

“OFF THE FIELD”: A MIXED METHODS STUDY EXPLORING IDENTITY STATUS AND  
ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

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## ABSTRACT

### “OFF THE FIELD”: A MIXED METHODS STUDY EXPLORING IDENTITY STATUS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

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Many athletes have difficulty transitioning out of sport. Identity foreclosure (high commitment to an ideology or vocation with little exploration of other roles and options) has been shown to have a negative relationship with career transition. This study investigated the identity status of former Division I football players and its relationship salient psychosocial factors (athletic identity, stereotype threat, and social support). A concurrent embedded mixed methods design was used with priority given to the qualitative data. Using Marcia's (1966) identity development theory and the scoring guide of Marcia and Archer (1993), this study also ascertained the current identity status of the participants and examined their career transition out of sport. Six former Division I athletes from the university were recruited. It was found that social support had a strong relationship with identity status. Those in Identity Achievement (high commitment/presence of exploration) had the smoothest transition, while those in Moratorium (low commitment/high exploration) had a more challenging path. Those in Diffusion (low commitment/low exploration) experienced a passive transition out of sport. Management styles of role conflict had a strong relationship with identity status, and lastly, stereotype threat had a small relationship with role conflict by means of attachment to athletic identity.

This thesis is dedicated to my mom. You helped transform me from the little girl who did not like to read to the graduate student who completed a master's thesis.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Transition out of sport is a reality that all athletes must eventually face. Compared to other retirements, athletic retirement is different because it usually occurs at a young age. Over the past 30 years, athletic career transition and potential predictors related to transition (e.g., athletic identity, retirement decision) have been a much-studied topic. To summarize the available research, Park, Lavallee and Tod (2013) conducted a systemic review of study on transition out of sport. The review consisted of over 120 studies that took place between the years of 1968 and 2010, with a sample of over 13,511 participants who played various sports, attained a variety of degree levels and grades. Many participants reported or described some form of transition difficulties. Thirty-five studies that investigated athletic identity and identity foreclosure (high commitment/low exploration) reported negative associations with career transition. This shows that identity foreclosure and career transition are pervasive issues among athletes (Park et al., 2013).

Transition out of sport is different than many other career transitions as there is a wider variety of ways it can occur. From aging out of sport to retirement - forced or voluntary - transition out of sport may be a difficult process due to the amount of time the average athlete dedicates and invests in their sport. An elite athlete has dedicated approximately 8-12 years of their life to reach that status (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Naturally, with so many years dedicated to one domain, an athlete would develop an athletic identity.

Having an identity helps answer the question “Who am I” (Guardia, 2009). Identity is not something that is decided overnight, this is a dynamic process that spans across an individual’s lifetime. For children, identity forms around defined roles, interests, and the option

to explore those interests and the initial competencies. In continuation from childhood, identity formation in adolescence centers on what vocation an adolescent may choose.

Erikson (1968), a developmental psychologist, proposed that during adolescence the main psychosocial task is to form an identity. It is in this stage of life that an individual faces the developmental conflict of identity versus role confusion. An individual is working to find a sense of self, and how this role fits within larger society. Since Erikson's original work on identity, cultural shifts have occurred: more people are attending college than when he first published his theory, and there has been a delay in marriages and parenthood. Due to the cultural shifts, what Erikson would deem the developmental task of adolescence many now be thought of as the developmental issue occurring in emerging adulthood. Between the ages of 18 and 25, emerging adulthood is a phase in development where the individual does not completely identify as an adolescent or as an adult (Arnett, 2000). This phase coincides with the typical age of a college student and illuminates the developmental issues that many traditional students and student athletes face.

Following Erikson's identity work and expanding upon it, Marcia (1966) came out with his well-known spectrum of identity statuses. Marcia defines identity as "a self-structure – and internal self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives abilities, beliefs and individual history" (Marcia, 1980, p. 109). He recognized that identity formation is multi-faceted process that typically occurs around adolescence. Adolescence when the development of an individual's cognitive, behavioral and social skills are all developed enough to first come together and allow for identity formation to occur (Marcia, 1980). Marcia's theory recognizes four identity statuses: Identity Achievement (high commitment/high exploration), Identity Moratorium (low commitment/high exploration), Identity Diffusion (low commitment/low exploration), and

Identity Foreclosure (high commitment/ low exploration) . These are the statuses in which one can be categorized while in the identity formation process. Each phase is hallmarked by the level of commitment and the level of exploration. Of the four identity statuses, Identity Foreclosure has been shown most often to have the most negative relationship with career transition (Park et al., 2013)

As mentioned previously, identity formation is not a finite process. An individual will take on an identity status as a means of dealing with identity issues. Identity formation does not occur with one big decision but over multiple and repetitive small decisions that are made along the way (Marcia, 1980). College has become a time in young adults' lives where identity development and growth occur (Waterman, 1985). College-aged individuals have more freedom and are making more life decisions. Figuring out where one feels one can be oneself and where one best fits into society drives these decisions.

As an individual interacts with society and society interacts with the individual, a person begins to develop a social identity. Role identities allows one to determine where one fits inside a social structure, working to answer the questions “Who am I?” and “Where are others like me?” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stryker, 1980). With an individual's role being externally based and his or her identity being internally based, a social structure and connectedness helps play a part in increasing the salience of an identity. For student-athletes, often their athletic identity is the one reinforced by society the most often, making it one of their more developed identities. The overdevelopment of the athletic identity may also be partly due to the individual coping with their role conflicts (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996).

Role conflict can occur due to commitments, forcing individuals to make decisions, thus bringing about identity competition. Student athletes have the unique challenge of being both a scholar and an athlete at their university. Both ventures are demanding on their own and taken together, the roles are not always compatible. Many student-athletes feel that they do not have time to explore their other identities outside of athletics which can, down the line, lead to greater role conflicts (Murphy et al., 1996). Chartrand and Lent (1987) proposed that student-athletes may believe that in order to succeed in sport they need to narrowly focus on that domain. By focusing only on their athletic role they neglect other domains to explore and they leave themselves more at risk to be identity foreclosed. In athletics, identity foreclosure on an athletic career is particularly harmful when the chances of becoming a professional are small, and the rate of deselection is high. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016; Stryker & Burke, 2000)..

Social identities can help people figure out where they fit in, but they can also make individuals susceptible to stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is where an individual underperforms after being primed for their stereotype. This phenomenon was first discovered by Steele and Aronson (1995) when African Americans were underperforming on math tests when their Caucasian peers were in the room, but they performed normally when there were only African Americans in the room. Since then, stereotype threat research has shown that stereotype threat also negatively affects Caucasian athletes in sports, and negatively affects student athletes in academics. (Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005) To be susceptible to stereotype threat one must have a social identity related to the stereotype. How much a person is susceptible to stereotype threat depends on the identity salience. This can become an issue as it relates to athletic identity and student athletes

faced with the “dumb jock” stereotype at their university. (Stone et al., 2012). If a person does not identify with that social identity, they will not be primed for the stereotype. If the person has two identities that relate to the stereotype, one identity may be stronger in certain situations (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). Exposure to stereotype threat can influence one’s disengagement from the domain and if exposure is prolonged, it can lead to disidentification. Student-athletes facing the “dumb jock” stereotype may disengage from academics as a defense mechanism. The defense mechanism prevents an individual from exploring a domain they might have otherwise considered (Woodcock, Hernandez, Estrada, & Schultz, 2012).

Currently in the United States, there are approximately eight million students who participate in high school athletics (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). The number participating at the college level dramatically decreases. There are approximately 482,533 student-athletes participating in NCAA championship sports from the Division I level to the Division III level (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015a). More specifically, in the 2014-2015 school year there were 72,788 NCAA football players, and of that number 16,175 were draft eligible. The 2015 NFL draft had 256 draft picks. Of draft eligible players, 1.6% were called upon by an NFL team. Despite these discouraging odds, 64 % of football bowl subdivision (FBS) football players think it is likely or somewhat likely they will have a professional sports career. Compared to last year, this statistic is up by 5% or more (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015a, 2016). The majority of college football players will need to “go pro” in a different area.

A large portion of research has focused on the athlete’s career transition out of sport. Consensus from the systemic review conducted by Park, Lavalley and Tod (2013) showed that many athletes faced difficulty transitioning. Since athletic retirement occurs at a younger age

than normal retirement, many athletes find this to be a challenging adjustment. They still need to find another career. The athletes who can acknowledge their retirement from sport begin to explore other roles and acquire other skills. They reduce their athletic identity and report a smoother transition compared to the individuals who cling to the role of athlete (Petrie, Deiters, & Harmison, 2014).

The culture of athletics is geared towards an attitude of “rugged individualism” – a thought process that one should be able to help oneself out, leading towards a disinclination to ask for help (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). However, those who ask for assistance expand their circle of social support and make a smoother transition out of sport (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Petrie et al., 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Identity foreclosure can make career transition difficult, especially in the realm of athletics where ultimately every athlete must transition out of sport. If more detailed information as to why athletes become identity foreclosed could be revealed and shared, groups within the school or organization could help in vocation and identity exploration. This would provide the athlete with a larger support structure.

Although there has been much individual research on athletic identity, stereotype threat, social support and identity foreclosure, there is a lack of research describing the relationship of all these factors together. There is also a lack of research exploring the other identity statuses and their relationship to career transition.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of the study was to explore how psychosocial factors such as athletic identity, susceptibility to stereotype threat, and perceived social support relate to Identity

foreclosure and other identity statuses. The secondary objective of the study was to explore the identity status of athletes in career transition and to understand how identity status is related to the athletes' career transition.

### **Research Questions**

1. What relationship does athletic identity, stereotype threat, or social support have to identity status?
  - a. What are the similarities and differences of those in different identity statuses, regarding the psychosocial factors?
2. How has identity status impacted the athlete's career transition out of sport?

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The primary objective of this thesis was to investigate psychosocial factors and their relation to identity status in former football players. The secondary objective was to explore how identity status was associated with career transition for these football players. The first part of the chapter details identity and the major theorists behind identity formation and identity status. In addition, the section elaborates on the developmental conflict college-aged individuals face regarding identity formation. The second part of the chapter discusses athletic identity, the third part explores stereotype threat, the fourth part discusses social support. Lastly, the fifth part of the chapter details primary prevention for athletes.

#### **Identity**

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are a transitional period of life. This developmental stage of life brings physical changes and many mental changes. The individual begins to increase their independence. There is an increase in the exploration of future vocations and an examination into an individual's belief system and ideologies (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968).

