in the study were three male and three female intercollegiate athletes (ages ranged from 23 to 24 years old) from Canada, who competed in swimming, track and field, basketball, and volleyball. After one month away from their respective sport, they experienced feelings of loss and sadness when

reminiscing about their lasts within their sport but many of the participants were seeking new outlets or passions in order to redefine their self-identity (Lally, 2007). The recentness of leaving their sport appeared to influence their emotional state and that may have triggered the reality they would not have the opportunities to participate in some of those lasts. Moreover, analysis of additional interviews one-year post-retirement demonstrated that the participants had a smooth transition, mainly because they sought out other identities whether that was through their job or schooling opportunities. Some individuals felt sad, scared, and vulnerable even before they retired from their sport (Lally, 2007). The researchers proposed that these feelings occurred because athletes sensed the end of their sports career looming and that they were not ready to be done competing competitively. In conclusion, it appears that transitioning out of sport caused these athletes to feel sad and to try to search for new activities to fulfill that emptiness brought on from retiring from sport. It is important to note that some of the participants talked about their job or school identities as a way to adjust, but a spiritual identity was not described. Furthermore, it would be of interest to find out if spiritual identity can also aid or hinder transition or if it has no influence on sport retirement. One limitation from Lally's (2007) study was that it included a small sample size, thus a larger sample size is needed to see more variety of experiences from participants and to get a sense of themes or trends.

One common limitation from two of the collegiate athlete studies was that participants were from universities in Canada (Giannone et al., 2017; Lally, 2007); it is possible that there are cultural differences in athletes' responses to transition since some of the participants were from various countries (e.g., Lithuania, Russia, Germany, Slovenia, and Canada; Alfermann et al., 2004; Giannone et al., 2017; Lally, 2007). Therefore, cultural differences may occur due to the significance placed on athletics in varying countries, for instance, some cultures may view sports

as a high priority, thus making it more difficult to transition out of sport. Although there have

been a few studies examining athletes from other countries it would be helpful to include more

studies researching the effects transition has on intercollegiate athletes in the United States.

Another area of research related to transitioning out of sport is the examination of the

relationship between life satisfaction and athletic identity. Webb and colleagues (1998) measured

correlations between athletic identity, ability to adjust mentally to retirement, and reasons for

retirement of 93 individuals from the United States (45 females and 48 males, M_{age} 22.4 years).

In regard to retirement, 39 athletes retired after or during high school competition, 49 athletes

retired either during or after their intercollegiate career, and five athletes retired from

professional sports. Almost half of the participants classified retirement as quite difficult and

their athletic identity was strongly related to retirement difficulties (Webb et al., 1998). For

athletes in the study who experienced a career-ending injury, there was a positive relationship

between athletic identity and experiencing vagueness about the future. There was a negative

relationship between life satisfaction and control for athletes who were unable to compete at the

next level. Moreover, athletes with higher self-esteem reported greater life satisfaction. Athletes

in this study did not provide any evidence of diminished life satisfaction after sport unless they

perceived to have little control over events in their life (Webb et al., 1998). In another study that

examined life satisfaction and sport retirement, Kleiber and colleagues (1987) found that

individuals who suffered a career-ending injury during their final season scored significantly

lower on life satisfaction than the participants who did not suffer a career-ending injury (Kleiber

et al., 1987). Within this study, there were 427 retired male athletes who participated in

basketball and football in the Big 10 athletic conference. Although, there were not consistent

findings between these two studies, one study only included male participants (Kleiber et al.,

1987) making it difficult to know if these findings differed due to the fact no female participants were included. Future studies should include mixed gender samples.

These results on intercollegiate aged athletes provide insight into the role athletic identity and academic identity have on transitioning out of intercollegiate sport and these results are similar to elite athletes retiring from sport. For example, elite athletes in previously mentioned studies also struggled with transitioning out of sport and experienced anxiety trying to figure out their career post-retirement (Grove et al., 1997; Lavallee et al., 1997). Higher athletic identity prior to retirement was related to athletes being more susceptible to poor transitions out of sport (Grove et al., 1997). Athletes who suffered a career ending injury appear to have lower life satisfaction (Kleiber et al., 1987). On the other hand, as athletic identity decreased after retiring from sport, elite athletes reported a greater amount of account making (Lavallee et al., 1997). In conclusion, stronger athlete identification when transitioning out of sport may increase the likelihood of experiencing an identity crisis with longer adjustment periods that can cause an increased level of depression, anxiety, and stress (Erpič et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1997). It is important to understand how some athletes may choose to cope or not to cope with their transition out of sport, so practitioners can understand how to support former athletes.

Religiosity and Athletic Retirement

Currently, there is minimal research on the influence of religiosity on transitioning out of sport. Some Christian athletes view their ability to participate in sport as a gift from God (Mosley et al., 2015). Therefore, it is possible that some athletes with higher religious identity could have an easier transition out of sport because these athletes with higher religiosity still have a core identity that continues on after they are not playing; however, this hypothesis has not

been specifically tested and there are few studies specifically on religious athletes' transitions out of competitive sport. The only known study on the topic is reviewed below.

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wilde (2010) conducted a mixed methods study to understand the role religion and spirituality play in the athletic retirement process. Participants were ten male former NFL athletes (ages ranged from 36 to 67 years old, M_{age}= 50.6 years old) who competed in the NFL for at least one year and considered themselves to be religious or spiritual, with eight participants specifically citing a belief in God, a higher power, or Jesus Christ, and two participants indicated that they were more spiritual than religious. Half of the participants identified as African-American, three of the participants identified as European-American, and two participants identified as having a multi-racial background (i.e., African-American/German/Irish). All of the participants were married and had children. Athletes finished their career between the ages of 26 and 39. The researcher utilized the Sports Questionnaire (Alfermann et al., 2004) and modified it to the specific study (i.e., country was changed to ethnicity). The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview that examined the athletes' use of spirituality during their retirement from football. A few of the interview topics included: 1) how athletes defined spirituality, 2) what the athlete found helpful or unhelpful about their religious practices, and 3) how the athlete used their spiritual beliefs to cope with retirement from sport.

Wilde (2010) identified multiple themes from the participants' responses. Eight of the participants stated that their concept of God changed over time, specifically two participants had a negative perception of God and three participants reportedly did not have a concept of God prior to the NFL, but their experiences either during the NFL or prompted them to believe in a higher power or God. In addition, all of the participants indicated that their religious/spiritual life

was an important component of their daily life and they endorsed utilizing a wide spectrum of religious practices in their daily life. Another finding from four of the participants was that they believed that the events that occurred in their life were due to God's plan and that those circumstances did not happen by chance. A majority of the participants made comments about difficulties of being in the NFL and the nature of the sport. For example, participant seven stated that, "in the NFL, the bottom line was you either produce or you don't" (Wilde, 2010, p. 99). Changes in beliefs during retirement were indicated by nine of the participants and difficulties with transition were stated by eight participants. Specifically, two of the participants mentioned that they used alcohol and drugs to cope with retirement. In addition, half of the participants explained that they did not use their religious beliefs to cope with the transition out of sport. For example, some of the participants did not necessarily abandon their faith in search of something else but rather dealt with the transitional period with other methods (i.e., alcohol or substance abuse). Quantitative results from participants' responses to the Sports Questionnaire indicated that 90% of the participants did not plan out their retirement from sport beforehand, and only 50% reported that their retirement was voluntary. Another finding was that the majority of the participants (90%) believed they needed to adjust to life after their sports career ended. In addition, the earliest feeling of being fully adjusted from their sport retirement was around 12 months with most of the participants feeling adjusted after 18 months. Sixty percent of the participants reported that they experienced sadness upon retirement, as well as uncertainty and emptiness. Lastly, 60% of the participants thought it was difficult to change (i.e., adapt) after their sports career ended (Wilde, 2010).

Some of the main takeaways from Wilde's (2010) study included that participants' concept of God changed over time, they believed that the events that occurred in their life were

due to God's plan, and that those circumstances did not happen by chance. Half of the participants did not use their religiosity to cope with retirement (i.e., instead some used alcohol or drugs), and a majority of the participants reported experiencing difficulty with retirement. Although this study provides insight into the unique challenges of transitioning out of the NFL, there are a few limitations. First, there was a wide range in retirement age among the athletes and a few of the participants had been retired for many years when the study was conducted, which may make it difficult for them to remember specifics of their transition. The sample size was also small, although the researcher utilized a mixed methods study to gather more in-depth information with qualitative methods. The researcher provided some suggestions for future research including: using a sample of athletes from a different sport and using a larger sample size with a qualitative study, as well as controlling for the length of retirement (Wilde, 2010). Moreover, because this study was conducted on professional athletes, it is unknown if these findings are relevant to amateur athletes, like intercollegiate athletes. Studying intercollegiate athletes may lead to different results since they transition into their first career rather than a second career (like professional athletes). Moreover, college athletes who are not continuing their education are transitioning away from two core identities, athletic identity and academic identity, compared to professional athletes who may only be transitioning from their athletic identity.