**Identity Development.** Eric Erikson, a developmental psychologist, constructed one of the most well-known theories on psychosocial development. He said that in adolescence, the main psychosocial developmental task is identity formation. Adolescence is the first time in which the individual has developed the necessary physical, psychological and social skills to undergo an identity crisis. In an identity crisis, an individual reconciles their childhood identifications with their societal responsibilities. Adolescence is the time where individuals are faced with the issue of identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966).

Erikson's (1968) work does not put a specific age on adolescence and notes that certain societies have a prolonged adolescence due to changes in technologies and science. Currently,



many people are delaying marriages, delaying parenthood and higher numbers of people are attending college. Emerging adulthood, 18-25, appears to be the new term for prolonged adolescence. The individual is typically leaving or has left the house for the first time. He or she has more opportunities for identity exploration. Identity formation is not an immediate process, but a dynamic process that consists of multiple and repetitive small decisions over time. Often, an individual will not reach identity achievement by the time they finish high school (Arnett, 2000; Marcia, 1980).

**Identity Status.** Another influential contributor to the identity literature was developmental psychologist, James Marcia. In continuation and expansion of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, Marcia (1966) proposed that in the process of identity development, an individual could be categorized into one of four identity statuses (see Figure 1). These statuses are not stages in which there is a sequential process. An individual can shift from one status to another, depending on life events.

*Identity Diffusion* is the stage in which a crisis may or may not be present, but the individual has little to no commitment to an ideology or vocation. Erikson describes a crisis as a time where an individual is trying to create and forge their adulthood identity while reconciling it with the ideals from his or her childhood. This creates an inner conflict (Erikson, 1968). The individual in diffusion may have a preferred occupation in mind but has not done much exploration into the vocation and would be willing to abandon the idea if a better opportunity arose. *Identity Foreclosure* is where there is no exploration of vocations and/or ideologies, but the individual has committed to both. This individual does not undergo a crisis. *Identity Moratorium* is where the individual is experiencing a crisis and actively struggles to make a commitment. This stage can be overwhelming for the individual. Lastly, *Identity Achievement*

describes an individual who has experienced a crisis and, as a result of that experience, has committed to a vocation and/or an ideology. At some point, there was exploration of other options and a decision was made on the individual's own terms. Ultimately, the end goal is to become identity achieved (Marcia, 1966). Identity foreclosure centered on athletics can be particularly hazardous as there are only rare opportunities to achieve professional status (i.e., to “go pro”).

Figure 1: Identity Statuses

		High	Low
Commitment	High	Identity Achievement	Identity Foreclosure
	Low	Identity Moratorium	Identity Diffusion
		Exploration	

**Identity Foreclosure.** Identity foreclosure is where an individual has a high-level of commitment to an ideology or vocation, but has done no exploration. Student-athletes of revenue producing sports are particularly susceptible to it (Park et al., 2013). Student-athletes, although a unique population, share many things in common with the groups of students studying the Fine Arts. For example, both must commit an extensive number of hours to practice. In the Linnemeyer and Brown (2010) study, they saw that Fine Arts students committed 28 hours to fine art and fine art activities and the athletes committed 21 hours to sports and athletic activities. Even though both populations have a high commitment to their chosen discipline, the student athletes were found to have had higher numbers of identity foreclosure compared to both Fine Arts students and general students. Students in non-revenue producing sports do not have traditional ways of pursuing athletics professionally and, therefore, may be more likely to

explore other career options. If an athlete does not explore other options, this leaves them at a disadvantage. If an athlete's athletic career does not result in being a professional and they did not develop their identities and roles outside of athletics, they may be hindered when it comes to joining the more traditional work force (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010).

If an individual accepts that they will retire from sport, decreasing athletic identity can help in the transition and protect an individual from a crisis. Many athletes who can predict retirement from sport begin to explore other roles and acquire additional skills. In turn, they report a smoother transition compared to the individuals who insist on clinging to the role of athlete (Petrie, Deiters, & Harmison, 2014). One can decrease the prominence of their athletic identity by mentally distancing themselves from the sport and reminding one's self that they will retire soon. This can be thought of as disengagement. Diversifying their focus provides the individual time for role exploration and experimentation. This could help reduce identity foreclosure, which is mainly caused by the inhibited exploration (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993; Lally, 2007; Miller & Kerr, 2003).

**Role Conflict.** For most students, their time in college is when a large amount of identity changes occurs. Even within the college-aged group, it has been seen that upper classmen males have a stronger sense of their personal identity compared to the freshman males (Waterman, 1982). College is one of the more dynamic time periods in identity formation and the college athletes have multiple roles – as scholar and as athlete – to consider in the identity formation. The process of further identity formation can be complex. Sometimes, the competing commitment of the roles can lead to delayed role formation (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Murphy et al., 1996).

The Lifespan Model of Athletic Development of Wylleman and LeValle (2004) suggests that as an athlete is entering the mastery stage of their athletic development, they are also entering the higher education stage of the academic/vocational development. For many, the roles of student and athlete have led to role conflict due to the different demands of each role. Some athletes compensate for their role conflict by over-identifying with their athletic role, thus reducing identity competition. Other athletes do not have the time to fully explore their identities outside of their athletic identity (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Murphy et al., 1996; Stryker & Burke, 2000). This lack of exploration makes the athletic level transition from mastery to discontinuation and the academic/vocational transition from higher education to professional occupation harder. (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Lally, 2007; Park et al., 2013; Petitpas, 1978).

Guardia (2009) discusses identity in terms of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). There are three basic psychological needs in SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Garcia suggested that people are more likely to explore areas that fulfill their needs in each category, and avoid opportunities that do not. Environment plays a major role in what needs are satisfied and how, which then plays a major role in the structuring of identity. Thus, one's environment offers another explanation to the overdevelopment of the athletic role and the neglect of the academic role.

### **Athletic Identity**

Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) and colleagues define athletic identity as “the degree to which an individual athlete identifies with the athletic role” (p. 237). Athletic identity is used to add to their concept of self. They may use their athletic identity to evaluate their competencies. Like other identities, athletic identity is developed through an individual's

interaction with their environment and their ability to acquire certain skills. If an individual has a high athletic identity it means that they cognitively, affectively, behaviorally and socially identify in this athletic way (Brewer et al., 1993). An elite athlete has dedicated approximately 8-12 years of focused training to reach that status. It would be natural for many athletes to have a high athletic identity (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Having a high athletic identity in itself is not an issue. However, athletes with higher athletic identities may over-identify with that role and create a role conflict (Miller & Kerr, 2003). Student-athletes may be unable to properly split their time between the two roles, which creates a lack of balance (Chartrand & Lent, 1987). In their early university years, some athletes feel as though they need to spend more time in their athletic domain to reach their goals, which costs them other role development and exploration (Miller & Kerr, 2003).

Regarding time commitment, athletics can easily become a significant part of an individual's identity. When asked to self-report, 87% of baseball, 80% of men's basketball, 79% of FBS football, and 78% of women's sports excluding basketball reported having a high athletic identity (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010). The NCAA report coincides with Brewer's (1993) findings that student-athletes have a high prevalence of high athletic identity and among student athletes, males seem to have higher instances of athletic identity. For many student-athletes, their years in college are not followed by a career as professional athlete. This creates a forced retirement from the sport and requires an individual to reevaluate their identity (Beamon, 2012). Many times, individuals can choose a prominent identity by which others mainly view them. This dominant identity can be helpful when trying to achieve a certain status in one's dominant role, but comes at a cost of a lack of exploration into other roles. Compared to

football and basketball, other sports reported a lower amount of hours spent per week on athletics (Lally, 2007; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015b).

Transitioning out of sport also forces athletes to redefine themselves and restructure their identity. Identity does not only consist of who/what someone is but also contains social identity. Many people have self and social identities that contain multiple roles, so when a change occurs to one they do not lose a sense of who they are and are more capable to cope with the loss or decrease in that identity. For athletes, identity foreclosure begins earlier and their athletic self-identity is reinforced by their environment (friends, teammates and coaches). Some students derive a sense of security in their athletic identity and, because of this secure feeling, they are not inclined to explore other possibilities (Beamon, 2012).

Beamon (2012) investigated athletic identity salience and athletic identity foreclosure through ethnographic interviews. She grounded her study by using identity foreclosure as a theoretical framework. The participants were retired African American athletes between the ages of 22 and 47. The majority of the group was in their 20s. During the interviews, the participants expressed that some people only know how to communicate with them through athletics. They mentioned their athletic identity being a significant part of their life, because it was always brought up by others. Thus, athletics was both a self-identity and a social identity. Many participants mentioned their race as a reason for their current athletic identity, falling into the stereotype that African American males must be athletic and play sports well. For many of the study's participants, because their athletic identity was reinforced more than any other identity, they did not explore other options despite having other talents and they foreclosed on the athletic identity. Thus, their athletic identity became the most salient. Even after retirement from sport, many of the individuals in the study remained foreclosed.

In American society, a high value is placed on sports. This can partially be attributed to the fact that many people begin their involvement in sports at a young age and sport helps shape the identity of many individuals. For certain individuals, sports had a direct impact on their childhood. There was not much free time to have the typical adolescent experience due to intense dedication to their sport in hopes of becoming a master athlete (Danish et al., 1993). Issues related to athletic identity are not just an American issue, even though some may be exacerbated by American culture (which places high value on sports and sport involvement).

**Measuring Athletic Identity.** Grove, Lavalley and Gordon (1997) looked at former elite Australian athletes. Athletic identity was strongly positively correlated with emotional adjustments and social adjustment in athletic retirement. The score on the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) had a positive correlation with career exploration/decision making. In other words, the higher someone's athletic identity, the more career/decision-making anxiety they had for retirement. Athletic identity was negatively correlated with career planning pre-retirement. The researchers found that if the athlete had a strong athletic identity at the time of retirement there was a positive correlation with venting of their emotions, behavioral disengagement, and denial. Those who scored high on the AIMS scale also were found to suppress competing activities and seek emotional social support more than their counterparts who scored lower on the AIMS scale. The Grove et al. study suggests that people who maintain a strong athletic identity at the time of retirement may be more susceptible to career transition problems.

This can be contrasted to a Canadian culture that does not put as much emphasis on collegiate sport. Miller and Kerr (2003) looked at athletic identity at a university in Canada. In Canada, the researchers report that college athletic events do not draw nearly as big of a crowd as

American college sports. Athletic scholarships are dramatically smaller than those provided to student-athletes in America. The researchers discovered three main areas of time investments for the student-athletes: academic, athletic and social. Many of the participants said that early in their college career, they were heavily involved with their athletic role and had a difficult time committing to their academic responsibilities. The researchers called this over-identification with the athletic role. In the middle of their collegiate career, the athletes went through what the researchers called “delayed role experimentation”. By the time the student was in the late phase of their collegiate career, the domain in which they concentrated their effort changed. Later in their college career, there was a shift in focus from the athletic domain to more attention to the academic career. This shift in domains could also be viewed as a way to protect the identity as Lally (2007) previously mentioned. When athletes can foresee their athletic retirement, some may distance themselves from their athletic identity in order to avoid a crisis. The Miller and Kerr (2003) study highlights the need for cross-cultural studies of the impact of athletic identity.

### **Susceptibility to Stereotype Threat**

Stereotype threat is “the resulting sense that one can then be judged or treated in terms of the stereotype or that one might do something that would inadvertently confirm it.” (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002, p. 389). Taking notice of the underperformance phenomenon, Steele and Aronson (1995) conducted a study at Stanford University to look at what is now called stereotype threat. They found that even when controlling for SAT score difference, the African American participants would underperform on an academic task, when the task was presented as a way to measure the individual’s abilities. However, when the individual was not put in an “intelligence diagnostic condition”, the performance of African Americans was almost the same as the performance of Caucasians.



A main feature of stereotype threat is that it is a situational threat. It arises from cues in the environment that bring awareness (conscious or subconscious) to one's social identity. The cues from the environment alone will not typically cause stereotype threat. Stereotype threat can also happen to any group of people because all groups of people have a negative stereotype attached to them. To experience stereotype threat one must care about the domain being tested (Steele et al., 2002). The threat can occur when the individual is placed in a situation where a stereotype might be salient. Lastly, an important feature of stereotype threat is the nature of the threat. How does one perceive negative outcomes by confirming the stereotype? Because the nature of the threat can change depending on the circumstances, the stereotype may apply in one situation but have no bearing in another (Steele et al., 2002).

Following the Steele (1995) study, multiple researchers have replicated the study in different settings and the results of stereotype threat appear to be generalizable. It is not only minorities who can be impacted by stereotype threat. Steele (2002) found that when presented with a math test and told the purpose of the test was to see if Asians had superior math skills, Caucasian males underperformed. The Caucasian males were put in the shadow of the positive stereotype of Asians having superior math skills. Secondly, stereotype threat is not only seen in academic settings. Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, and Darley (1999) found out that it could also be seen in sport. Using a golf task, Stone et al. found that framing the task as a measure of sport intelligence caused the African American participants to underperform compared to their Caucasian counterparts. When the task was framed as a measure of natural athletic ability, the Caucasian participants were the ones to underperform. When primed for an identity or a negative stereotype, the target group is known to underperform (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone et al.,

2012, 1999). This is especially important to note when examining minority athletes who are faced with more than one identity.

Social identity plays a role to the degree that stereotype threat impacts a person. By identifying with a group, one expects to be perceived as part of the group (Steele et al., 2002). In many people, it is possible to have multiple roles and different social identities. Depending on which identity is more salient to the individual, the impact of stereotype threat can be changed. Shih, Pittinsky and Ambady (1999) tested whether stereotype threat would occur in Asian women. Asians have been generalized to have superior mathematical skills, while women have been generalized to be poor in math. In this situation, the stereotypes for the two identities contradict each other. The author found out that a manipulation in identity salience caused a change in performance, with the Asian identity prime performing the best, and the woman prime causing an underperformance. A similar trend in results was found when looking at student-athletes. The identity of student has a more positive association when looking at performance on an academic task compared to the negative stereotypes associated with athletes and academic performance. In Yopyk and Prentice (2005), the data suggests that the student athlete's identity is task-dependent. The student hat was worn during a math test, thus the scores were good. When looking at the scores of general and academic self-regard, the athlete hat was worn and the same student scored lower. The salience of the identities is not static and can change within one task.

Some athletes' social identity is more complex than others, and therefore there are multiple roles within their identities. In NCAA collegiate athletics, African Americans comprise the largest minority group (Stone et al., 2012). African Americans are faced with a racial stereotype to combat in addition to the "dumb-jock" stereotype. Traditional African American students are already more at risk for stereotype threat than others. In Stone et al. (2012), the

participants were primed for: athletic identity only, scholar-athlete identity, or neutral identity. The researchers looked at both academically engaged and academically disengaged athletes. African American student athletes who were academically engaged experienced stereotype threat when primed for their athletic identity. The impairment on the task, answering SAT and GRE verbal questions, was worse when the task was difficult. When primed with the identity of “scholar-athlete”, the athletes had impaired performance on both easy and difficult tasks. In both conditions, impairment was experienced; however, the severity of the impairment was worse in the scholar athlete prime. The academically disengaged African American athletes did not have a significant interaction between the identity prime, race and the test (Stone et al., 2012).

**Stereotype Threat Effects.** Stereotype threat can have both short and long-term effects. Short term defenses include: domain avoidance, self-handicapping, disproving the stereotype, and disengagement from the stereotyped domain. The long term defenses or adaptations to stereotype threat include: disidentification and identity bifurcation. Disengagement consists more withdrawal from the domain that can later lead to disidentification in which an individual does not put effort into the stereotyped domain that was a formally valued social identity. With disidentification, the individual may also resist development of that domain at a later time. Identity bifurcation is where the individual selectively deidentifies with an aspect of their social group that can be linked to the negative stereotype. (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004; Steele et al., 2002; Woodcock et al., 2012). People are more likely to explore areas that fulfill their needs in each category and avoid opportunities that do not (Guardia, 2009). Stereotype threat could cause an athlete to not explore a domain, which could hinder role experimentation and exploration. Athletes are already prone to delayed role exploration and have shown higher instances of

identity foreclosure. Stereotype threat could compound these things. (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2003)

### **Social Support**

Definitions of social support vary among researchers which makes it a vague topic. The lack of consensus is a common complaint in the research. Cohen and Syme define social support as “resources provided by other persons” (1985, p. 4). Cobb (1976) defines it as belonging and feeling valued and cared for. House (1981) expands his definition to describe four types of social support: Emotional (empathy), instrumental (tangible), informational (advice and suggestions), and appraisal (self-evaluation).

In the beginning of the lifespan, an infant is dependent on their parents or caregivers to meet their needs. Family relationships help lay the foundation for identity formation, as young children age from childhood through adolescence, their social networks expand. Peer social support becomes equally important as those family relationships. In early adolescence, both parental and peer support can be predictor of identity status. During this time period, social support also has been shown to aid in positive adjustment. (DuBois et al., 2002; Hall & Brassard, 2008; Para, 2008).

The quality of an athlete’s relationships can impact their transition to the next stage. Shifting social networks and loss of contact with former support structures could promote isolation. An athlete’s support structure is largely determined by the stage of their athletic career. Although parents mainly remain a constant in the support structure, many athletes face the loss of contact with their coaches and former teammates. (Park et al., 2013; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Stressful or threatening events in life have been known to cause an impact on health, both physiological and psychological. Social support has been found to buffer the effects of stress. The data found by a literature review empirically supports the Buffering Hypothesis. The Buffering Hypothesis describes the process by which an individual is protected or “buffered” from the effects of stress by social support. In addition to the Buffering Hypothesis, there is support for the Main Effect Hypothesis where social support, regardless of stress factors, increases well-being (Cohen & Syme, 1985; Cohen & Wills, 1985). In addition to discussing the role of social support, it is almost as important to look at perceived social support, the degree to which an individual believes their needs of support are being met. Who gives the support, the type of support, how well it is received and timing of the support may be context-dependent. If an individual does not perceive that they have the necessary social network to support them, they will not be able to utilize them as effectively (Cohen & Syme, 1985; Procidano & Heller, 1983).

From the functionalist perspective, the purpose and primary function of social networks is to provide social support and comfort to the individual (Procidano & Heller, 1983). Social support in its meaning can change throughout the lifespan. In individuals who are foreclosed, familial social support may be more weighted, or the only form of social support. Peers can offer diverse viewpoints. These different viewpoints can foster exploration or reinforce ideas. For example, an individual in identity diffusion may move towards moratorium, or an individual who is identity foreclosed may only associate with those who reinforce their foreclosed behaviors (Para, 2008). Athletes who have relied heavily on their athletic skills and whose social environment has reinforced this behavior can develop a sense of entitlement. Due to this behavior reinforcement, they are less likely to develop or seek to develop other skills (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988). The high time demands of athletics inadvertently caused a divide between

student-athletes and traditional students. As a result of this, many athletes' social networks are composed mainly of other athletes (Martens & Lee, 1998).

### **Primary Prevention**

When working with athletes, primary prevention might be useful. Primary prevention involves a potential issue being discussed or approached beforehand in order to prevent problems before they can arise. Transition in sport is a major concern. It is not only age that leads someone to discontinue playing sports. Reasons such as injury, illness, and loss of position on team can contribute to discontinuation of sport. For athletes who have dreams of a professional career in sport, much of their time is committed to making this goal a reality. Activities such as career planning and education may become a lower priority. In order to avoid identity foreclosure one needs to explore other vocations and careers (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The study used a mixed method design to investigate the relationship of athletic identity, stereotype threat and social support to the identity status of former Division I collegiate football players. The secondary purpose of the study was to explore and ascertain identity status of the participants and examine how identity status affected career transition out of sport. A purposeful sample of former Division I football players was used. This chapter details the research design, participants, material, procedure, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

#### **Research Design**

The study employed a mixed methods design. A mixed method design consists of using qualitative and quantitative data to gain a more elaborate or broader perspective on the data collected (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Having both qualitative and quantitative data offsets the weakness of using one type of data alone. One set of data can enhance the other set of data. The types of data together will help elaborate on the phenomenon and they might provide clarification (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). More specifically, the participants participated in a concurrent embedded design. In the concurrent embedded design, as the name suggests, qualitative and quantitative data were collected within the same timeframe or phase of the study. There is unequal priority in the strands of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). This study used QUAL(Quan), which denotes the qualitative data had a higher priority and the quantitative data was embedded in the design. The quantitative strand provided supplemental data to the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews. The survey data was used to help expand on the results from the

qualitative strand. Data was integrated during the interpretation phase. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

**Theoretical Framework and Epistemologies.** This study examined the relationship psychosocial factors may have had with identity status and how identity status relates to career transition. It is not uncommon for multiple frameworks to be used in a mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Guiding the design of this study was Marcia's (1966) identity formation process and identity statuses. The statuses are marked by how high or low one's commitment is to an ideology or vocation. In addition, the statuses are also marked by an individual's exploratory behavior (high or low). Questions were modeled after Marcia and Archer's (1993) scoring criteria. The responses from the interviews were used to determine if the athletes engaged in exploratory behaviors. If so, when did they begin to do this and what events may have started the behavior. If they did not engage in exploratory behaviors, the athletes were probed for what may have impeded their exploration.