Wilde's (2010) study demonstrated that religious athletes could struggle with transitioning out of sport. In addition, half of the NFL athletes did not use their religiosity/spirituality to cope with their transition (Wilde, 2010). Lastly, Wilde's (2010) study demonstrated the need for further research on the topic of religiosity and transitioning out of sport; this study was conducted with professional athletes and included no female athletes, so

conducting research on religious athletes that are male and female at the intercollegiate level will provide different findings.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in the literature review some athletes with high athletic identity experience psychological difficulties in post-athletic career adjustments and organizing their life after sport participation (Erpič et al., 2004). Spiritual well-being appears to be associated with coping; specifically, individuals with a greater spiritual well-being are more likely to cope positively to adverse situations and to have a healthier psychological profile (Hammermeister & Peterson, 2001; Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008). On the other hand, a few Christian athletes reportedly struggled at maintaining their religious well-being during college (Seitz et al., 2014), two Christian athletes distanced themselves from religion (Ronkainen et al., 2019), and five NFL athletes did not use their religious faith to cope with their sport transition (Wilde, 2010).

Additionally, lacking in previous qualitative research is an inclusion criterion related to athletic identity. The present study will isolate individuals with above average athletic identity because previous research has shown that individuals with higher athletic identity tend to have a difficult time coping with transition out of sport and may experience an increased level of anxiety, depression, and stress (Erpič et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1997). There is still a need for more research on transitional periods for athletes. In addition, athletes' religious faith or religiosity has been researched with a variety of methods, but there is minimal research on the role that Christian religious faith and athletic identity play in coping with transitioning out of college athletics. Conducting research on the experiences that Christian and non-Christian intercollege athletes with above average athletic identity have following sport retirement could help practitioners understand if and how Christian athletes use their religious faith to cope with

their transition out of sport. It is also important to note that some athletes struggle with their transition out of sport and some athletes have substance abuse problems (Wilde, 2010) or may experience depressive or anxiety symptoms (Giannone et al., 2017; Menke et al., 2019). Therefore, it may be beneficial to investigate how former athletes cope with the transition out of sport, to determine what helps athletes during transition and if their religious faith is helpful or not helpful.

The current study addressed several limitations of previous research. Although there are a vast number of quantitative studies on athletic retirement for professional athletes, very few have examined Christian faith and transition out of sport qualitatively. Utilizing quantitative measurements provides some insight into athletic identity and sport transition, but survey measures cannot capture the variety of ways in which an individual may handle or cope with their transition out of sport, including the varied use of religious behaviors. Therefore, a qualitative study could provide in-depth information on religious thoughts and behaviors during the transition experiences (retirement) of former intercollegiate athletes. Although Wilde (2010) used a qualitative study to examine religious/spiritual athletes' retirement from the NFL, more qualitative studies are needed with larger and more diverse samples in terms of gender and sport type, as well as level of competition (i.e., intercollegiate athletes) since religiosity and athletic transition have been rarely studied together.

Therefore, the present study will have a larger sample size that includes student-athletes across all intercollegiate classifications (i.e., Division I, Division II, Division III, NAIA, NJCAA). By including athletes at all intercollegiate levels, the results will be more applicable to broad groups. Next, because previous research on religious athletes' retirement only included professional male athletes, the current study will include athletes of all genders. There is a need

to study intercollegiate athletes since professional athletes are leaving their sport later in life and are choosing their second career, whereas intercollegiate athletes are entering their first career. Also, intercollegiate athletes differ from elite athlete samples, because intercollegiate athletes may be faced with the transition from two core identities (e.g., athletic and academic identity), whereas professional athletes may only leave behind one core identity. Previous researchers have frequently utilized qualitative studies to examine career transitions for former athletes, but they have not specifically studied athletes with high athletic identity who also have a strong religious identity. Yet, identity can be a key personal variable that influences transitions. Thus, it seems important to focus on studying retirement in athletes with high athletic identity, who also have additional core identities, such as a strong religious identity. Sport retirement means that (most) athletes must shift their social roles, and social identity theory describes the importance of finding a new identity after retirement (Tajfel, 1974). Specifically, Tajfel (1974) described the concept of individual mobility, which described individuals as having the opportunity to escape or leave a group, in order to seek another group to identify with (Tajfel, 1975). Thus, it is of interest to determine if and how athletes with high athletic identity, who have an additional core identity, have different experiences with transition out of sport. Religion offers an in-group for retired athletes to be a part of, which may offer retired athletes individual mobility, which in turn could allow retired athletes to leave their athletic identity in order to identify with their religious identity when they are transitioning out of competitive sport. Therefore, according to social identity theory, athletes with high athletic identity who retire and do not have another social group to identify with, may have different experiences after graduation or struggle with transition compared to a group that also has high religious identity. However, this claim remains untested

as no previous studies have compared the sport retirement experiences of a group of Christian athletes with high religious faith to a group with low religious faith.

Therefore, the present study will examine strength of religious faith and athletic retirement. The current study was designed to collect data to understand how athletes' identities may impact their coping experiences of transitioning out of sport. The current study utilized an online, written qualitative method in order to examine a larger number of participants than previous qualitative research on athletes' transition experiences (Menke et al., 2019; Ronkainen et al., 2019), but still gathered open-ended responses from individuals. Although there are many religions that intercollegiate athletes subscribe to, the focus of the study will be on athletes who identify as Christian in order to compare the results of the current study to past studies on transition out of sport, which have mostly been on Christian athletes.

The primary purposes of this anonymous online qualitative survey study are to: 1) better understand the experiences of intercollegiate athletes with high athletic identity who transition out of competitive sport; 2) to determine if there are different thematic patterns in the responses of strong religious faith athletes' reported experiences and coping methods in comparison to athletes who report lower religious faith; 3) and to determine if prayer is utilized as a coping strategy as well as what purpose, if any, prayer serves or does not serve during the transition experience according to participants' report. This study's results may provide sport psychologists with an increased understanding of intercollegiate athletes' Christian religious lives as it is related to coping with their career transition.

Introduction

Self-identity is defined as, "the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular roles" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226). Burke (1991) described identity as one's concept of who one is, relative to a social role or social situation (e.g., athletic identity). Similarly, McCall and Simmons (1978) theorized that identities are formed based on the meanings and expectations an individual establishes for a particular social role. Lastly, within a proposed identity control system, Burke (1991) stated that people establish an identity and use their own *standard* or beliefs as a basis for appraising and reacting to circumstances.

Of particular interest to sport psychology researchers is athletic identity, which is defined as the level of an individual's identification with their athlete role (Brewer et al., 1993). Researchers have determined that athletic identity varies by demographic groups like competition level (Williams & Wiechman, 1997), gender (Gill et al., 2013), and race/sport (Kissinger et al., 2000). For instance, Kissinger and colleagues (2000) found that basketball players at the community college level had the highest athletic identity compared to baseball and football players. More specifically, African American basketball players had the highest athletic identity out of all the racial groups in their sample. In regard to gender, Gill et al. (2013) found that National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I and Division III male athletes had higher athlete identification than females in each respective classification; however, athletic identity levels between Division I and Division III athletes were not statistically significantly different. Overall, there is evidence that male athletes report higher athletic identity than female athletes (Gill et al., 2013; Williams & Wiechman, 1997). Regardless of sport or level, some athletes with high athletic identity experience psychological difficulties in post-athletic career

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adjustments (Erpič et al., 2004). In intercollegiate sports, athletes may hold multiple identities such as an athletic identity, academic identity, and religious identity to name a few, although little is known about how two identities: athletic and religious, intersect.

Scholars have defined religion and spirituality in a variety of ways and often use the terms interchangeably (e.g., Mosley et al., 2015). A common definition of religion is "a system of beliefs in divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals directed toward such a power" (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975, p. 1). Religion includes traditional behaviors, such as attending church services and reading sacred books. Religious faith is defined as the trust or belief in a spiritual force or deity (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Spirituality, defined more broadly than religion, is described as connecting with others to find purpose in life and having a relationship with a God or higher power (Hawks et al., 1995).

Researchers have examined religiosity in athletic populations. Storch et al. (2004a) investigated the religious faith of 226 undergraduate students (57 athletes), who were mainly male (74%) and European American (75%) and found that athletes had greater religious faith than non-athletes (e.g., Storch et al., 2004a); this may indicate that some athletes have a religious identity in addition to their athletic identity. Researchers are also interested in an individual's religious/spiritual well-being. Religious well-being was defined by Buford et al. (1991) as an individual's perception of their religious life in terms of quality. Hammermeister and Peterson (2001) found that college students who scored higher on a spiritual well-being scale had healthier psychological profiles than individuals who scored lower. Religiosity has also been examined qualitatively; specifically, Seitz et al. (2014) interviewed seven (4 men, 3 women) Division I Christian athletes (3 Non-denominational, 3 Baptist/Methodist, 1 Inter-denominational), who participated in multiple sports. Most of the participants reported that they struggled at

maintaining their religious well-being during college, but a few participants felt that their religious well-being was helpful during the middle of life trials. Similarly, an in-depth study of two elite Christian male athletes revealed that they did not use their religious faith when experiencing life transitions (Ronkainen et al., 2019). There are conflicting findings about religious athletes' well-being and coping experiences, thus additional studies are needed, particularly those that focus on spiritual/religious athletes' coping with a major stressor like sport transition.