The study was grounded in two epistemologies – social constructivism and pragmatism. Social constructivism framework focuses on how someone creates their reality. Two people can experience the same situation but can have different perceptions of it. This can be seen in how many athletes have many shared university experiences, but can leave with vastly different perceptions of those experiences. Social constructivism centers on “what is perceived as real is real in its consequences” (Patton, 2014, p. 122). Pragmatism focuses on questions like: “What can we learn?”, “What are the applications of this information?”, “What are the real-world applications?” It leads one to try to find answers to help address the problem. In the case of this study, the problem would be identity foreclosure and career transition (Patton, 2014)



## **Participants**

With the help of the Student Athlete Support Services Department from the university, six former Division I football players were recruited to participate in this study. The participants were chosen based on the recommendations from a staff member of the office, believing the individual had a unique viewpoint to describe their transition. This led to diverse responses. In addition, some participants were recruited after being referred to the study by other participants. The participants ranged from age 24 to age 39. Five of the participants were African American and one participant was Caucasian. The information learned from this study will be used to help shape an identity retreat for former football players from this university. Football players were selected because they historically have reported some of the highest percentages of Division I athletes who believe it is somewhat likely they will become professional athletes.

## **Materials**

The participants were given a short demographic questionnaire to complete that proceeded the survey. It contained questions regarding football history, ethnicity, age, current occupation, annual house hold income and marital status (See Appendix A).

**Identity Status.** To measure the stages of identity as identified by Marcia (1966), the Objective Assessment of Ego-Identity Status (OM-EIS) was used. The OM-EIS is a 24-item scale with four subscales and each subscale had six questions (See Appendix B). It contained a 6-point Likert scale with responses that include “strongly agree, moderately agree, agree, disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree.” The subscales have internal reliabilities ranging from .67 to .76. The identity foreclosure sub scale, which has an internal reliability of .76, was used to measure how high or low the participants rank on identity foreclosure.(Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979).

**Athletic Identity.** Athletic Identity was measured using the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). This scale was created by Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder (1993). It is a 10-item scale that measures strength of identification with athletic roles. The response to these items are on a 7-point Likert scale. Answers can range from “1” strongly disagree to “7” strongly agree (See Appendix C). Higher scores suggest a higher athletic identity. Brewer and colleagues (1993) have also shown that the AIMS is highly correlated with the Perceived Importance Profile. The internal consistency of the scale ranges from .80 to .93 and a test-retest reliability of .89. (as cited by Murphy et al 1996).

**Stereotype Threat.** Susceptibility to stereotype threat was measured using the Social Identities and Attitudes Scale (SIAS: Picho & Brown, 2011). The scale measures how vulnerable an individual may be to stereotype threat, and can help identify risk levels (See Appendix D). Before this measure, there were no integrated stereotype threat measures, only other instruments measuring stereotype threat moderators. The scale has 30 items that use a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from “1” strongly disagree to “7” strongly agree. To revise the original scale, Picho and Brown ran a confirmatory factor analysis of the results which proved satisfactory for the scale revision. Smith and Cokley (2016) conducted a psychometric evaluation of the SIAS. They concluded that, even with a more diverse sample, the six subscales still had acceptable values of reliability. They also concluded that the SIAS is both reliable and valid. The SIAS contains six subscales, but for this study only four of them were used. Gender Identification (GI), Gender Stigma Consciousness (GSC), Ethnic Identification (EI), Ethnicity Stigma Consciousness (ESC). The reliability of the subscales ranges from .81 to .88. The SIAS has been validated using college age students (Picho & Brown, 2011).

**Social Support.** The Personal Resource Questionnaire (PQR85) was developed by Brandt and Weinert (1981) to examine the multidimensional aspect of perceived social support. Originally developed in the nursing field, the measure has since been used in multiple forms of research. Since the PQR was first published, newer versions have been developed. The PRQ85 is a two-part measure. PRQ85-Part II was used (See Appendix D). The instrument consists of 25 items that use a 7-point Likert scale. With “1” representing strongly disagree to “7” strongly agree. The higher a participant scores, the higher the perceived social support (Weinert, 2003). Part II has shown to have a reliability around .90 (Weinert, 2011). Although this scale was originated in the health care field, it has been applied to athletics (Hamilton, Hamilton, Meltzer, Marshall, & Molnar, 1989; Judge et al., 2015).

**Interview Instrument.** The interview guide was put together by adapting and modifying parts of the instruments listed above. In addition, experts and stakeholders in the student athlete services field were consulted to create additional questions. The interview grants the participants an opportunity to share their unique experiences and describe how certain psychosocial factors or life events may have contributed to their development.

The identity status discernment portion of the semi-structured interview was modeled after Marcia’s (1966) development of ego identity. These identity questions were used to ascertain the current identity status of the participants. The answers for identity were also evaluated using the scoring criteria laid out by Marcia and Archer (1993). For investigating athletic identity, a portion of the semi-structured interview investigated life factors that may have reinforced the development and level of one’s athletic identity. These questions were created with the influence of the Beamon (2012) study results. The stereotype threat portion of the semi-structured interview asked questions about situations in which an individual encountered

stereotype threat, or situations in which the participants aware of being stereotypes and their thoughts of the stereotypes that could apply to them. Lastly, the social support section of the semi-structured interview probed the participants about their social networks and whom they go to for social support.

## **Procedure**

After IRB approval was received, individuals were solicited for participation with the help of an administrator in the Student Athlete Support Services department. In addition to the purposeful sampling, a few participants referred others to the study. When the participants agreed to participate in the study, they were given an informed consent form in which they consented to having the interview audio recorded. The participants first participated in the semi-structured interview. These interviews were conducted either in-person or over the phone. Each interview was conducted individually and lasted between 30 and 65 minutes. The in-person interviews took place on campus, in a private room, in the student athlete support services building. The participants were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary and so were their responses. The interviews ended when there were no more questions from the researcher and the participant had no questions for the researcher. Sample questions include “Who is in your support structure and in which ways do they support you?”, “What was your student athlete experience like?” and “How do you think being a student athlete impacted the way professors interacted with you?”. Once all the interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Following the conclusion of the interview, the participants were asked to complete an online survey followed by a brief demographic questionnaire. Before beginning the online survey, the participants were asked to electronically sign an informed consent form. The content

of the online survey consisted of the scales mentioned in the materials section. The survey had a total of 58 questions, not including the demographic questionnaire. The participants were reminded that answers are confidential and they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. To ensure that the participants were paying attention during the survey one of the scales employed reverse scoring.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative (primary) and quantitative (secondary) data were collected. They were analyzed separately, then combined. The quantitative data were used to supplement the findings of the qualitative data.

**Qualitative.** To begin data analysis the audio files of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. After transcription occurred, each individual transcript was read multiple times in order to gain comprehension. Notes and memos were made in the margin about first impressions. Directed content analysis was used for each interview. Directed content analysis occurs when there is an existing theory about a phenomenon. This type of content analysis is used to validate existing research and can be used to show relationships between variables (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The semi-structured interview used Marcia's identity status criteria to classify each participant. Each psychosocial variable was used as a primary theme. After the interviews had been read and initial impressions had been noted, coding began. The interviews were printed out and coloring of codes occurred. If there was content that did not fit the original codes, new primary themes were created. Sub-themes were also created to better categorize the information found. This was done for each interview. Once content analysis was complete, the researcher described the connections in a more comprehensive context and supported these connections

with quotations. After the completion of the interviews, a narrative or participant summary was created for each participant, in order to see relationships between ideas.

***Limitations.*** Some of the major limitations of directed content analysis is due to the fact that a researcher used predetermined themes, they may miss other important data. In addition, the researcher may look for data, by either probing a certain way in the interview or even during coding, that supports their initial claims, thus making analysis biased (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

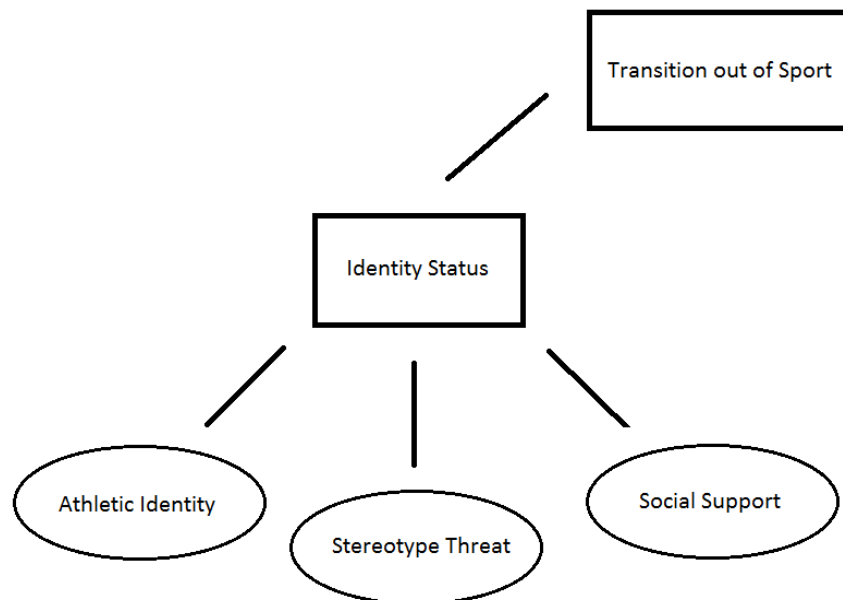
***Trustworthiness.*** To combat bias and increase objectivity, multiple verification strategies were employed. First, an audit trail was kept to ensure objectivity and increase trustworthiness. The audit trail denoted the sequential process the researcher followed when coding interviews. Once codes were derived, the audit trail expanded to include the researcher's reasoning behind classifying the codes. Secondly, the researcher used peer review. The researcher met with an auditor to review the code book and the accuracy of the themes and general workings of the data. The auditor would challenge the researcher, which resulted in the researcher defending or modifying their thought process. Thirdly, the researcher made sure to use a sample that consisted of various types of individuals who could speak about the research questions. The sample was not homogenous regarding life experience. Athletes who appeared to be transitioning well, in addition to those who appeared to have transitional difficulty were recruited. Lastly, the data collection and analysis occurred concurrently. This allowed the researcher to assess the effectiveness of their questions and determine if there was other phenomena to be discovered (Mayan, 2016).

***Quantitative.*** The sample size was deemed too small to run correlations. Instead, descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were run.