Prayer tends to be an important part of some religious faiths, particularly the Christian faith, but there are only a few studies on the use of prayer in athletic populations (e.g., Czech & Bullet, 2007). For example, in a study with 19 Division II intercollegiate Christian athletes (9 men, 10 women; 8 identified as non-denominational), Czech and Bullet (2007) found that prayer helped athletes trust and relax during stressful times. Also, in a study that utilized open-ended interviews, nine White Division I Christian intercollegiate athletes (4 females, 5 males) from a variety of sports described prayer as a performance enhancer that decreased anxiety and promoted strength to play their best (Czech et al., 2004). Taken together, it appears that athletes use prayer to cope with stressful situations. However, both studies included a small sample size and more diverse samples are needed, since participants were either from specific geographic regions (Midwest United States; Czech et al., 2004) or attended faith-based universities (Czech & Bullet, 2007). Given that some Christian athletes have used prayer as a way to cope with athletic stressors, religious faith could possibly help with the stress of sport transition. At present, there is minimal research on religious athletes' transition experiences to confirm or refute this hypothesis; however, there has been some research on athletic identity and sport transition.

Researchers have proposed theoretical models to explain difficulties associated with retirement or transition out of sport. According to Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), loss of athletic identity can be detrimental to adapting effectively, especially if that is the sole basis for how an individual identifies; yet three resources can influence effective adaptation: coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning. There is research indicating that athletes who perceived they had high athletic identity experienced psychological difficulties in post-athletic career adjustments (Erpič et al., 2004) or experienced anxiety trying to navigate their career post-retirement (Grove et al., 1997; Lavallee et al., 1997). Alfermann et al. (2004) found that elite level female athletes from various European countries experienced less negative emotions during sport retirement. All of these researchers investigated professional athletes; thus, it is important to study the experiences of intercollegiate athletes as well, since intercollegiate athletes may lose two core identities, athletic and academic identity, when they transition out of sport.

In a survey study with 72 intercollegiate Canadian athletes (54 female, 18 male) who participated primarily in soccer (36%) and basketball (13%), Giannone et al. (2017) found that higher athletic identity was positively related to anxiety in post-retirement. Although some athletes report anxious feelings on surveys, it may be helpful to examine their transition experiences qualitatively, to capture the entirety of their experiences. For example, Menke and Germany (2019) in a qualitative study of 14 Division I male football and basketball players in the United States found that many of the participants reported that transitioning out of sport was difficult and they experienced feelings of loss. The participants reported strong athletic identity prior to retirement and stated that the identity change brought on distress and loneliness. For some, unexpected loss of sport (e.g., injuries) made participants wish they would have prepared for their transition (Menke & Germany, 2019). One limitation from the previous studies was a

lack of female athletes (Giannone et al., 2017; Menke & Germany, 2019) and relatively small number of sports represented, which highlights the need for more research on athletic identity and intercollegiate sport transition. Research is needed that isolates individuals with above average athletic identity to determine how those athletes experience the sport transition process.

In addition to athlete identity, an athlete's religious identity has been examined in a variety of ways. Research on religiosity and coping found that Division I athletes ($n = 142$, 68% male) with higher spiritual well-being reported better ability to cope with athletic stressors and athletes with stronger spiritual identity had a healthier psychological profile than those who were less spiritual (Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008). Religious identity and coping have also been examined qualitatively with two elite male professional athletes. While journeying through life transitions, each participant reported a tendency to distance themselves from religion, due to teammates being non-religious or not having the opportunity to attend church on Sunday's because of games (Ronkainen et al., 2019). However, since there were only two participants, and both were Christian men, it makes it difficult to draw generalizations from this study to broader groups of athletes (Ronkainen et al., 2019). Overall, past findings indicate that some religious individuals do not use their religious faith to cope with life stressors, which seems to contrast positive correlational findings between adaptive coping and religiosity. Also, there is little known about religiosity as a form of coping specifically with sport retirement.

To date, there is only one known qualitative study that specifically examined religious/spiritual athletes' sport retirement. In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wilde (2010) interviewed ten male athletes (ages ranged from 36 to 67 years old) who competed in the NFL and considered themselves to be religious or spiritual, specifically eight participants reported a belief in God, a higher power, or Jesus Christ, and two indicated that they were more

spiritual. Half of the participants voluntarily retired from the NFL, the rest had an unplanned retirement (e.g., injury or cut from team). Eight participants mentioned experiencing psychological difficulties with their transition and two reportedly used alcohol and drugs to cope with retirement. Half of the participants explained that they did not use their religious beliefs to cope with the transition out of sport. Another finding was that 60% of the participants reported that they experienced sadness, uncertainty, and emptiness upon retirement, and they thought it was difficult to adapt after their sports career ended. Although this study provides insight into the role of religious/spiritual beliefs during transition, there were limitations. First, there was a wide range in the participants' age and some athletes had been retired for many years. Next, the sample size was small. In addition, the study was conducted with professional athletes and included only men. Importantly, a final limitation is that the study lacked a comparison group of athletes with low religious faith. Thus, differences, if any, in sport transition experiences are unknown for high religious faith athletes compared to low religious faith athletes.

Sport retirement means that (most) athletes must shift their social roles (Tajfel, 1974), and social identity theory describes the importance of finding a new identity after retirement (Tajfel, 1974). Thus, it is of interest to determine if and how athletes with high athletic identity, who have an additional core identity, have different sport transition experiences. Religion may offer an in-group for retired athletes to be a part of, which may allow them to leave their athletic identity to identify with their religious identity. According to social identity theory, athletes with high athletic identity who retire and do not have another social group to identify with, may struggle with transition compared to a group that also has high religious identity (Tajfel, 1975). However, this claim remains untested as no previous studies have compared the sport retirement experiences of a group of athletes with high and low religious faith.

There is some evidence that athletes with high athletic identity experience psychological difficulties following athletic retirement (e.g., Giannone et al., 2017), yet additional research on more diverse samples of intercollegiate athletes is needed. Since, previous researchers have not studied a sample with above average athletic identity, qualitative studies are best for exploratory investigations. Additionally, previous prayer research in sport only included small sample sizes of athletes from faith-based institutions in the Midwest. Thus, more studies are needed on more geographically diverse samples to understand if and how religious athletes use their Christian faith (or potentially prayer) to cope with sport transition, particularly studies that compare a group of athletes with high Christian religious faith to a group with low religious faith.

The primary purposes of the current qualitative study were to: 1) better understand the experiences of intercollegiate athletes with above average athletic identity who transitioned out of competitive sport; 2) to determine if there are different thematic patterns in the responses of higher religious Christian faith athletes' reported experiences and coping methods in comparison to athletes who report lower religious faith; 3) and to determine if prayer is utilized as a coping strategy as well as what purpose, if any, prayer serves or does not serve during the transition experience. The present study isolated individuals with above average athletic identity because previous research has supported that individuals with higher athletic identity have a difficult time coping with transition and may experience increased anxiety, depression, and stress (e.g., Grove et al., 1997). Regarding religion, the focus of the current study will be on athletes who identify as Christian to allow for comparison to past studies on sport transition. This study's results can provide mental performance consultants with increased understanding of athletes' coping with their career transition, which may inform interventions to implement with athletes prior to or during their sport retirement.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 72 former intercollegiate athletes, who competed at the NCAA Division

level (Division I = 6; Division II = 9; Division III = 38), NAIA Division I (n = 11), NAIA

Division II (n = 3), or NJCAA (n = 1). The participants identified as female (n = 50), male (n =

18), or chose not to answer (n = 4). Their ages ranged from 20 to 24 years old (M_{age} = 22.6 years

old; SD = .89). The participants identified their race/ethnicity as White (n = 61), Asian (n = 4),

Black/African American (n = 2), and Other (n = 1; multi-racial), and four participants did not

respond. Participants identified as non-denominational Christian (n = 18), Catholic (n = 10),

Christian (n = 8), Lutheran (n = 7), Protestant (n = 5), Presbyterian (n = 4), Methodist (n = 2),

Baptist (n = 1), Pentecostal (n = 1), and other (n = 1). Other participants identified as Agnostic (n

= 6), Atheist (n = 5), or did not answer (n = 4).

Participants had an average length of time since intercollegiate sport termination (i.e.,

graduation or leaving their university) of 12.2 months (SD = 5.89). They competed in the

following sports: basketball (n = 12), football (n = 9), volleyball (n = 9), softball (n = 7), soccer

(n = 4), golf (n = 4), rowing (n = 4), competitive cheer or dance (n = 3), outdoor track and field

only (n = 3), cross country and track and field (n = 3), baseball (n = 2), cross country only (n =

1), bowling (n = 1), swimming and diving (n = 1), tennis (n = 1), acrobatics (n = 1), soccer and

tennis (n = 1), outdoor and indoor track and field (n = 1), swimming and lacrosse (n = 1),

softball and cross country (n = 1), or did not respond (n = 4). They reported that they participated

in their sport for 8.5 years on average. Lastly, regarding the timing of their transition related to

the Covid-19 pandemic, 27 participants reported transitioning prior to Covid-19 and 40

participants reported transitioning during Covid-19 (5 did not respond).

For strength of religious faith grouping, 25 participants were in the Christian HRF group (19 females, 5 males, 1 chose not to answer; 11 Division III, 2 Division II, 2 Division II, and 4 NAIA). On average, women in the HRF group had been retired for an average of 12.45 months and men were retired for an average of 15 months. In comparison, there were 20 participants in the LRF group (12 females, 5 males, 3 chose not to answer; 1 NJCAA, 3 Division II, 2 Division II). Women in the LRF had been retired for an average of 9.5 months and men were retired for an average of 9.8 months.

Measures

Athletic Identity Measurement Scale

The AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993; see Appendix C), which measures athletic identity, includes 10 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores on the AIMS represent a stronger identification with the athlete role (Brewer et al., 1993). The AIMS is scored by computing a total score. Previous research has shown that the AIMS has strong internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .81, Brewer et al., 1993; Cronbach alpha = .93, Good et al., 1993). For the purposes of this study, the retrospective version of the AIMS was utilized (Brewer et al., 1993; Grove et al., 1997). This procedure of modifying the AIMS from the present tense to past tense has been used by previous researchers. An example of the alteration is changing the statement "I consider myself an athlete," to "I considered myself an athlete" (e.g., Grove et al., 1997). Internal consistency has been found to be acceptable with the retrospective version of the AIMS as well (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79; Grove et al., 1997). For the current study, participants' AIMS scores were used to determine if they met the study's athletic identity inclusion criteria. Gill et al. (2013) found that the average score on the AIMS for Division I male athletes was 44.23 and 42.94 for female athletes; in a sample of

Division III athletes, men averaged a score of 46.57, with women averaging 40.55. Using Gill et al.'s (2013) averages as a guide, men who scored lower than 47 and women who scored lower than 43 were excluded from the present study. Based on Gill et al.'s (2013) findings the more stringent number on the AIMS averages was used by rounding up to the nearest whole number.

Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire- Short Form

The SCSORF-SF (Plante et al., 2002; see Appendix D) measures strength of religious faith, using five items that are scored on a four-point Likert scale (1 *strongly disagree* to 4 *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate stronger strength of religious faith. Based on previous research, the SCSORF-SF has a reported Cronbach alpha of .95, indicating excellent internal consistency (Storch et al., 2004b). In addition, the total score of the SCSORF-SF is strongly correlated with the subscales of the Duke Religion Index (Koenig et al., 1997), indicating convergent validity (Storch et al., 2004b). To the researchers' knowledge the SCSORF-SF has not been used in past research to identify groups who are high or low in religious faith. In the present study, participants who scored a 3 or a 4 on each item of the SCSORF-SF (which correspond to "agree" and "strongly agree", respectively) were classified as the high religious faith (HRF) group. Whereas participants who scored a 1 or a 2 on each item of the SCSORF-SF (which correspond to "strongly disagree" and "disagree", respectively) were classified as the low religious faith group (LRF).

Sport Transition Open Ended Questions

Participants typed responses to the following open-ended questions (see Appendix E): 1) Please describe your transition out of playing competitive college sport. In other words, has it been easy or difficult to transition out of playing organized, competitive college sport? Explain. 2) What have you done to cope with your transition out of competitive sport. Coping is defined

as changing the way you think or what you do to manage specific situations and experiences that are challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)? Please explain. 3) Have you utilized prayer to cope with your transition out of sport? If yes, please explain. If no, please explain?

Demographics (see Appendix F). Participants responded to demographic questions, including: gender identity, ethnicity/race, age, graduation date (or months since leaving school), intercollegiate division level, college sport participation, and religious identity/denomination.

Procedure

The study's protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board. To recruit from diverse universities and colleges across the United States, stratified random sampling was used. The NAIA has 15 sports with 21 conferences, the NJCAA has 17 sports with 21 regions, and the NCAA has 24 sports across three division levels. A random number generator was used to choose 15 schools from each NCAA classification from the *NCAA Members by Division* page located on the NCAA website. Three rounds of stratified random sampling were completed for all three NCAA divisions. For NAIA and NJCAA, two-stage sampling was implemented, and two rounds of random sampling were completed. A quarter of the 21 conferences in the NAIA and four regions of the NJCAA were selected and eight schools were chosen out of the conferences/regions selected by the sampling method. When a University was selected, the researcher sent an email to all head coaches at the institution, asking them to forward the study to their athletes who had graduated (or left the university) in 2019 or 2020; if a coaches' email was not provided, the athletic director was contacted instead. Afterwards, convenience and snowball sampling were used, by posting recruitment material on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and encouraging participants to pass along the study's link to others.

Recruitment materials included a link to an anonymous online survey hosted by

Qualtrics; the first page of the survey included the study's inclusion criteria, which were that

participants had to 1) have played a varsity intercollegiate sport at any intercollegiate level for at

least two years, 2) have graduated or left from college for at least 3 months but not greater than

24 months, 3) be over 18 years old, and 4) have competed in the United States. As described

earlier, an additional inclusion criterion was based on participants' scores on the AIMS. Athletes

who competed at the professional, semi-professional level or Olympic level after their

intercollegiate career were excluded since they were considered to not be retired from sport.

An informed consent (see Appendix G) was included on the second page of the survey

and was electronically signed by all participants to ensure understanding of the study. Next,

participants completed all questions and surveys in the order listed above. In total, 101 agreed to

participate in the study, but only 84 responses were analyzed (i.e., completed all quantitative

questionnaires and responded to one of the three of the qualitative questions). Afterwards, 12

participants were excluded from the study after qualitative analysis, since they did not meet the

AIMS inclusion criterion. All responses remained anonymous; the only personally identifying

information collected was if the participant wanted to be included in a raffle to win one of three,

$25 gift cards.

Data Analysis

Frequency data for demographic responses was analyzed by utilizing SPSS version 27.0.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the open-ended responses.

Initially, the primary researcher read and familiarized themselves with the data. Next, line by line

coding was used by two researchers to identify codes and write down possible themes (i.e.,

patterned response) based on participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The primary and

secondary researchers discussed any disagreements in coding decisions; consensus was reached

prior to finalizing the themes, by choosing the coding decision that stayed closest to the

participant's actual words. Themes were titled with a short phrase that captured the patterned

meaning of the participants' words (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative analysis was used on

three aspects of their experiences: general transition experiences, coping strategies during

transition, and the purpose of prayer (for those who used it) during transition. Thus, there were

three separate data sets. Participants' quotes were not edited for punctuation. After coding all

participants' responses who were included based on the AIMS, the researcher then divided the

participants into high or low religious faith groups based on the SCSORF-SF.

Results

The average total score on the AIMS for the 84 participants who responded to the surveys

was 52.07 (SD = 8.02), with a range of 32 to 70. The average total score for participants who met

the AIMS inclusion criteria was 53.89 (N = 72; SD = 6.72), with a range of 44 to 70 for the total

sample; the average AIMS for women was 53.53 (n = 50; SD = 7.45) and 54.05 for men (n = 18;

SD = 6.42). On the SCSORF-SF, the average score was 12.62 (n = 72; SD = 4.71). In the

Christian HRF group, the average SCSORF-SF score for women was 17.79 (n = 19; SD = 2.04)

and 17.6 for men (n = 5; SD = 2.07). In the LRF group, the average SCSORF-SF score for

women was 6.17 (n = 12; SD = 1.90) and 8.0 for men (n = 5; SD = 2.74). All 72 participants

completed at least one of the three qualitative questions.

General Transition Experiences

Analysis of responses regarding the athletes' transition (see Table 1) led to two higher-

order categories: Losses, with four themes, and Difficulties, also with four themes.

Losses. One higher-order category about transition experiences was Losses. The most common theme was *Loss of Sport* (*n* = 31). For example, participant 1 reported, "you go from being focused on your sport for 17 years of your life and then it's suddenly gone. It's a grieving process, it's like losing a close friend." Additionally, participant 22 stated, "I think accepting that the chapter has closed is still challenging and I miss the sport deeply." Overall, it was evident that no longer having the opportunity to continue playing was difficult for participants.

Leaving teammates presented a unique loss to many participants after graduation. Thus, another theme was *Loss of Sport Relationships* (*n* = 19). For example, participant 30 stated, "I always had an automatic community of friends with sports. When I left, I didn't have that." Similarly, a former basketball player wrote, "…more than anything I miss being a part of a team and having that camaraderie with my teammates." Although missing competition was common, missing the team or team atmosphere was another commonly reported loss after leaving sport.

Some participants described *Loss of Identity* (*n* = 14) related to their transition. For instance, participant 31 wrote, "Sport was such a huge part of my life. The transition out of sport was hard. Sport had been part of my identity for the majority of my life." Similarly, a former collegiate golfer reported, "many friends that I make going forward will not see me as an athlete. While I am confident in my identity, this is still a strange thought since I have played sports since kindergarten."