CHAPTER IV  
FINDINGS

This chapter details the findings of the study. It includes the descriptive statistics from the online survey and the findings from the qualitative analysis. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of psychosocial factors such as athletic identity, susceptibility to stereotype threat, and perceived social support as they relate to identity statuses. The secondary objective of the study was to ascertain by interview the identity status of the athletes in career transition, and examine how identity status is related to the athletes' career transition. The nature of the inquiry can be seen in Figure 2

Figure 2: Nature of Inquiry



Identity is a combination of self and social concepts. There are four identity statuses. Identity achievement is noted where there is high commitment to an identity and the presence of a crisis/exploratory behavior. Identity foreclosure occurs with high commitment but no crisis/exploration behavior. Identity moratorium has low commitment and the presence of a

crisis/ active exploratory behavior. Lastly, identity diffusion is low commitment and there can be the presence or absence of a crisis.

### **Participant Profiles**

Below are some brief profiles of the participants. Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the participants' confidentiality. Table 1 details the demographic of the participants. Table 2 details the participants' football history. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the survey and the results will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.

Alex, 25 (achievement), was originally a walk on to the football team. He began to play football during elementary school and realized he had skill his high school sophomore season. He wanted to attend this university even though they did not offer him an athletic scholarship, at first. To pay for school his first couple of years, he balanced having a job, school work and football practices. He retired from sport due to injury and not being recruited by an NFL team. He said he was disappointed by not getting signed, but his disappointment did not last long, as he decided to focus on his studies. He used his last year of football eligibility to start a master's degree in sports administration.

Bryan, 30 (moratorium), reported that in elementary school he felt he had a unique talent and could make football a career. He was extremely self-motivated to excel in football. Originally, he had never heard of the university but decided to attend after researching the school's football statistics, the players and the position coach. His parents also suggested this would be a good school to attend. He got drafted and then played in the NFL. He retired from sport due to an injury. He says that if it were not for the injury he sustained, he believes he would be playing today. He now works as a recruiting intern. At the time of the interview, he was working to attend graduate school so he could become a coaching graduate assistant.



Caleb, 26 (diffusion), started to play football after seeing his brother play. Growing up, he was involved in multiple sports and also took Advanced Placement classes in high school. He chose to attend this university due to his position coach, whom he looked up to. He did not try out for the NFL due to having his third season-ending injury his senior year. He now works as a recruiting intern. At the time of the interview, he was working to attend graduate school so he could become a graduate assistant with the football team.

David, 39 (achievement), played in the NFL for over multiple years. He initially began at a junior college and transferred into this university. He got drafted and went on to play with different NFL teams. Towards the end of his career, he was losing his love of football due to the politics of the last team he played for. He retired from sport following the NFL lockout of 2011. He and his wife own their own businesses and enjoy raising their children. He decided to return to school to complete his bachelor's degree since he only had his associate's degree.

Eli, 25 (moratorium), grew up playing both baseball and football. He decided to only pursue football in college. He did not realize he had exceptional talent in football until he started to receive scholarship offers. His transition out of sport is different, compared to the others. He played in the NFL right after college; however, after a hamstring injury, he was cut from the practice squad. At the time of the interview, he was still trying to get picked by a Canadian Football League (CFL) team and was ultimately signed to a CFL team.

Felix, 24 (achievement), started playing football when he was young but said it was not his first passion. He chose to go to this university due to its reputation in academics, as well as athletics. While at university he joined a historically black fraternity and had an internship with a radio station. He tried for the NFL and did not make it. He used his last year of eligibility to

begin his master's degree. Currently, he works as graduate assistant for another Division I institution working with football and plans to pursue a second master's degree.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Race	Age	Marital Status	Highest Degree	College GPA	Undergraduate Major	Current Occupation	Annual Household Income
Alex	White	25	Living with Significant other	Master's	3.0	Economics	Assistant Director of Development Football Recruiting	\$60,000-\$79,000
Bryan	Black	30	Single	Bachelor's	2.3	Sociology	Football Intern	\$20,000-\$39,000
Caleb	Black	26	Single	Bachelor's	2.4	Interdisciplinary Studies - Psychology and Sociology	Football recruiting assistant	\$20,000-\$39,000
David	Black	39	Married	Bachelor's <sup>a</sup>	*	Communications	Business owner and student	*
Eli	Black	25	Single	Bachelor's <sup>a</sup>	2.7	Psychology	CFL Player <sup>b</sup>	\$60,000-\$79,000
Felix	Black	24	Single	Master's	3.9	Journalism	Graduate Assistant - Football Coaching	under \$20,000

<sup>a</sup>Degree in progress

<sup>b</sup>At time of interview he had not been signed to a team

\* Not Reported

Table 2. Football History

Participant	NFL Attempt	CFL Attempt	Years in professional sports	Total years playing football
Alex	Y	N	0	12
Bryan	Y	Y	NFL - 4 years	19
Caleb	N	N	0	16
David	Y	*	NFL - 11 years	*
Eli	Y	Y	NFL - 2 years	17
Felix	Y	Y	0	18

NFL – National Football League

CFL – Canadian Football League

\* - Not reported

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Participant	Identity Status	SIAS						
		OM-EIS	AIMS	PRQ85	Ethnic Identity	Gender Identity	Ethnic Stigma Consciousness	Gender Stigma Consciousness
Alex	Achievement	2.33	4.3	6.2	4.75	3.67	4	4.6
Bryan	Moratorium	1	4.9	5.44	5.5	3.67	4.2	4
Caleb	Diffusion	1	5.6	5.36	6.25	4	4.6	5
David	Achievement	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Eli	Moratorium	2.33	3.7	3.55	*	2.67	*	*
Felix	Achievement	2.33	3.8	4.12	6	4.67	3.8	3.8
Mean		1.80	4.46	4.93	5.63	3.73	4.15	4.35
SD		0.73	0.80	1.08	0.66	0.72	0.34	0.55

*Note:* The number reported shows each participant's score on the scale. David did not complete the survey, so there was no information to report for him. Eli did not fully complete the SIAS, there were only enough responses for the GI subscale, so his scores for the others were discarded.

## **Social Support and Identity Status**

Social support had the strongest relationship of all the other variables to identity status. Social support are the people the participant goes to when they need assistance. People in their social network comprise their social support. All participants had a moderate or above moderate perceived social support as reported in their PRQ85 scores ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). The participants seemed to differ in how they utilized their support system. Participants classified in identity achievement were similar in the fact that they actively utilized their social support to network. Alex admitted he is an internal person but he turns to his girlfriend most often for support. He acknowledged his internal nature leads him to deal with most problems on his own. He recognized he should reach out to others more and is actively working on that. He views his internship supervisor as a role model and asks him for career advice. He is willing to go beyond his main support to network. Felix is similar to Alex in that he also uses his internship as a networking opportunity. He also mentioned that he does not actively seek help; however, if someone offers it, he welcomes it. David said that his wife is a person he can count on to support him and he had learned from his NFL days to nurture connections with the people he meets.

I know how to network a lot better than I did as a youth. Cuz as a youth, they tell you like man, this guy, he's so and so, the owner of Ford. And as a kid, you might look at him and your like...hmm, ok. When you are supposed to be like..ohh! So what are you doing? What's your contact? Can we get into rap? Can we talk about your business ventures? Do you have a contact for this other side of things I am looking at?

The individuals of this study who were categorized as identity moratorium or identity diffusion were less likely to utilize their social support. They were also less likely to network or request assistance. Both Bryan and Caleb have more of an 'up by the bootstraps mentality.' Bryan is highly self-reliant. Bryan has a good social support system that mainly consists of

family. He knows he can go to his parents about anything, but he admits to not being a very open person. He wishes in college he had lowered his pride and asked for help more often. When he has a problem, he says his approach is to “Keep it to myself [and] try to figure things out because I don’t really want to talk”. Even though he did not utilize his social support as much as he could have, Bryan’s advice to future freshman is to network and maintain positive relationships. He said “Don’t burn bridges, you never know who you might need or who might be in a position to help you... Nobody has ever gotten completely, complete success all by themselves.” Caleb is a reserved person and if he is not familiar with someone he is not going to approach them. He uses his mother and brother as social support because he trusts them and does not trust many people. Although he is reserved, he maintains those close relationships that he chose to build.. He tries to handle most of his problems on his own, and does not like to ask for assistance because “I don’t want to be a burden on anyone”. Eli, who was categorized as identity moratorium does not share the same social support utilization behavior as the other individual in moratorium and the individual in diffusion. He is very close to his siblings and cousin since they all grew up with each other. He actively utilizes them for social support. The main discernable difference between Eli and those in identity achievement lies not with the social support utilization but in the diversity of the group of people in their social networks.

Even now I look up to my brother my sister my cousin. You know I still talk to them almost every day. And any situation I get myself into, if I want to figure something out I just ask them what I need to do, or how I need to do it, because I know they have probably been through those situations

**Diversity.** In this study, the individuals with a more heterogenous social support network were in identity achievement. A group was considered heterogeneous if the members of the social support group came from different backgrounds and could offer support in their respective domain. It was also the individuals in identity achievement who appeared to have the smoothest

career transition. The individuals in moratorium and diffusion had a more homogeneous social support network that mainly consisted of their family. David was able to develop a diverse social support group during his time in the NFL, making contacts outside of football and through the business ventures he built with his wife. As a requirement of their master's programs, both Alex and Felix found internships which have allowed them to expand their social network. Alex said he meets new types of people all the time as a part of his internship. Felix was involved in a fraternity, which expanded his social network beyond athletes and family. He had a large number of contacts and he utilized them. He attributed his smooth transition out of sport to social support.

I feel the transition for me because of my support system, my support base, family, people who I have made connections with they have set me up so I don't have to go looking for a part time job at McDonalds.

Caleb did not have a diverse social support group, due to his reserved nature. Bryan did not have a diverse social support group because his focus was on athletics and most of his time was spent with teammates and coaches. Even though Eli did not have a diverse social support group, he seemed to recognize the importance of establishing one and utilizing them. He believes

there is no reason a student athlete should leave school after you know. and not knowing what they want to do. There is an uncountable amount of people who want to help you. You just have to uh reach out to resources like alumni, advisors, your coaches. Reach out to everything, you don't know what kind of opportunities will be presented to you in the future.

### **Identity Status and Transition**

A participant's identity status showed a strong relationship with the type of transition out of sport experienced. At the time of interview, each participant had been out of sport for at least one season of football. A notable finding of transition was the participant's current occupation. Five of the six athletes were employed working within sports – whether it be the business side of athletics or working on the field with the student athletes. They transitioned out of playing and



transitioned into other components of the athletic realm. Another notable finding about transition was how each athlete dealt with their loss of schedule. This was a finding that was not originally hypothesized, but arose as notable from the data.