Other participants cited *Lack of Physical Activity* (*n* = 8) as a loss and a hindrance to their ability to cope with their transition. For instance, a former soccer player mentioned:

> It was initially difficult to transition from being required to work out to then only
>
> working out if I wanted to. I was no longer obligated to be at the gym early in the

mornings if I didn't want to. Because of that though, I found myself not meeting standard

exercise recommendations for a person my age. (P19)

Another former athlete reported:

… its hard to be anywhere near as active as I once was, even if I do get the chance to

workout. Watching my body change and morph out of what will probably be the best

physical shape of my life has been extremely difficult to watch as well. (P65)

Overall, the participants indicated that transitioning out of sport triggered losses that went

beyond the sport itself, to include losses to physical activity, relationships, and identity as well.

Difficulties. An additional higher-order category used to describe transition experiences

based on participants' responses was Difficulties. Due to Covid-19, *Unplanned Career*

Termination ($n = 18$) was the most common difficulty theme. For a few athletes, Covid-19

abruptly ended their senior season, participant 17 reflected that their transition, "was not

voluntary but rather stripped away from me…. It was my senior season and I missed out on

having the opportunity to perform for my school and myself one last time." A former softball

player had a similarly abrupt transition due to Covid-19:

… I did not know until weeks after it had been played that I had competed in my final

competitive game as an athlete. Not having that final closure of knowing it was my last

conference tournament or game being played has made it extremely difficult, especially

with that what if factor. What if I had a full season? … Would me and my fellow seniors

finally won that conference tournament we had been working for the past 4 years of our

collegiate careers? … These unanswered questions have probably been the hardest for me

to cope with besides no longer having a competitive atmosphere. (P12)

Another theme that described participants' experiences was *Emotional Struggles* (*n* = 13), which included several primary codes, such as negative emotional reactions and lack of motivation. For instance, participant 67 reported "…I went through a depression phase for the first couple months after getting done with my sports career." Regarding motivation, one former collegiate basketball player reported, "a lot of things I did in life I did so I could play in college, now its more difficult to find that motivation for other things in my life."

Two additional themes described by multiple participants included *Employment Challenges* (*n* = 8) and *Time Management Challenges* (*n* = 6). A few participants specifically mentioned a lack of employment opportunities due to their time spent in their sport; specifically, a rower said, "The inability to gain internship opportunities throughout a 4 year, year round job as a student athlete has definitely put me in a disadvantageous position compared to other peers who did have these opportunities." Additionally, Covid-19 added to the challenge of finding a career after sport, specifically, "It was increasingly difficult to find a job after graduation due to a mix of the pandemic and lack of professional experience." (P9) Participants also needed to adjust to decreased time demands, one participant reported, "it is the first time in my life where I am not showing up to practices early in the morning and playing in the winter." (P11)

Coping Strategies

Analysis of participants' responses about how they coped with transition led to two higher-order categories, which included: Filling the Void, with four related themes, and Managing Mental/Emotional Challenges, also with four themes (see Table 2).

Filling the void. Since participants did not go on to play professionally, many shifted their time and focus to their career to fill the void their sport left. The most common theme, reported by over half of participants, was *Career Focus* (*n* = 37). Some sought employment in

sport, many as coaches, such as participant 24 who explained, "[leaving sport] motivates me to be a better coach that provides positive experiences for my athletes." Pursuing higher education was also helpful; a former women's basketball player said, "I jumped into my Masters program straight after I finished up playing and my undergraduate degree, and that has helped a lot." Participants found additional strategies to fill the potential void. *Physical Activity* was a way that almost half of the participants ($n = 33$) coped with their transition. For example, one participant reported, "I go to the gym regularly. I'm there every day and I continue to better myself athletically." (P39) Other participants found autonomy over their exercise selection, like a former volleyball player who stated:

> Being a college athlete you never had to worry about what my next workout would be since it was all planned out for you. Now I have to hold myself accountable and be disciplined on when I workout. But I also have flexibility if I want to try new types of exercise which is refreshing. (P62)

Another theme, evident in 12 participants' responses, was *Non-Sport/Non-Religious Hobbies and Interests.* Hobbies differed amongst participants (e.g., reading for personal growth, going outdoors), but were reportedly important for finding fulfillment after leaving sport. For example, participant 3, "focused more attention on other interests such as data analysis, mathematics, and music." All in all, participants frequently reported that they filled the void by finding new hobbies and staying physically active.

Managing mental/emotional challenges. As indicated earlier, retirement from sport required that participants cope with numerous emotional and mental challenges. A common coping strategy was *Maintaining Sport and Competitor Identity* ($n = 31$); participant 8 mentioned, "I've found different outlets for my competitive nature such as running, boards

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games, learning new things, etc. These activities have helped me to continue being the competitive athlete I have always been so I didn't just feel lost without sports." Others stayed involved by watching their sport; a former collegiate football player mentioned:

> I watch a lot of my sport on television and relate it to the times that I played it. I break down plays and fundamentals and view it with a coaching mentality, it helps me find peace and it's honestly quite enjoyable. (P15)

Participants also reported that adjusting and continuing relationships after sport was important. Thus, an additional theme was *Maintaining Interpersonal Relationships* ($n = 12$); for instance, participant 1 mentioned, "I continue to stay in touch with my former teammates and reminisce on when we played." Additionally, a former volleyball player coped "by staying completely honest and in touch with my close friends who were going through the same thing. It was extremely beneficially to stay honest about my struggle with my friends and former coaches because they knew how I was feeling and how to get me out of bad phases."

An additional theme for managing the mental/emotional struggles was focusing on a *Positive Interpretation of Leaving Sport* ($n = 8$). Some participants interpreted leaving their sport positively; for example, participant 28 described leaving their sport as, "a much needed break both emotionally and physically." Others utilized *Religious/Spiritual Coping Strategies* ($n = 7$); for instance, participant 66, reported, "I have tried to lean more into my faith. And praying and working towards discovering who I am in Christ." Participant 28 mentioned, "my faith has always been my first priority and identity and I spent a lot of time in prayer for direction moving forward and re-prioritizing my life." Lastly, a final theme noted by two participants was *Therapeutic Services*; both participants attended counseling to cope with their transition.

Utilization of Prayer as a Coping Strategy

All 72 participants responded to a question about their use of prayer; of the entire sample, 33 (45.8%) participants used prayer to cope with their transition (see Table 3 for quotation samples). Qualitative analysis of those 33 participants' reasons for utilizing prayer resulted in five themes: *Prayers for Direction* (*n* = 20), *Prayers to Build Relationship with God* (*n* = 11), *Prayers for Identity* (*n* = 8), *Prayers of Gratefulness* (*n* = 2), and *Prayers to Experience Inner Peace* (*n* = 4)*. The results were not compared between high religious faith and low religious faith groups since most low religious faith participants did not report using prayer.

Comparison of High and Low Religious Faith Groups

Based on SCORF-SF responses, participants were divided into Christian athletes with high religious faith (HRF, *n* = 25) and low religious faith (LRF, *n* = 20) subgroups. Thematic responses were compared between these two groups (see Table 1 and Table 2). The most common loss reported by both athletes with HRF and LRF was *Loss of Sport* (HRF = 40%; LRF = 45%). Two loss themes reported more frequently by athletes with HRF was *Loss of Relationships* (HRF = 35%, LRF = 15%) and *Loss of Identity* (HRF = 24%, LRF = 0%). For the Difficulties category, the most common theme for both groups was *Unplanned Career Termination* (HRF = 24%, LRF = 25%). However, the most frequently cited coping method differed between the groups. HRF athletes most frequently reported using *Physical Activity* (HRF = 64%; LRF = 30%) to cope, while the LRF group most frequently reported *Maintaining Sport/Competitor Identity* (LRF = 45%; HRF = 44%). *Career Focus* was the second most common coping method for the LRF group (35%) and the third for the HRF group (48%).

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Discussion

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This study was the first qualitative investigation of the sport transition experiences of former intercollegiate athletes with above average athletic identity; it was important to explore

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sport transition experiences in more depth, since past research indicated that athletes with higher athletic identity have difficulty with sport transition (e.g., Murphy & Petitpas, 1996). Lastly, this is the first study to compare transition experiences between HRF (Christian) and LRF athletes.

A novel feature of this study was the recruitment of athletes with above average athletic identity. The participants' AIMS scores in the present study indicate that the sample potentially had higher athletic identity than past samples. In the current study, female and male athletes' average AIMS scores were 53.53 and 54.05, respectively. In a previous study, Division I female participants' average AIMS score was 42.94 and male participants' average was 44.23, additionally Division III women scored a 40.55 on average, and men scored an average of 46.57 (Gill et al., 2013); no statistical differences on gender comparisons were reported by the researchers. Further, the average total AIMS score for the overall sample of current participants was 53.89; in a previous study of 72 retired collegiate athletes, the average AIMS score was 37.5 (Giannone et al., 2017). Additionally, 51 elite athletes had AIMS scores of 46.91 (men) and 45.71 (women) in past survey research (Lamont-Mills & Christensen, 2006). The average AIMS scores from the current study were only potentially lower than one previous study, which included 388 male community college athletes, specifically basketball players ($M = 61$) and football players ($M = 59$; Kissinger et al., 2011). Overall, it appears likely that the current study isolated athletes with above average athletic identity, though statistical comparisons with past samples' averages are needed to state this definitively.

Sport Transition Experiences

The primary purpose of this study was to better understand the sport transition experiences of former intercollegiate athletes with above average athletic identity. The current study's themes of *Emotional Struggles* and *Loss of Sport* were similar to previous studies. For

example, former Division I male basketball and football players reportedly felt lost and anxious after their sport transition (Menke & Germany, 2019) and, for Canadian intercollegiate athletes, anxiety post-retirement was positively related to athletic identity (Giannone et al., 2017). Menke and Germany's (2019) athletes reported similar losses and struggles to the current participants, such as loss of athletic identity, which brought on feelings of loneliness and distress. Similar to the present study, Erpič et al. (2004) found that the most common difficulty 85 former elite Slovenian athletes experienced was missing the athlete lifestyle, which mirrors the current study's finding on *Loss of Sport*. One study that specifically targeted religious athletes was Wilde's (2010) study of former NFL athletes, which had a similar finding to the current study in that some participants reported feeling sad upon retirement. Therefore, athletes with above average athletic identity appear to struggle (emotionally) with losses when their sport career is over, which supports past findings on athletes with varying levels of athletic identity.

According to Schlossberg's (1981) model of adapting to transition and Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of athletic retirement, how an athlete's career ends and the control they have over their retirement may influence their ability to cope. *Unplanned Career Termination* was a difficulty reported by a quarter of current participants. This specific difficulty, which may have been more pronounced for current athletes due to the Covid-19 pandemic, has been reported in past studies on life satisfaction and career-ending injury for 427 former Big 10 basketball/football players (Kleiber et al., 1987) and 93 former athletes from a variety of levels (Webb et al., 1998). In the current study, 18 participants from a variety of intercollegiate levels cited unplanned career termination as a reason for their early exit out of sport. More specifically, Covid-19 abruptly ended some participants' senior seasons; some reported a lack of closure, which may reflect the fact that they did not have control over their sport transition. According to

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), when athletes retire their social support may decrease due to the lack of contact with their coaches or former teammates. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Loss of Sport Relationships* was a common theme in the current study. These losses may have been exacerbated by the pandemic, which required individuals to isolate from others, therefore making it challenging to connect with former teammates in-person.

Regarding the current study's theme of *Time Management* challenges, previous researchers have not identified decreased time demands as a challenge during transition. One explanation for this novel finding is that only athletes with higher-than-average athletic identity were included, so athletes with above average athletic identity may be more invested in their athlete role when competing, thus making the time demands more pronounced because they were accustomed to the athlete role. It is also possible that decreased time demands may have been more challenging during a global pandemic, especially if participants had issues finding work or had an increase in free time because they were unable to spend time outside of their home.

Although the findings in the present study are largely similar to previous findings, the current sample included mostly athletes at the Division III level, which may influence the sport transition experiences. For example, sport time demands could differ depending on the competitive sport level. Thus, intercollegiate athletes of varying levels may have differing amounts of newfound time available after their sport career is over. Also, since many of the participants competed at the Division III level, they were not scholarship athletes, so they may have had more of a focus on the dual role of being a student-athlete compared to athletes competing with athletic scholarships; the dual role of student-athlete may explain why many of the participants reported *Career Focus* as a coping strategy. In addition, most participants in the current sample were women. It seems likely that transition experiences may vary by gender. For

example, Alfermann (2004) found that elite female athletes from various European countries experienced less negative emotions during sport retirement. Also, female athletes may utilize teammate relationships more often than male athletes as a method of coping with stress (Nicholls et al., 2007). Although the current sample often cited relationship losses in their transition experiences, it is possible that these findings might not generalize to athletes of other gender identities. Overall, the current study's findings provide insight on the losses and challenges athletes experience when they transition out of sport. Thus, the present findings provide a strong rationale for preparing athletes to encounter challenges and losses before they graduate.

Coping Strategies

Physical Activity (*n* = 36) coping was noted by many participants in the present study. Similarly, Gill and colleagues (2013) found that higher scores on the AIMS correlated positively with physical activity levels post-retirement in a group of 18 Division I and 31 Division III athletes. Gill's (2013) finding may indicate the importance of encouraging athletes to maintain physical activity beyond their sport to cope, particularly athletes with above average athletic identity. Conversely, half of the current participants coped by focusing on their career after leaving collegiate sport. Interestingly, Lally and Kerr (2005) found that eight collegiate Canadian athletes who knew their sport career end was looming, transitioned their focus to academic and career opportunities. Some participants indicated that lack of employment opportunities and internship experience was a difficulty, which is similar a previous study in which former Big 10 athletes wished they had opportunities to plan their career when they were playing sport (Menke & Germany, 2019). Yet, other current participants found their athletic skills (i.e., time management, organization) beneficial to their career preparation and transition.

Current participants reported an additional coping strategy, *Maintaining Sport/Competitor Identity*, which has not been mentioned in previous studies. Maintaining competitiveness through other activities may provide former athletes with an opportunity to keep their athletic identity and find new ways to challenge themselves without sport. Since most collegiate athletes participated in their sport for approximately eight years, it is not surprising that being a "competitor" became a large portion of who they were and how they may identify. Therefore, it may help to encourage athletes to find new competitive outlets (e.g., recreational sports) to ease their transition, since it appears that multiple participants still valued their athletic identity or enjoyed competing against themselves or others after leaving college sport.

An additional coping strategy mentioned by less than 10 percent of participants was *Religious/Spiritual Strategies* ($n = 7$). According to previous studies, religious faith can be useful for coping with adverse situations (Hammermeister & Peterson, 2001; Perera & Frazier, 2013; Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008), however the present study did not measure or statistically analyze if the Christian HRF group coped better than individuals with LRF. Interestingly, many participants reported toward the end of survey that they utilized prayer during transition, but earlier in the survey when asked broadly how they coped with their transition, less than 10 percent of participants spontaneously indicated using their religious faith to cope; thus, although nearly half of participants used prayer, they may not have thought of it as a coping strategy until prompted by a later question. In Wilde's (2010) qualitative study on religious/spiritual NFL athletes, an interesting finding was that all participants indicated that their religious/spiritual life was an important component of their daily life, which is similar for the Christian HRF group ($n = 25$) in the current study. On the other hand, Wilde (2010) had some contrary findings to the present study, for example 90% of Wilde's (2010) participants did not plan out their career

beforehand, which differs from the *Career Focus* noted by over half of the participants in the present study. An explanation for this difference might be that Division III athletes may know that they will not play sports professionally compared to former NFL athletes who may have focused only on sport as their career. Lastly, some former NFL athletes coped by using substances or alcohol (Wilde, 2010), which was not discussed by any current participants. It seems likely that some participants drank during transition, but perhaps the pandemic led to less substance use because of lack of social time or potentially living at home with parents.

In the present study, only two participants reportedly used therapy to cope with transition. Given the high number of challenges reported by participants, it is surprising that only two participants used therapy to assist their transition. These participants' difficulties may not have reached a clinical level, or the difficulties did, but the participants did not reach out to a professional. It appears likely that few athletes seek formal support from CMPC's or clinical sport psychologists, so coaches and teammates should encourage athletes to seek either psychology services.

Comparison of Thematic Responses by Religious Faith Groups

It is interesting to note that Christian athletes with HRF found physical activity as the most beneficial coping strategy, even more often than using their Christian faith, and that the HRF group reported physical activity twice as frequently as the LRF group. A potential explanation may be that churches were largely closed during the pandemic, so they could not rely on that particular support group. The *Loss of Identity* reported by the HRF group somewhat contradicts social identity theory (Tajfel, 1975). Although the HRF group may have had a religious identity to fall back on when they transitioned away from being a competitive athlete, their responses indicate that they frequently felt a loss of identity and perhaps did not necessarily

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seek out or emphasize their religious identity during their transition. Since zero participants in the LRF group indicated an identity loss, they may have maintained their athletic identity, which may explain why *Maintaining Competitor/Sport Identity* was a common theme in the study. Overall, it appears that the HRF individuals still struggled with their transition. One potential interpretation for why losing teammates may have been challenging for the HRF group is they may have participated in religious activities with their teammates, and therefore their athletic identity and their religious identity may have intersected in a way that led to more difficulty than those without the mixing of the two identities. For instance, Murray and colleagues (2005) found that Division I female softball players stated that prayer was a beneficial way to bring the team together. It is important to note that LRF athletes had been in retirement for an average of approximately 9.5 months compared to the HRF group who had been retired for approximately 12.45 months (women) and 15 months (men). The length of time since transition likely influences participants' responses; in Wilde's (2010) study, the earliest feeling of being fully adjusted from sport retirement was around 12 months, with most of the participants feeling adjusted after 18 months.