The identity achievement individuals had the smoothest transition out of sport. By the time it came to leave sport, they had undergone exploration and were beginning the process of committing to another identity. The major difference between those in identity achievement and those in identity moratorium laid in the duration of crisis. Those in moratorium spent more time in crisis and had a less-developed back up plan. Alex had already begun to explore the business world when he did not make the NFL. He may not have been in identity achievement right away, but not making the NFL led him to commit to business and sports management. He had the opportunity to try out for the CFL league; however, he decided against it. He said, "I [had] a great opportunity to finish my master's cuz I'm only taking one semester off and finish my master's." Felix also seemed to have a smooth transition. He talked about being disappointed that he did not go to the NFL, but he recognized there were other ways to stay involved with football without playing. His previous identity status is not clear; however, his disappointment with the NFL did lead him to the exploration and commitment to another role. He remarked, "I want to coach, like my passion for football has led me to a coaching career." His commitment is demonstrated by the fact he is pursuing a second master's degree so he can continue being a graduate assistant and learn about coaching football. Lastly, David reported losing his passion for football towards the end of his career. He noted, "Once my guarantees were over with and then that's when a love started going away for me from football". This set into motion his exploration of other roles he wanted to develop. Even though he has had trouble finding something for which

he has the same level of passion as football, he is happy to have more time with his children and wife and more time to be a husband and a father.

Those in identity moratorium were still experiencing an identity crisis at end of the interview. Their transition was less smooth due to the individual trying to reconcile their identities. They had more attachment to their athletic identity, compared to those in identity achievement. Their commitment to other roles was not high; however, active exploratory behavior occurred. Bryan sustained injuries while playing in the NFL. Those injuries are what ended his football career. He talked about how the NFL is a business and they cannot afford to keep hurt individuals and that is why he is not playing today. He said, "I still can't physically play it, which I would love to do, but I still want to be involved with it in one way or the other." When he was asked how willing would he be to give up coaching if something better came along, he replied not likely. "I'm not one hundred percent with it, but I know I found a passion for football-related things." He got an internship as a recruiting assistant to stay close to the game. When asked where he sees himself in 3 years he replied coaching and done with his master's degree. He has begun the steps to make coaching a reality. Eli's transition out of sport is a bit different from the other participants, as he had not mentally transitioned out of sport. At the time of the interview, he had been out of football for a season, but he was trying to make a Canadian team. He had the mentality of "I don't really give up on things. Once I have my mind set on something that I want to do, I get it done. It does not matter how long it takes me to do it I get it done." A large portion of his focus and time was dedicated to making that happen. However, Eli reenrolled in school again as he did not finish his bachelor's degree when he left to play for the NFL. This demonstrates his awareness that football will not be able to sustain him

for the rest of his life. While he had also gotten other jobs since being out of sport, he has not made a commitment outside of football, but he has done exploration.

The distinguishing characteristic of identity diffusion is there is no commitment to other roles. A crisis can be present or absent, but exploratory behavior is low. Caleb experienced a passive transition out of sport. That is not to say he was not upset that football had ended for him, but he did not appear distressed about it anymore. When asked about his future plans, he did not seem sure. He knew he wanted sports to be involved one way or the other, but not sure how. He mentioned some exploratory behavior, but not much. He is low on role commitment. When he was asked if he would give up coaching if something better came along, he replied, "If it's something I am really interested in, I'd probably give it [coaching] up really easily since I am not in it yet."

**Schedule.** Each participant had a different method of coping with their transition out of sport. Loss of schedule had a moderate relationship with participant's transition out. Alex said he struggled with the decision not to injury redshirt and have a season left of eligibility, but he has no regrets about his football career. One thing he did not account for was the loss of a schedule. While he was in college he did not feel controlled by the athletics department, but he missed the scheduling routine and tries to implement it in his life. For him, "It kept me on track to eventually get my master's, now I like that, I like the scheduling in my life." Caleb was affected hard by the conclusion of his athletic career. He struggled with the end of his athletic career and the loss of structure the routine provided. He said "I actually wish I had the schedule I used to have moreso than now". Caleb managed to come to terms with his new reality, but the loss of a concrete schedule negatively impacted him. "You had a schedule so it was easier to deal with, know exactly where you have to go, and now you have to make your own thing, buy your own

food, pay your own bills”. After spending over 10 years in the NFL David found the lack of schedule liberating. He could do things on his own time and in his own way. Initially after retiring, David did not want to do anything. He also reported struggling to find something he was as passionate about as football.

I worked my butt off for a long time, I don't want nothing. I don't want to respond to nobody, I don't want to be on the clock with nobody. I just want to sit here and raise these kids and live

### **Role Conflict**

Like most student athletes, these participants faced the role conflict in regards to their athletics role and their academic role. The strength of one's athletic identity alone did not seem to have a strong relationship with their handling of role conflict. All of the athletes had a moderate athletic identity ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 0.795$ ) according to their score on AIMS (Table 3). When asked if they still considered themselves an athlete, five of the six participants said 'yes'. One participant seemed undecided if he would still consider himself an athlete or not. Their feeling towards being considered an athlete could best be seen by the way Felix describes it.

Ohh yeah it never dies. I don't care what anyone says, once an athlete always an athlete. It might not work or look or feel the way it did when I was younger but...you know I am still an athlete in my mind

Felix, Eli, Caleb and Bryan all describe ways in which their environments reinforced their athletic identities. Both Caleb and Bryan did not spend much time with traditional academic students and most of their time was spend around student athletes. Their conversations centered on sports and other sport related issues. Felix mentions that football became a way for people to identify him. “Once I started playing football, it became what I did, what people knew me by.” Eli details how being a student athlete and going professional shaped the way that other people interacted with him. It would take him off guard when strangers would congratulate him on a

game or know his number and recognize him on the street. He said, “It’s crazy how people start acting when they see you have an opportunity to make it to the NFL or pro level.” He enjoyed the experience when it was with fellow students, however he was turned off when distant family members began to treat him differently “It’s weird how some of your family will start treating you like they are a fan and not your family member.”

**Role Development and Balance.** How well a participant was able to balance their athletic and academic roles depended on the importance the individual assigned to that identity. All of the participants shared the challenges of being both a student and a student-athlete. Each participant discussed how time demands were difficult to adjust to and always a battle to keep up with. When asked what it was like to be a student-athlete Felix said, “In my opinion, being a student-athlete is like double time, double work.” A high athletic identity did not mean an individual would have difficulty balancing roles. Rather, a high attachment or high value placed upon their athletic identity was a better indicator of role balance struggles. Those in identity achievement placed equal if not higher importance on academic identity compared to athletic identity. The priority level of these identities led to development in both. In this sample, identity achievement led to smoother transitions due to role explorations. These explorations were possibly made by the proper balancing of academic identity and athletic identity.

Alex did not come to this school on athletic scholarship. To pay for school, he got a job and had to concentrate on his time management. Initially, he struggled with the demands of working, going to school, and playing football. Once he was put on scholarship, he was able to better balance his roles and the time demands. He excelled in school which led him to explore other roles. When he first started, “I got here as a walk on and I took the bare minimum, and once I got put on scholarship I crushed school hard.” David had always wanted to play basketball

and football at a Division I college. He had done well academically and athletically in junior college, earning a 3.2 GPA. When he transferred, his grades initially suffered. He reported that during his first semester, he had made a 0.8 GPA. The next year, after much hard work, he succeeded in raising his GPA to a 2.6. Once his grades were back up, he tried out for the basketball team and made it. However, he ultimately turned it down. His reason being

So now I'm thinking, this is the thing I always wanted to do. I love basketball, I'm on a major stage, I wanted to pressure it out, but it's so risky. If I don't play, I can really just focus on my studies.

Felix chose this university because of its academic and its athletic reputation. Even though he had aspirations for playing football professionally, he knew this dream may not come to fruition and worked to prepare himself for the likely probability of a career outside of professional athletics. He was preparing for the days after football while playing.

a lot of guys umm.. they put all their eggs in one basket, for me you know it wasn't like that. I had a dream to play in the league, but not everyone gets that opportunity

The individuals in identity moratorium give preference to athletic identity, as they placed a higher level of importance upon it. Eli originally wanted to major in engineering, but he felt that he could not keep up with football demands and engineering. He switched his major to something more manageable. He thus gave up future possible career opportunities for sport. During his interview, Bryan talked about the importance of maintaining his grades so he could remain eligible. He was of the mind set, "to be able to do what you love, take care of academics."

Caleb, the individual in identity diffusion, treated academics more as means to an end. He did not put importance of one identity over the other, but he ended up naturally developing his athletic identity more deeply. He reiterated this throughout the interview. In retrospect, he wished he had done things differently when he was in college. He focused on playing and getting a

degree. While discussing his college major choice he said, “I wish I had done something else but that’s what got me through.” Caleb now advises future players to take both school and workout seriously as those were two things he did not do.

### **Stereotype Threat Awareness**

Each participant was aware of the stereotypes associated with being an athlete. They knew that some people thought they had easy class loads or that everything was handed to them. They were also aware of the stereotypes associated with being a person of color and an athlete. Results from the SIAS (Table 3) showed the participants had a highest susceptibility to ethnic identity stereotype threat ( $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ). Susceptibilities in gender identity ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ), ethnic stigma consciousness ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ) and gender stigma consciousness ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) were all average.

Stereotype threat did have a weak relationship with the participants’ identity status or transition out of sport. There was, however, relationship between stereotypes and athletic identity. Many athletes described how they would attempt to not look like an athlete so they would not get treated as one. Caleb indicated that he never wanted his professors to know he was a student-athlete. He said, “I didn’t really like them knowing because they treated you differently, and I didn’t like being treated differently.” A common theme amongst the participants was the need to prove themselves. The athletes said they did not take much heed to the stereotypes because people are going to think what they are going to think. Eli and Felix both spoke to that sentiment. Eli said, “At the end of the day it’s just proving yourself all the time. From the words, you speak to your work ethic to the things you do.” In similar thought, Felix said, “A student athlete is going to be placed in that category regardless.” David believed that professors interactions with students were individually based. If you approached the professor

with respect then he or she would reciprocate. If you approached with an attitude, expect to be stereotyped.

When you show that you are *that* athlete, and it does not have to be Black or White or Latino, whatever, but when you show that I'm the guy, or that I'm better than you, or I don't need you... when you show that side, yes, the stereotype does come into play

Felix shared these thoughts, "If you don't go to class, the professor isn't going to know you, you come in last minute and expect to try to pass the class, all of that ties into each other"

To reiterate the findings: It was found that social support had a strong relationship with identity status. Those who were in identity achievement utilized their social support the most and their social support consisted of a more diverse group of people. Those in moratorium and diffusion lacked diversity in their social support groups and their help-seeking behaviors varied. Identity status had a strong association with type of transition out of sport. Those in achievement had a smoother transition, those in moratorium had a more difficult transition due to the presence and duration of their crisis. The individual in moratorium had a passive transition. Role conflict was experienced by each participant, however role conflict had a relationship between identity status and transition out of sport. Lastly, there was weak relationship between stereotype threat and identity status, but there was a relationship between stereotype threat and athletic identity.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the relationship of psychosocial factors (athletic identity, susceptibility to stereotype threat, and perceived social support) to identity statuses. The secondary objective of the study was to explore identity status and examine how identity status is related to the athletes' career transition.

To explore the purposes, a concurrent embedded mixed method design was used. Like the name suggests, in a concurrent embedded design, data collection is occurring in one phase. Priority was put on the qualitative strand of data. This study design was chosen because the development of the psychosocial factors could be better observed through qualitative means, while a survey could supplement the findings found in the interview. Four major findings arose: Social support had the strongest relationship with identity status. The identity status groups differed on the utilization of their social support group and the diversity of their group. Secondly, identity status had a strong association with transition out of sport. The main differences for the groups were in the timing of the exploratory behaviors and how long a crisis lasted if crisis was present. Thirdly, there was a relationship between identity status and management of role conflict. Identity achievement individuals were most successful at managing role conflicts. Fourth, stereotype threat had a weak association with identity status, but it had a moderate relationship with athletic identity. All athletes were aware of the stereotypes and how they could affect them. Individuals who were more attached to their athletic identity appeared more vulnerable to stereotype threat.

## **Discussion of Findings**

Social support had the strongest association to an athlete's current identity status. This was primarily determined through the interview data, as every participant had a moderate to high score on the PRQ85. It was found that athletes in identity achievement had the most diverse social support groups. Their social support groups consisted of more than family and teammates. This is not typical of student athletes. Due to the time demands of athletics, many student-athletes' social networks consists primarily of other athletes (Martens & Lee, 1998). The networks of the identity achieved individuals included work supervisors, traditional students, business professionals and people whom they had met from networking. Two of the participants heavily diversified their social support groups during their collegiate athletic career, and the other individual diversified his network during his professional playing days. The heterogeneity of the group meant a heterogeneity of ideas and viewpoints. The athletes with diverse social support groups had more people to challenge the way they thought, and more people to offer them different forms of social support. The individuals in identity moratorium and identity diffusion had good perceived social support; however, their networks were homogeneous. Parental and peer social support greatly influence identity status (Hall & Brassard, 2008; Para, 2008). The lack of diversity in a social support group can create an environment that reinforces one set of ideals and never challenges an individual's beliefs. The homogeneity of a social support group does not generally foster role exploration.

In addition to having a more diverse social support group, identity achievement individuals were more likely to utilize their social support when they need assistance. By asking questions and listening, they expanded their social networks. Expansion of social support networks has been shown to make career transition smoother (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985;

Petrie et al., 2014). The participants could have learned to utilize their social support effectively when they were in a different identity status or when they were engaging in exploratory behaviors. The identity achieved individuals also had the benefit of a diverse network which made seeking people for House's (1981) four types of social support easier. The types of social support (informational, appraisal, empathy, instrumental) may be received better if the person delivering the support is an expert or trusted source in that area. Separate from his counterpart, one individual in identity moratorium did not have an issue asking for help from his siblings and cousins because he trusted them and looked up to them. However, they alone could probably only provide him empathy and appraisal support, when he may have needed informational and instrumental support for his career transition. As found through the interviews, one individual in identity moratorium and one individual in identity diffusion were highly self-reliant. They did not utilize their support groups as much as the individuals in identity achievement. They had the "up by the bootstraps" mentality, by which, if they put enough effort into something, a favorable result should occur. They believed they should be able to resolve issues on their own, without outside support. This type of mentality lead to a disinclination to ask for help (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

Identity status had a strong relationship to the type of transition out of sport. Identity achievement individuals had a smooth transition, those in moratorium had a more challenging path, and the identity diffusion had a passive transition out of sport. The two main factors that led to the difference in transition type were: the duration of time spent in crisis and role exploration/development outside of sports. Before sport ended, those in identity achievement began to develop their role outside of sport. Oftentimes, when an individual recognizes they will transition out from sport, they will decrease their athletic identity (Lally, 2007). The identity

achievement individuals did this by reminding themselves that football will end soon. They spent time focusing on other roles and began to develop those roles further. Thus, when transition occurred, they had another well-developed identity to rely upon. These individuals did not spend as much time in identity crisis. The individual in identity diffusion experienced a passive transition. He knew with certainty that his athletic career was coming to an end when he did not attempt to play in the NFL. At first, he struggled with the loss of playing sports, but he overcame that disappointment. Contrary to the findings in Peitre, Deiters and Harmison (2014), even though he knew sport was ending, the individual in identity diffusion did not look into other roles or seek to develop other skills. Lastly, the two individuals in moratorium were in crisis at the time of the interview. They had low commitment to a vocation, but they demonstrated high exploratory behaviors. Their AIMS scores were moderate for athletic identity, but from the interviews, the attachment to their athletic identity was high. This attachment to their athletic identity may have been the cause of their prolonged crisis. This can be explained by Chartrand and Lent (1987) study in which many athletes think that their success in sports requires exclusive focus on that domain. Consequently, they neglect exploring other domains.

Role conflict emerged as a variable not originally anticipated. Role conflict had a relationship with identity status and transition out of sport. Of the three identity statuses present, those in achievement managed role conflict the best. They had established identities out of sport and gave academics and athletics the same priority. When it came to transitioning, they relied upon their other identities to make the process smoother. As previously stated, the individuals in identity moratorium had more attachment to their athletic identity, thus giving it priority over the academic identity. Athletes who were attached to their athletic identity and whose environment reinforced this attachment were less likely to develop other skills. They relied more heavily on

their athletic role, which can lead to over-identification. This over-identification is a coping method to deal with the role conflict demands place upon them (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Murphy et al., 1996; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988). Identity diffusion has low crisis and low exploration, so the fact that the individual in the identity diffused state had some difficulties with role conflict was not surprising. These individuals already do not engage in much exploratory behaviors. Considering their lack of exploration combined with the fact that many student athletes do not have time to explore identities outside of athletics, it is not surprising that an athletic identity became more developed. For the diffused individual, his environment contributed to the further maturation and development of his athletic identity.

Stereotype threat had a relationship with athletic identity. It did not have the expected relationship with identity status. Through the interview data, it was evident that each participant was aware of the negative stereotypes that could be associated with them – those relating to being athlete and, if applicable, stereotypes about ethnic minorities. Through the scores on the SIAS subscales, it could be seen that the majority of the participants were moderately susceptible to stereotypes of ethnic identity. It was expected that stereotype threat may have a strong relationship with identity status by negatively affecting role exploratory behaviors. If an individual constantly underperformed in a domain, they would likely avoid it in the future (Steele et al., 2002). Since athletes are faced with the “dumb jock” stereotype, academics could have become an area where they disengaged. This would lead to overdevelopment of their athletic identity and contribute to role conflict between being a student and an athlete. It is possible that the athletes buffered the effects of stereotype threat by using the defense mechanism of identity bifurcation. By using identify bifurcation, it would mean the individual recognized the stereotype that applied to their social identity but did not recognize if the

stereotype applied to them because of some difference in attributes. They may hold the mentality of “Yes, this stereotype can affect athletes, but I am not like other athletes.” This would be an area for future research.

**Strengths.** This study was fortunate to recruit a sample of elite athletes. This group of athletes are not readily accessible and the sample allowed the researcher to gain unique insights into the identity formation and transition processes. These athletes had played football on multiple levels and could offer insights at each level. The design of the study also allowed for the participants to voice their opinions and share their stories. The participants could discuss life events and social support in further detail. The interview allowed the researcher to discern commitment levels and exploratory behaviors. The survey confirmed that they did not belong in the foreclosure status. This could not have been done as effectively without mixed methods. Another major strength of the study is that it was contextualized. The information gained from the study will be used to help create a program at the university for former football players. The sample consisted only of former football players from this school. This allowed the participants to offer the best responses and feedback, based on their personal experiences working with the student athlete services department.

**Limitations.** The findings of this study cannot be generalized to all student athletes, due to the fact that the participants all came from the same school and played the same sport. This limitation was purposeful in this study, but future studies may want to expand the sample to determine if athletes from other schools share the same experience. In addition, the athletes were all male and there was little racial diversity. The lack of diversity was circumstantial, but with a more diverse sample, experiences based on ethnic identity may arise. Next, the study did not reach the point of saturation. The sample size could have been larger. The goal of a larger sample

would be to see a more even distribution of individuals in the identity statuses. This study's main focus was to examine psychosocial factors and their relationship to identity status and, after determining identity status, ascertain its relationship to transition out of sport. Socioeconomic status was not given much consideration. Socioeconomic status at the time of transition could affect the transition. An individual with the potential to earn higher salary or with access to other financial resources after sport would have a different experience than someone who did not. There is less financial pressure. Lastly, there was no investigation as to how injury affected one's transition out of sport. Injuries can come unexpectedly and the individual may not have had time to prepare for life after sport. Without planning, there may have been a lack of role exploration.

### **Future Research**

From this study, a few areas for future research arose. First, a study to better understand identity status amongst athletes in revenue producing sports among different schools. It is not clear if the experience is unique to football, or if it is an experience shaped by specific schools. Second, since social support had the strongest relationship with identity statuses, it would be worthy to further investigate an athlete's social support, and how they use different forms of social support. This would help practitioners update the student athlete development models. Third, besides athletic identity, there does not seem to be much research as to what could help an individual manage their role conflict. This would show the implications of effective role management. Fourth, more research is needed to understand the role of financial security in the transition out of sport. After completing a successful career with the NFL (assuming the athlete built adequate savings and investments), do those athletes experience less external pressure to secure new work? Fifth, it would be important to investigate what are some ways to foster role exploration to individuals in identity diffusion. Sixth, although stereotype threat did not show a

relationship with identity status, future research should investigate stereotype coping methods such as identity bifurcation and how that affects a student-athlete's vulnerability. Lastly, future studies looking at career transition out of sport may want to employ a cross sectional design to investigate the identity status shifts that can occur during transition out of sport.