Use of Prayer

The third purpose of the study was to determine what purpose prayer serves during sport transition. Two previous studies on prayer found that athletes pray for thankfulness, trust in God, and utilize prayer to cope with stressful situations (i.e., sport transition; Czech & Bullet, 2007; Czech et al., 2004). These themes are consistent with the findings from the present study, specifically that participants utilized *Prayers for Gratitude* and *Prayers to Build Relationship with God*, such as trusting God with their transition. Czech and Bullet (2007) used a quantitative measurement to assess prayer effectiveness and observed prayer meetings, but they did not

utilize qualitative questionnaires to understand the specificity of athletes' reasons to use prayer as a coping strategy. The present study expands understanding of athletes' use of prayer, by clarifying why and how athletes use prayer to cope with a specific stressor. Additionally, Czech and colleagues studied currently competing intercollegiate athletes, which may have influenced the athletes' prayers; many of their athletes cited playing for God as a prominent purpose of their prayer life (e.g., Czech & Bullet, 2007). One unique challenge experienced by current participants was Covid-19, which may have influenced the use of prayer. Specifically, participants may have prayed for guidance and understanding of the global pandemic. Although prayer has not been previously examined thoroughly during sport transition, the current study highlights that many former athletes use prayer to guide their path after their sport career. Since 33 participants used prayer during their transition, CMPCs should recognize that prayer may be an important strategy for Christians, remember to assess clients' use of prayer during conversations about coping, and recommend it to Christian athletes. Though, suggestions for CMPCs cannot be gleaned based on the findings of this study for athletes from other religions.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the current study. First, most of the participants identified as White and Christian, which limits the ability to generalize findings; however, the current study had more women than previous studies, which is a strength. Second, some athletes transitioned before Covid-19, others during Covid-19, which may have affected their sport transition. Third, since the timeline for inclusion in the study was somewhat large (e.g., between 3 months to 24 months since transition), there may have been differences in memory recall between participants. Fourth, the novel method used to group participants into HRF and LRF has not been previously used in the literature, therefore examining its validity is necessary. For

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example, some participants who reported that they used prayer to cope were eliminated from the subgroup analyses due to medium religious faith scores, so the grouping system could have miscategorized participants.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The present study is the first to investigate the sport transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes with above average athletic identity. In addition, this is the first study to compare sport transition experiences between HRF and LRF athletes. The key finding was that former intercollegiate athletes with above average athletic identity at the time of playing, reported losses and difficulties during their sport transition. The most common coping strategy used by current participants, *Physical Activity,* was consistent with previous research (Gill et al., 2013). However, the importance of *Maintaining Sport/Competitor Identity* has not been reported in previous research; this finding represents an important contribution from this study, which may be explained by the focus on athletes with above average athletic identity. Practitioners should consider encouraging athletes with high athletic identity to find new competitive outlets (e.g., recreational sports), so they can maintain their competitive identity after sport transition.

Since several losses and difficulties were mentioned by participants in the present study, it may be beneficial to prepare current athletes for some challenges they may experience during their transition. Hong and Coffee (2018) created a curriculum for practitioners to learn skills, such as time management/goal setting, career/life coaching, and mentoring, to effectively support former athletes during and after career transition. Another suggestion for practitioners is to recommend a few coping mechanisms prior to an athlete's retirement, such as physical activity, finding new competitions or hobbies, or career preparation. Additionally, since Christian athletes with HRF reported more loss of identity and loss of sport relationships, it may be helpful to

encourage HRF Christian athletes to seek religious organizations or former teammates who were also religious during transition. Yet, more research is still needed to support the tentative evidence in the current study that HRF athletes report certain types of losses more frequently than LRF athletes. Further, since many participants indicated *Loss of Sport* as a challenge, athletic departments could provide opportunities for former athletes to be involved with their sport after they transition, such as mentoring current athletes or providing opportunities for athletes to connect annually at events. Lastly, since almost half of the participants in the current study indicated prayer as a coping strategy for their transition, practitioners should ask their athletes about their religiosity and potentially recommend prayer. Importantly, many of the athletes in the present study were Division III women, so these suggestions may be more applicable for that population than other athletes at varying levels and gender identifications.

All in all, the current study provided more in-depth information on identity and transition experiences. Future research should investigate religious faith and transition with a diverse sample, including religious faiths beyond Christianity and perhaps using a differing scale instead of the SCSORF-SF. The SCSORF-SF measures behavioral components of religion (e.g., reading the Bible), versus measuring religious identity or the inner definitions of the self. Additionally, researchers could establish cut-offs on the AIMS to classify athletes with "high athletic identity." Lastly, although the current participants reported what they found to be useful as coping strategies, there were no surveys administered to assess their mental health or well-being. As such, it is unknown if the current participants actually coped well or experienced positive mental health during or after transition. Thus, future researchers could include a mental health scale to identify which coping strategies are used by participants with positive mental health profiles.

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Table 1

Qualitative Coding Structure and Frequency of Themes for General Transition Experiences.

Higher Order Category	Themes	Example Primary Codes
Losses	Loss of sport $n = 31$; HRF = 40%, LRF = 40%	Missing sport lifestyle Missing competition
	Loss of sport relationships $n = 19$; HRF = 35%, LRF = 15%	Missing team atmosphere Missing teammates
	Loss of identity $n = 14$; HRF = 24%, LRF = 0%	Loss of athletic identity Not seen as athlete by friends
	Lack of physical activity $n = 8$; HRF = 12%, LRF = 15%	Miss exercise structure Lack of workout requirements
Difficulties	Unplanned career termination $n = 18$; HRF = 24%, LRF = 25%	Covid-19 Career-ending injury
	Emotional struggles $n = 13$; HRF = 24%, LRF = 20%	Lack of motivation Depression
	Employment challenges $n = 8$; HRF = 8%, LRF = 10%	Lack of opportunities Lack of work experience
	Time management challenges $n = 6$; HRF = 12%, LRF = 15%	Decreased time demands Missing time demands

Note. The *n* value represents the number of participants whose responses included the theme, out of the total sample of 72. The percentages represent the frequency of participants with High Religious Faith (HRF, $n = 25$) and Low Religious Faith (LRF, $n = 20$) whose responses included each theme.

Table 2

Qualitative Coding Structure and Frequency of Coping Strategies Utilized by Participants to Cope with Transition out of Sport.

Higher Order Category	Themes	Example Primary Codes
Filling the void	Career focus $n = 37$; HRF = 48%, LRF = 40%	Employed in sport Coaching
	Physical activity $n = 33$; HRF = 64% LRF = 30%	Exercise autonomy Individualized exercise
	Non-sport/non-religious hobbies $n = 12$; HRF = 20%, LRF = 10%	Focused on new identities Outdoor activities
	Religious/spiritual coping $n = 7$; HRF = 24%, LRF = 0%	Focused on faith Attending church
Managing mental/emotional challenges	Maintaining sport/competitor identity $n = 31$; HRF = 44%, LRF = 45%	Maintaining competitive drive Participating in sport
	Maintaining interpersonal relationships $n = 12$; HRF = 20%, LRF = 10%	Connect with friends Maintain friendships
	Positive interpretation of leaving sport $n = 8$; HRF = 16%, LRF = 10%	Necessary break Fulfilled athletic career
	Therapeutic services $n = 2$; HRF = 4%, LRF = 0%	Attended counseling

Note. The *n* value represents the number of participants whose responses included the theme, out of the total sample of 72. The percentages represent the frequency of participants with High Religious Faith (HRF, $n = 25$) and Low Religious Faith (LRF, $n = 20$) whose responses included each theme.

Table 3

Qualitative Coding Structure and Frequency of Themes regarding Participants' Purpose of Prayer.

Themes	Quotes
Prayers for Direction (*n* = 21)	"I utilized prayer because I felt lost when I ended college and sports. Something that had been such an important and prominent part of my life for years was instantly gone. I felt like I needed help finding what direction to go in life and what my purpose was." (P5)
	"I utilized prayer to help me figure out what I wanted to do professionally to help myself better understand my goals and aspirations." (P9)
Prayers to Build Relationship with God (*n* = 11)	"One day I just invited God to come on my run with me. Since then, I've invited Him on a lot of runs! And I think it's nice to talk to Him since I no longer have teammates that are with me every day and through every good, bad, and painful workout." (P68)
Prayers for Identity (*n* = 8)	"My relationship with Christ is my main identity, so prayer has a daily role in my life. That has been constant for me with sport and after sport." (P3)
Prayers to Experience Inner Peace (*n* = 4)	"Covid 19 ended my collegiate career so I had a lot of moments where I questioned why it happened to me. So I prayed a lot. I would talk to God throughout the day, with friends/family and at night to help me fall asleep. In the end it gave me the peace I needed to make the decision." (P2)
Prayers of Gratitude (*n* = 2)	"I thank God for the opportunity to play and have something that I was passionate about and to be physically able to play it." (P40)

Note. Out of the total sample, 33 participants indicated that they prayed to cope with their transition. Out of the 33 responses coded, 22 were high religious faith participants and 10 were moderate religious faith participants.