**Identity Foreclosure.** Unlike most of the literature that focuses on athletes and transition out of sport, none of the individuals in this study were in identity foreclosure. In addition, the participants had very low scores on identity foreclosure subscale. This could be a function of the scale itself, or where the participants were in their transition out of sport. The objective assessment of ego-identity status (OM-EIS) is one of the most widely used scales to assess identity status, and the OM-EIS identity foreclosure subscale has been used in many studies. This scale had been used on samples with athletes. Although this scale has been used by athletic populations before, there is a need for a scale created to specifically look at identity foreclosure in athletes. The questions could pertain more to their lifestyle and specific constraints they face.

At the time of the interviews, all of the athletes participating in the study had been out of sport for at least one full season. This may have been enough time for a participant to have undergone an identity shift. Once an athlete realized that they would no longer be playing sports and had time to digest this information, it would be difficult to maintain a high commitment to a role that is no longer prominent. This change could create an identity shift. If this study was to be replicated, it would be prudent to include participants in different times of their career transition. This could be done longitudinally or cross-sectional.

**AIMS Measurement.** The AIMS measurement scale was used to discern how high or low the participant's athletic identity was. However, each athlete across the identity statuses had



a moderate or high athletic identity. For the purposes of this study, measuring the strength of the athletic identity may not have been the most appropriate. A person with a high athletic identity is also capable of having other developed and strong identities. Many studies do not acknowledge this. In this study, it was not the strength of the athletic identity that caused issues for some participants. It was the preference and higher priority of the athletic identity.

### **Implications for Practice**

In conclusion, it was found that social support (utilization and diversity) was the biggest indicator of an individual's current identity statuses. In turn, identity status had a strong relationship with career transition out of sport. There were differences in exploratory behaviors around transition time and the duration of crisis. Moratorium was the identity status that struggled the most with role conflict, and they had the most challenging transition. Stereotype threat and athletic identity had a relationship. Depending on the individual's value placed upon their athletic identity, the individual would become more vulnerable to stereotypes associated with athletics.

Many student athlete services departments offer support for their student-athlete, but not all student-athletes are willing to utilize it. Professionals and practitioners in student-athlete services should consider what specific types of support (informational, appraisal, emotional, and instrumental) they are offering their student-athletes. If they have a program in place, conduct a program evaluation to correct deficits. While staying inside the contextual constraints, practitioners should find ways to increase and diversify their student-athletes social network groups (on campus internships or peer mentor programs). Role conflict could be mitigated by increased opportunities for role exploration and development

To help with career transition, practitioners should consider implementing programs for upperclassmen and recent graduates that help them expand their social network and maintain those new relationships. Practitioners should consider having their athletes attend more networking events and create additional situations in which the athlete is in constant communication with some of the people they meet in order to expand their social network. For two of the participants, this seemed to be the internships they needed in their master's degree. The program for transition out of sport could also include former university players visiting the school to share their experiences with current athletes, sharing their challenges and successes. Current student-athletes may be more receptive to someone who recently faced all the difficulties they faced and has successfully transitioned out of sport.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Demographic Questionnaire

**Part A:** Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability

1. Age (in years) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply)

- White or Caucasian    Black or African American    Middle Eastern/ North African  
 Hispanic or Latino    Asian or Pacific Islander    American Indian or Alaskan Native     
Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Highest Level of Education (if in school use current level) \_\_\_\_\_

4. College Major \_\_\_\_\_

5. College GPA \_\_\_\_\_

5. Marital Status

- Single    Married    Divorced    Living with Significant Other    Widowed

6. Annual Household Income

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under \$15,000      | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$59,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 - \$124,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 - \$19,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 - \$69,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$125,000 - \$149,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 - \$29,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000 - \$79,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$150,000 - \$174,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000 - \$39,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000 - \$89,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$175,000 - \$199,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000 - \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000 - \$99,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> over \$200,000        |

7. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is your current occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many total years have you played football? \_\_\_\_\_

10. If you are a current student athlete how many years of eligibility do you have left?

11. Did you or will you attempt to play in the NFL?

APPENDIX B:

OM-EIS Foreclosure Subscale

<b>Part B:</b> Please respond to the following statements. Answer with the rating that best represents how you feel about the statement where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = disagree 4 = agree 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree. Please select only one answer per question.						
	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
1. I might have thought about a lot of different things but there has never really been a decision since my parents said what they wanted.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. My parents had it decided a long time ago what I should go into and I'm following their plans.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. My folks have always had their own political and moral beliefs about issues like abortion and mercy killing and I've always gone along accepting what they have.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I guess I'm pretty much like my folks when it comes to politics. I follow what they do in terms of voting and such.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I attend the same church as my family has always attended. I've never really questioned why	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I've never really questioned my religion. If it's right for my parents it must be right for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX C:

Athletic Identity Measurement Scale



<b>Part C:</b> Please respond to the following statements. Answer with the rating that best represents how you feel about the statement where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Please select only one answer per question.							
	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
1. I consider myself an athlete	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I have many goals related to sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Most of my friends are athletes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Sport is the most important part of my life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Other People see me mainly as an athlete	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Sport is the only important thing in my life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX D:

Social Identity and Attitudes Scale

<b>Part D:</b> Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. In answering each question, use a range from (1) to (7) where (1) stands for strongly disagree and (7) stands for strongly agree. Please circle only one response choice per question.							
	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
1. My gender influences how I feel about myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My gender influences how teachers interpret my behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I value my ethnic background	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Most people judge me on the basis of my ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My gender is central in defining who I am	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Most people judge me on the basis of my gender	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. My identity is strongly tied to my gender	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I feel a strong attachment to my ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. My gender affects how people treat me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. My ethnicity is an important reflection of who I am	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I am connected to my ethnic heritage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. My gender affects how people act towards me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. My ethnicity affects how my peers interact with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Members of the opposite sex interpret my behavior based on my gender	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. My ethnicity influences how teachers interact with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. My ethnicity affects how I interact with people of other ethnicities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. People from other ethnic groups interpret my behavior based on my ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX E:

Personal Resource Questionnaire 85

<b>Part E:</b> Below are some statements with which some people agree and others disagree. Please read each statement and CIRCLE the response most appropriate for you. There is not right or wrong answer.							
	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
a. There is someone I feel close to who makes me feel secure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. I belong to a group in which I feel important.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. People let me know that I do well at my work (job, homemaking).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. I can't count on my relatives and friends to help me with my problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. I have enough contact with the person who makes me feel special.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. I spend time with others who have the same interests I do.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. There is little opportunity in my life to be giving and caring to another person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Others let me know that they enjoy working with me (job, committees, projects).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. There are people who are available if I needed help over an extended period of time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
j. There is no one to talk to about how I am feeling..	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
k. Among my group of friends we do favors for each other	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
l. I have the opportunity to encourage others to develop their interests and skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
m. My family lets me know that I am important for keeping the family running...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
n. I have relatives or friends that will help me out even if I can't pay them back...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
o. When I am upset there is someone I can be with who lets me be myself..	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
p. I feel no one has the same problems as I	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
q. I enjoy doing little "extra" things that make another person's life more pleasant....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
r. I know that others appreciate me as a person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
s. There is someone who loves and cares about me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
t. I have people to share social events and fun activities with	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
u. I am responsible for helping provide for another person's needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

v. If I need advice there is someone who would assist me to work out a plan for dealing with the situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
w. I have a sense of being needed by another person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
x. People think that I'm not as good a friend as I should be.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
y. If I got sick, there is someone to give me advice about caring for myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX F:

PRQ 85 Permission

### Figure 3: PRQ 85 Permission

June 30, 2016

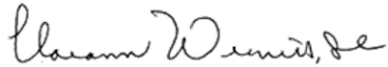
Taylor Payne

Ms. Payne:

Please let this letter serve as your permission to use the PRQ85 or PRQ2000. Any changes to question stems or answer sets must be approved in advance. Translation of the PRQ into other languages is acceptable and encouraged. A copy of the translated version of the PRQ should be sent to me. If you do, in fact, use the PRQ for data collection in your study, I ask that you send me an abstract of your findings. Should you have any questions or need clarification, kindly write or e-mail [cweinert@montana.edu](mailto:cweinert@montana.edu). I will try to respond in a timely manner.

Thank you for your interest in the PRQ. I hope that this social support measure will be helpful in your research.

Sincerely,



Clarann Weinert, SC, PhD, RN, FAAN  
Professor Emerita  
[www.montana.edu/cweinert](http://www.montana.edu/cweinert)



APPENDIX G:

Interview Guide

## Interview Guide\*

- How did you get started in football?
  - When did you realize that you had a unique talent in football?
- Why did you choose to attend this University?
  - How did you choose your degree? If no degree probe
  - Plans for careers/fields interested in
    - What is attractive about that
    - When did you decide upon that career choice?
      - How willing do you think you'd be to give up X if something better came along?
    - Did you always want to do that?
    - Family work in that area?
- What was the student-athlete experience like for you?
  - With whom did you spend most of your time (social interaction)
    - What kinds of things did you mainly talk about
  - Do you still keep in contact with your old teammates?
    - Probe. How often? What are things you talk about?
    - Do you still consider yourself an athlete?
  - What impact did being a student-athlete have on your life?
  - While being a Student-Athlete did you feel controlled?
  - In your opinion ...Change professor's interaction with you?
    - If minority: Do you feel....
  - Did you ever encounter the dumb jock stereotype?
    - If minority probe for ethnic identity
  - In what ways if any was academic success stressed?
    - Who was the one putting importance on it? (family? Coach? Parents?)

### \*Transition\*

- What does an average week look like for you? (what is your life like?)
  - What are some of your hobbies?
- How do you define yourself?
- How do others define you?
  - Seen as just an athlete?
- What person or persons in your life would you say you go to for support the most?
  - Probe: why this person?
  - How do they support you?
  - In what ways could your support system be better?
- In your opinion, has your family become fixated on your athletic achievements?
- When did you realize that playing football could possibly be a career?
  - Did you family stress the importance of athletics to you?
    - Parents see an opportunity for scholarships?
- Why did you stop playing?

- Who has played the biggest role in you being a successful athlete?
- Who makes or has made you feel that you can be successful in academics?
  - Have you ever avoided underperformed in academics by putting in less effort to begin with?
    - In Sport?
- Where do you see yourself in 3 years?
- If you were an AD what forms of support you would you offer to student athletes?
  - Coach?
- Lets pretend for a second I am an incoming football freshman, what advice would you give me?

Is there anything that we have not talked about that you want to?

Do you want to ask me any questions?

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