Appendix A

Journal of Applied Sport Psychology Submission Guidelines

All parts of the manuscript should be typewritten, double-spaced, with margins of at least one inch on all sides. Articles will be no more than 30 double-spaced pages in length for quantitative submissions and 35 for qualitative submission (including tables, figures and references). They should also include a title page, a 250-word abstract, 50-word lay summary, up to three implications for practice and complete references. Lay summaries should be included after the abstract and key words. Insert a line space after the abstract, and then include a heading (Lay Summary:) and then the lay summary text. Implications for Practice should be included after the lay summary. Insert a line space after the lay summary, and then include a heading (Implications for Practice:) and then finally the text in bullet point format. The title of the manuscript should reappear on the first page of the text. Authors should also supply a shortened version of the title suitable for the running head, not exceeding 50 character spaces. The discussion section of the manuscript should provide suitable attention to the applied implications arising from the findings of the work. Research notes with novel or interesting descriptive quantitative or qualitative data (15 pages including references, tables, figures, 100-word abstract) are welcomed submissions

Manuscripts, including tables, figures and references, should be prepared in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association (Seventh Edition, 2020). Manuscripts which do not adhere to these guidelines will be returned to the authors on submission.

Authors are to avoid the use of sexist, racist, and otherwise offensive language. Where relevant the cultural characteristics of any sample population studied should be described in the participant section of the method. Manuscript copies should be clear and legible and all figures must be camera ready.

General guidance for the preparation and successful submission of academic work in sport and exercise psychology can be found here

Guidelines can be found using the following link:

https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=uasp20&page=instructions

Appendix B

Western Washington University Internal Review Board Notification

WWU Research Compliance

To:	Zachary Willis
Cc:	Jessyca Arthur-Cameselle
Subject:	Modification Application #3991EX20 Approved

Hi Zach,

Your modification for protocol #3991EX20 is approved.

Attached is your approval packet. Please store this packet along with your application for the duration of your research and according to the University's guidelines for document retention.

Please get in touch if you have any questions at any point.

Best,

Stephanie Richey
Research Compliance Officer
Research & Sponsored Programs | Western Washington University
www.wwu.edu/compliance
compliance@wwu.edu
360.650.2146

Office Hours: (Working Remotely) M-F 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Appendix C

Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer et al., 1993)

Please select the number that best reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with each

statement regarding your sport participation.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1. I considered myself an athlete.

2. I had many goals related to sport.

3. Most of my friends were athletes.

4. Sport was the most important part of my life.

5. I spent more time thinking about sport than anything else.

6. I needed to participate in sport to feel good about myself.

7. Other people saw me mainly as an athlete.

8. I felt bad about myself when I did poorly in sport.

9. Sport was the only important thing in my life.

10. I was very depressed if I was injured and could not compete in sport.

Appendix D

Abbreviated Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith (SCSROF; Plante et al., 2002)

Please answer the following questions about religious faith using the scale below. Indicate the level of agreement (or disagreement) for each statement.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I pray daily.

2. I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life.

3. I consider myself active in my faith or church.

4. I enjoy being around others who share my faith.

5. My faith impacts many of my decisions.

Sport Transition Open Ended Survey

Answer the questions with as much detail as possible.

1) Please describe your transition out of playing competitive college sport. In other words,

has it been easy or difficult to transition out of playing organized, competitive college sport?

Explain.

2) What have you done to cope with your transition out of intercollegiate varsity competitive

sport? Coping is defined as changing the way you think or what you do to manage specific

situations and experiences that are challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

3) Have you utilized prayer to cope with your transition out of sport? Yes or No.

    5a. If yes, please explain.

    5b. If no, please explain.

Appendix F

Demographic Information

1. What is your current age?

2. What is your gender identity?

 Male __ Female __ Transgender __ Other __ Prefer not to answer __

3. What ethnicity(s) do you identify with? Check all that apply.

 American Indian or Alaska Native __

 Asian (including Indian subcontinent and Philippines) __

 Black or African American (including Africa and Caribbean) __

 Hispanic or Latino (including Spain) __

 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander __

 White (including Middle Eastern) __

 Other (please specify) _____

 Prefer not to respond __

4. How long has it been since you were out of intercollegiate sport? Example responses

include (3 months; 18 months; or 22 months)?

5. Where did you last compete collegiately?

NCAA Division I __ NCAA Division II __ NCAA Division III __

NAIA Division I __ NAIA Division II __

NJCAA Division I __ NCJAA Division II __ NJCAA Division III __

6. Which varsity level sport(s) did you play at the intercollegiate varsity level? Check all that

apply.

Basketball __ Baseball __ Beach Volleyball __ Bowling __ Competitive Cheer or Dance __

Cross Country __ Equestrian __ Fencing __ Field Hockey __ Football __ Golf __

Gymnastics __ Half Marathon __ Ice Hockey __ Indoor Track and Field __ Lacrosse __

Outdoor Track and Field __ Rifle __ Rowing __ Rugby __ Swimming and Diving __ Skiing

__ Soccer __ Softball __ Tennis __ Other (please explain) __

7. How many years did you participate in your primary sport (sport you participated in most

recently) throughout your playing career?

8. What is your religious/spiritual denomination?

Adventist ___ Agnostic ___ Atheist ___ Baptist ___ Buddhist ___ Catholic ___ Episcopalian

___ Hindu ___ Islam ___ Jewish ___ Lutheran ___   Non-

denominational ___Orthodox ___ Pentecostal ___ Presbyterian ___ Protestant ___ Reformist

____ Sikhist ____ Other ____

9. Which identity was most important to you during your playing career?

athlete identity ___ spiritual/religious identity ___ student identity ___ not one of these three

identities was more important than another _____

none of the above were most important (please explain) _____

Appendix G

INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose and Benefit: The purpose of this research study is to better understand former college athletes' experiences of transitioning out of college athletics. Additionally, a primary purpose is to better understand how athletes cope with the transition out of sport, specifically what coping mechanisms they use during transition, such as spiritual or religious practices. There are no direct personal benefits from completing this study; however, my participation can further the knowledge of intercollegiate athletes' ability to cope with transition out of sport.

Summary of your Participation: If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete two brief numeric response surveys, answer some open ended-questions, and fill out a demographics questionnaire. Two example questions from the numeric surveys are: "I considered myself an athlete," and "Sport was the most important part of my life." The demographics questionnaire will ask for information such as my age and what sport I participate in. Your participation will take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. While there are no expected risks to participating, some questions may cause me some discomfort.

REGARDING MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY, I UNDERSTAND THAT:

1) To participate, I must be over 18 years old.

2) To participate, I must be a former NCAA, NAIA, or NJCAA varsity athlete.

3) My participation and information will remain **confidential**.

4) I have the option of entering my name at the end of this survey to be included in a raffle for three 25$ Amazon gift card.

5) My participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw from participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

6) If I want a copy of this consent form, I can print this page or contact the researcher at willisz@wwu.edu.

This research is being conducted by Zach Willis, a Master's student at Western Washington University, under the supervision of Dr. Jessyca Arthur-Cameselle. Any questions that you have about this study or your participation may be directed to Zach at willisz@wwu.edu.

The Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC) at Western Washington University has approved this study. If you have any questions about your participation or your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Western Washington University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) at compliance@wwu.edu (360) 650- 2146. If during or after participation in this study you suffer from any adverse effects as a result of participation, please notify the researcher directing the study or the WWU HSRC.

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*** **By clicking on this box to continue the survey, I indicate that I have read the above description, I am 18 years of age or older, and I agree to participate in this study.**

Appendix H

Inclusion Criteria

Check the box next to each of the following to indicate whether or not it applies to you.

1. Are you at least 18 years old?

   a. Yes

   b. No (automatically sent to thank you page)

2. Did you participate in a varsity intercollegiate sport (e.g., NCAA, NJCCA, NAIA)?

   a. Yes

   b. No (automatically sent to thank you page)

3. Are you still participating in intercollegiate sport (e.g., NCAA, NJCCA, NAIA)?

   a. Yes (automatically sent to thank you page)

   b. No

4. Have you been out of intercollegiate sport (i.e, graduated or left the university) for over 24 months?

   a. Yes (automatically sent to thank you page)

   b. No

Appendix I

Contact Email

Hello Coach ____,

My name is Zach Willis and I am current graduate student in the Sport and Exercise Psychology Master's program at Western Washington University. I am also a former collegiate football player. I am conducting a study for my master's thesis project to better understand intercollegiate athletes' identities and their transition out of collegiate sport. For my study, I am recruiting former collegiate athletes who either graduated or left the university anytime during 2019 or 2020 to complete my **online anonymous survey.**

I would appreciate it if you will forward this email to former student-athletes who left your university or graduated in 2019 or 2020. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and will take 15-20 minutes to answer questionnaires about identity, and their transition out of collegiate sport.

Lastly, would you also be willing to forward this email to other intercollegiate coaches or other college athletic personnel to send to their former athletes?

If you are interested in the results of my study, you may contact me. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me. I appreciate your time!

Here is a link to the study:

Sincerely,

Zach Willis

willisz@wwu.edu

Appendix J
Social Media Text

If you are a former intercollegiate, varsity athlete who graduated or left your university during 2019 or 2020, I would appreciate it if you would complete my 15-20 minute online survey. I am a former collegiate athlete and now, a graduate student in Sport Psychology at Western Washington University. The purpose of my study is to better understand intercollegiate athletes' identities and their transition out of collegiate sport. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous (e.g., I will not ask for your name or the name of your former university/college). After the survey, you have the option to enter your email on a separate survey to be entered into a raffle for one of three 25$ Amazon gift cards. Here is a link to the study: