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Exploring the Relationship Between Athletic Identity and Career Maturity Among High Profile
Student Athletes in Revenue Producing Sports Attending a Division II Institution

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the relationship between athletic identity and career maturity of high profile male athletes at a Division II institution in the Midwest. The study was guided by Donald E. Super's (1957) career development theory. Participants were high profile male student athletes, who were currently enrolled at the institution and played a revenue producing sport (narrowly defined as men's football and basketball). Semi-structured interviews were conducted that prompted participants to describe their experiences as high profile student athletes and how those experiences contributed to their athletic identity and career maturity. Findings suggest that participants had a strong athletic identity, an identity that was influenced by early socialization and institutional factors. The findings also indicate that three out of the five participants demonstrated lower career maturity.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Ideally, college is meant to prepare students for the real world (Saffici & Pellefrino, 2012). College is a space for students to explore careers, intern at prospective companies, and gain additional experiences beyond the classroom. However, research suggests that collegiate athletes are not adequately prepared for life after termination of their sport (Beamon, 2012; Poux & Fry, 2015). Specifically, students who participate in revenue producing or high profile sports have been found to have less career maturity or the ability to make realistic career decisions than their nonathletic peers (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996).

Student athletes who compete in a revenue producing sports (football and men's basketball) form a strong athletic identity resulting in heavy commitment to the sport, leaving little to no attention to career and academic development (Martens & Cox, 2000; Poux & Fry, 2015). This is not surprising given the environment in which student athletes live. Student athletes who aspire to professional football, basketball, or baseball careers become distracted from thinking of other career options while still in college (Cox, Sadberry, McGuire, & Adrian McBride, 2009). According to Martens and Cox (2000), athletes often develop a strong commitment to their sport early in life due to the amount of reinforcement they receive from parents, coaches, and peers. This is especially true for high profile athletes in revenue producing sports (Cox et al., 2009; Martens & Cox, 2000; Poux & Fry, 2015). Although a strong commitment to the sport is desirable from an athletic perspective, it may be harmful to development outside of the sport. Furthermore, high demands, coaches seeking to develop their players as elite athletes, and having their teammates as the major social network contributes to

the increases of their athletic identification as well as their commitment to the sport, ultimately lowering the career maturity of student athletes (Houle & Kluck, 2015).

For student athletes in general, time commitment and demands of the sport limit their ability to focus on the development of their future careers (Houle, Brewer, & Kluck, 2010; Poux & Fry, 2015). More specifically, to be successful in college, students must manage time to attending classes regularly, study and complete homework, enjoy a healthy social life, eat, sleep, and take care of basic human needs (Cox et al., 2009). Student athletes, however, must complete all these things while also training three to five hours a day, attending required meetings weekly, traveling during competitive seasons, competing in home competition, and other appearances as required (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). Additionally, in a national study of student athletes experience in college, more than half of student athletes expressed that they did not spend as much time on academics as they would have liked to and 80% indicated it was due to their participation in sports (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). Collegiate athletes demonstrate delayed career development and low levels of career maturity especially as it relates to choosing a major and an occupation. Findings from Beamon’s (2012) study (as cited in Poux & Fry 2015) indicate that athletes gave less consideration to the major they chose, because they saw the selection of majors as a requirement to continue playing sports, as opposed to a decision that affected their future.

A review of the literature revealed that there are several studies that have examined the athletic identity, career maturity, and identity foreclosure of student athletes in various sports, including men and women’s sports (Harrison et al., 2011; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Murdock et al., 2016; Simons et al., 1999; & Wooten, 2005). Simons et al. (1999) was one of the few researchers who distinguished between athletes who played revenue sports verses those who did

not. Furthermore, while most studies utilized large scale surveys (Ferris et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2011; Simons et al., 1999) only a few used in-depth interviews (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007) to explore the subtle institutional variables related to athletic identity and career maturity. Finally, much of the existing research on athletic identity and career maturity of student athletes has focused on Division I institutions (Harrison et al., 2011; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Murdock et al., 2016; Wooten, 2005); there is a lack of research on the athletic identity and career maturity of high profile student athletes who play revenue sports at a Division II institution. This study seeks to address the gap in the literature by conducting a qualitative examination of the athletic identity and career maturity of high profile male athletes who play revenue sports at a Division II institution in the Midwest.

Importance of the Problem

Researchers have reported that there is a divide between intercollegiate athletics and higher education. Although college sports have become a big part of the culture in higher education, conflicts exist between the goals and functions of the intercollegiate athletic program and the mission of the higher education institution (Gayles, 2015). Many athletic programs at universities and colleges are inconsistent with the institution's mission (Saffici & Pellefrino, 2012). Despite the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) mission being geared towards developing individuals as both students and athletes in preparation for life after collegiate endeavors, research has shown student athletes describe themselves as "athlete-student" (Poux & Fry, 2015; Saffici & Pellefrino, 2012). Today, athletic programs in institutions are run as big businesses, instead of benefiting all students as an opportunity to learn life lessons (Carson & Rinehart, 2010). Furthermore, for student athletes, this can mean lowered academic

admissions standards, preferential treatment in school, and ultimately less time contributed to development outside of the sport (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Saffici & Pellefrino, 2012).

With only 1% of collegiate athletes becoming professional athletes, and the average professional sports career lasting around three and a half years, it is very important for student athletes to explore options beyond athletic professions (Beamon, 2012). The commercialization of athletic programs today sends false representation to student athletes, by including requirements that some would agree or argue are damaging to their development after college (Carson & Rinehart, 2010; Poux & Fry, 2015; Saffici & Pellefrino, 2012). For example, time commitment to athletics can hinder student's availability for internships or exploring different careers, thus making it difficult when searching for jobs after graduation. Still, the research is inadequate.

Currently there are very few studies that examine the athletic identity and career maturity of students in Division II institutions, but given the large number of athletes enrolled in Division II institutions it is crucial that we attend to the development of their career maturity as well. Most importantly, these student athletes deserve the opportunity to take full advantage of their college experience. The purpose of an educational institution is not to entertain the American public with athletics. On the current path institutions are taking with athletic programs, many student athletes will remain unprepared for life after sports. Institutions should be educating future citizens who serve a greater good of society (Carson & Rinehart, 2010).

Background of Problem

Intercollegiate Athletics in Higher Education

Intercollegiate sports were established in colonial colleges in America (Flowers, 2009). Alexander Rippa (as cited in Flowers 2009) describes the institutions as essentially upper-class

institutions founded to train church and state leaders in the aristocratic tradition of the Old World. According to Flowers, by the early nineteenth century, students became bored of their finicky lives and began the “sport” of hazing newcomers. Students were organized by class and competed with other classes in the college, leading to the annual “Bloody Monday” evolving to football. Although there were no specific policies towards these games, some presidents and faculty members saw these athletic contests as a positive activity on campus and interfered very little in the operations, but some institutions banned the sport from their campus, fining or suspending those who participated in the sport on the campus (Flowers, 2009).

In 1852, Harvard and Yale competed in the first intercollegiate rowing match (Flowers, 2009; Rader, 1999; Smith, 2000). According to Flowers (2009) due to the lack of institutional and faculty support, students needed to produce money for the continuance of their athletic clubs. This led to the commercialization of college athletics. Faculties of colleges resented this commercialization of the athletics, perceiving sports as a distraction to the academic mission of the university (Flowers, 2009; Smith, 2000). Alumni were recruited to help manage and/or coach the team as well as provide financial help. Reluctantly, the spirit of winning became the focus, instead of what had hitherto been a friendly competition (Flower, 2009).

As stated by Flowers (2009), “Prior to the Civil War, college enrollments began to decline and schools faced charges that they were elitist and therefore not deserving public support, so colleges began to look for a means to improve their visibility and attract student” (p. 348). Institutions saw athletics as a way to increase enrollment and attract public support. By 1920, intercollegiate athletics became an important aspect in higher education. Today, colleges and universities embrace the many institutional benefits of athletics, including high enrollment, donors, and money (Carson & Rinehart, 2010). Students, alumni, and faculty band together in a

sense of camaraderie to prove that they are better than the college down the street. College sports are not big businesses but are operated as such.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

In 1910, the NCAA was formed to formulate rules that could be applied to the various intercollegiate sports, although in the early years the NCAA did not play a major role in governing any college sports (Smith, 2000). According to Smith, there were some minor attempts to restructure rules in football and other sports played, including the creation of a national championship event in various sports. However, due to the growing commercialization of, and interest in college athletics, the NCAA efforts did not equal the tasks presented. In 1951, the NCAA became more significant to its members, exercising their authority (Smith, 2000).

In the early 1970s, members of the NCAA decided to create multiple divisions (Division I, Division II, and Division III). Institutions would be placed in divisions that reflected their competitive capacity (Smith, 2000). Particularly, Division I institutions were those with more students and money to compete. Division II and III had less students and less money to compete in collegiate sport competitions. Today, “The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a membership-driven organization dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of student-athletes and equipping them with the skills to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom and throughout life” (NCAA, 2016). As the commercialization of college sports increased, including increased costs related to non-revenue producing sports, costly gender equity requirements, and new facilities, NCAA confronted challenges in enforcing new processes and balancing the playing field. (Smith, 2000).

Division I. According to the NCAA website, Division I institutions have the largest student body population and manages the largest athletic budgets in collegiate sports. Due to

their budget, Division I schools are able to offer the most full ride scholarships. There are nearly 350 colleges and universities listed as Division I, more than 6,000 fields for athletic teams, and more than 170,000 student athletes competing in NCAA sports each year (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Division I institutions must sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women. Similar to the other divisions, two team sports must be for each gender. Moreover, student athletes in this division must complete 40% of the coursework required for their major by the end of their second year, 60% by the third year, 80% by the end of their fourth year, and are allowed five years to graduate (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

Division II. According to the NCAA website, Division II was implemented in 1973. There must be at least five men and five women sports at a Division II institution with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season represented by each gender. What makes Division II institutions unique is they provide partial scholarships for athletes based on financial aid. In 1997, the NCAA granted each division the right to decide their own policies. There are approximately 300 colleges and universities identified as Division II and over 119,000 collegiate athletes competing each year (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Moreover, student athletes in Division II sports must complete 24 credit hours each academic year to remain eligible for competition. In addition, student athletes must receive a 2.0 throughout their time at the institution. Lastly, Division II student-athletes must complete their four seasons of competition within the first 10 semesters (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

Division III. With 450 universities and colleges and 180,000 student athletes, the NCAA describes Division III institutions as the largest NCAA division. Academics are the primary focus for student athletes at Division III schools. Through shorter practices and playing seasons, this division is able to minimize the conflict between athletics and academics (National

Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). According to the NCAA, there is no minimum standard to maintain eligibility. However, athletes must be enrolled in at least 12 semesters regardless of an institution's own definition of full time and be in good academic standing. Finally, student athletes are more often integrated with the student body in order to keep them focused on being a student first.

Statement of Purpose

Research indicates that student athletes who compete in revenue producing sports (men's football and basketball) seem to have a stronger athletic identity and lower career maturity at Division I institutions. However, given the large number of student athletes at Division II institutions, it is important to explore their athletic identity and career maturity, especially amongst high profile athletes competing in revenue producing sports. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the relationship between athletic identity and career maturity of high profile male athletes at a Division II institution and answer these questions:

- (1) What is the athletic identity of high profile male athletes who play in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution?
- (2) What is the career maturity of high profile student athletes who play in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution?
- (3) What is the relationship between the athletic identity and career maturity?

Definition of Key Terms

Athletic Identity

The degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role (Houle et al., 2010, p. 146).

Career Maturity

One's ability to make a proper career decision, including the knowledge of what is required to make that career decision as well as the degree to which one's choices are realistic (Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, & Kiewra, 1998).

Division I

The highest level of intercollegiate athletics, who must sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women) with two team sports for each gender.

There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria.

Division I schools must meet minimum financial aid awards for their athletics program, and there are maximum financial aid awards for each sport that a Division I school cannot exceed (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

Division II

Division II institutions have to sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, (or four for men and six for women), with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season represented by each gender. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria. Division II athletics programs are financed in the institution's budget like other academic departments on campus. Traditional rivalries with regional institutions dominate schedules of many Division II athletics programs. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

Division III

Division III institutions have to sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season represented by each gender. There are minimum contest and participant minimums for each sport. Division III athletics features

student-athletes who receive no financial aid related to their athletic ability and athletic departments are staffed and funded like any other department in the university (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

High Profile Athletes in Revenue Producing Sports

Includes the starting players in men's basketball and football players.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

A membership-driven organization dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of student-athletes and equipping them with the skills to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom and throughout life (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

Student Athlete

Students who participate in one or more hours of intercollegiate athletics per day (Nelson & Wechsler, 2001, p. 43).

Delimitations of the Study

This is an exploratory study that is limited to the investigation of athletic identity and career maturity of high profile male student athletes competing in revenue producing sports (men's basketball and football) at one Midwest Division II institution. Female sports and non-revenue male sports are not included in this study.

Limitations

A major limitation of the study is the small number of participants who enrolled in the study. Since only five high-profile student athletes volunteered to be interviewed, the findings cannot be generalized to all student athletes. Also, all participants came from one particular institution, therefore the findings do not represent all Division II institution.

Organization of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis will focus on a review of literature, research design, results, and conclusion. In the next chapter, the literature review, I will discuss the theoretical rationale that guides this study and provide a critical review of the literature. In chapter three, I will discuss the research design, methods of participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four will discuss the findings and Chapter five will provide a discussion of the findings as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This study seeks to explore the relationship between athletic identity and career maturity. This chapter covers the theoretical framework for this study and a thematic synthesis of previous literature. Specifically, literature exploring Donald Super's career development theory will be examined along with athletic identity, career maturity, and identity foreclosure in intercollegiate athletes.

Theoretical Framework

Career Development Theory

Donald E. Super's (1957) career development theory is the theoretical framework for this study. Super is one of the leaders in the career development movement, initiating the Career Pattern Study in 1951, and emphasizing the importance of self-concept (Coleman, 1958). This framework was developed from the work and career theory of his colleague Eli Ginzberg. Eli Ginzberg, an economist, developed the career development theory in 1951. Ginzberg theorized that there were only three periods of occupational choice including fantasy choice, tentative choice, and realistic choice (Super, 1953). Although Super admired Ginzberg's work, Super extended the work on life and career development from three to five stages and included two additional sub-stages (Coleman, 1958; Super, 1953). In Super's career development model the five career stages highlight changes in goals across five periods of life and include, growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Brown & Associates, 2002). Within these stages, three major influences, or sub-stages, factor into vocational development: environmental determinants, personal determinates, and situation determinants (Brown & Associates, 2002; Coleman, 1958; Super, 1953; Super, 1990).

Stage one: Growth. Career growth occurs during ages four to thirteen (Brown & Associates, 2002). During this stage, one is developing their own self-concepts, attitudes, needs, and a concept of the general world of work. By the end of childhood, individuals will make decisions based on attitudes, beliefs, and competencies in regards to career (Brown & Associates, 2002). Most student athletes begin to take on an athletic identity during this early stage. Often, athletes develop a strong commitment to the sport during this stage of life through reinforcement from parents, coaches, and peers (Martens & Cox, 2000). According to Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, and Bimper (2011), during this stage, Black student athletes dream of becoming professional athletes from television and media portrayal. However, for individuals to move successfully through the other stages, one must continue to develop their competences.

Stage two: Exploration. Throughout ages fourteen to twenty-four, society expects young people to learn who and what they might want to become. Brown and Associates (2002) break down the exploration stage into three vocational development tasks that move an individual from occupational daydreams to employment in a job: crystallization, specification, and actualization. The first task, crystallization, is to explore broadly to form tentative ideas about where they fit in society. The second task, specification, is to develop a preferred plan of action in preparation for declaring an occupational choice. The third task, actualization, is to execute that plan on either an exploratory basis or with a more definite but still tentative commitment (Brown & Associates, 2002; Super, 1980). Particularly, collegiate athletes are in this exploration stage. At this stage, student athletes are likely to succumb to identity foreclosure, meaning student athletes identify as athletes and make no effort to explore other identities (Beamon, 2012). Also, the degree of structure in the athletic system can promote conformity and dependence discouraging exploratory behavior. Some student athletes in this

stage may continue on the athletic path, being coaches or working with athletics in some capacity. Overall, the exploration stage can set the tone for the next three stages.

Stage three: Establishment. Establishment generally occurs during the ages of twenty-five and forty-four. “The three vocational development tasks that outline the establishment stage stem from how society expects one to hold a job” (Brown & Associates, 2002, p.178). The first task describes implementing one’s self concept. This means stabilizing in an occupation, which requires one to understand the culture and climate of the organization and completing job responsibilities adequately. The second task calls for demonstrating positive work attitudes and productive habits, including building professional and positive work relationships. Finally, the third task of the establishment stage is defined as advancing in one’s position, whether that is moving to a completely new position or just having different job opportunities (Brown & Associates, 2002). This stage can be difficult for student athletes, especially when the exploration stage has not been accomplished. Student athletes may have unrealistic occupational expectations, such as becoming professional athletes, which affects their career development. With that being said, one may become more focused on maintaining a position rather than advancing and entering the fourth career stage.

Stage four: Maintenance. Maintenance usually occurs during ages forty-five to sixty-four. Individuals enter this stage when they decide to stay in an occupation, rather than advance into a different role in the organization. Super (as cited in Brown & Associates 2002), theorized three styles of positive functioning during the maintenance stage. One style is holding a position where an individual continues with the responsibilities of the position, but focuses on doing them well. Updating, the second style, is striving to do a tasks better, i.e. not only perfecting one’s craft, but keeping current on new techniques. The last style is innovating which means creating

new techniques, uncovering different tasks, and doing them differently (Brown & Associates, 2002). Moreover, throughout the maintenance stage, individuals are preparing for the final stage, disengagement.

Stage five: Disengagement. This stage occurs during ages sixty-five and older. According to Brown and Associates (2002), after a long period in maintenance, workers eventually lack energy and interest in the current occupation. Super (1990), explains this stage consisting of an individual not being able to meet the job requirements and facing new decisions prior to retirement and actually retiring. Furthermore, this stage can be a difficult transition for some. For student athletes, disengagement can come earlier than sixty-five. Most professional athletic careers end very early, causing the transition a hard one to cope with. Generally, “at each age, vocational development tasks and career concerns should mesh, and the degree of mesh indicates level of vocational maturity. Skipping a task in the normative sequence may result in difficulties in later stages” (Brown & Associates, 2002, p. 167).

Summary. In Super’s career development model the five career stages highlight changes in goals across five periods of life and include, growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Brown & Associates, 2002). In addition, Super theorizes that each stage can affect the next stage. Student athletes are in the exploration stage. At this stage, student athletes are likely to succumb to identity foreclosure, that is, student athletes identify as athletes and make no effort to explore other identities (Beamon, 2012).

Research/Evaluation

In the following section, research related to athletic identity and career maturity amongst collegiate athletes will be examined and synthesized to give a better understanding of the significance of this study.

Athletic Identity

Houle, Brewer, and Kluck (2010) define athletic identity as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (p. 146). Moreover, an “athlete’s identification with the athlete role is facilitated by not having to be employed when they have an athletic scholarship, having coaches reinforce their self-definition as elite athletes, and having a team as a social network” (Houle & Kluck, 2015, p. 25). Beamon (2012) describes the social structure of student athletes as a significant contribution to athletic identity. Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (as cited in Beamon, 2012) confirm that due to the limited time and energy devoted to non-athletic interactions, students’ athletic identity seems more rewarding and encouraged by peers, parents, and coaches. Research has shown that student athletes have developed a perception of self as athlete-student, rather than student athlete (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Saffici & Pellefrino, 2012). Moreover, they prioritize factors in their lives that help to improve sport performance (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016).

Cultural differences. Race, gender, and class can also affect athletic identity. Considering the over representation of African American men in revenue producing sports in colleges and professional teams, many Black young men dream of being a professional athlete, and identify with the athletic role (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011). Research has shown that Black football student athletes have a stronger athletic identity than their White counterparts. Particularly, Harrison et al. (2011) conducted a study to explore the relationship of race and athletic identity. A total of 109 football student athletes from a Division I predominantly White institution participated in this study. Participants included former and current members of the university’s football team. An Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), was administered to teammates and responses were totaled to determine the degree of

athletic identity. Moreover, the results of the AIMS acknowledged specific differences in the scale items, concluding that African American football student athletes has a higher athletic identity score than Caucasians and “African American student athletes were more internally focused on their sport, felt that others perceived them only as athletes, and see sport as the focal point in their lives” (Harrison et al., 2011, p. 97).

Pushing African Americans towards athletics is very common and this push hinders the social and cognitive growth, especially in males (Beamon, 2010). Beamon conducted a study to examine the socialization of former African American male collegiate athletes. Both purposive sampling and snowball sampling were utilized to select 20 Black men who played in revenue producing sports (football or men’s basketball) at a Division I institution. Most of the participants played in semi-professional football leagues, obtained degrees, and or began their sport of choice by age 10. The findings show the impact of two major factors: socializing agents and socializing environment. Specifically, the socializing agents were identified as family, role models, neighborhoods, and the media. Socializing environments that continued to be mention throughout the interviews were the African American community and culture. For example, “terms such as we, us, our, and my people signified a larger community connection that exists outside of family and neighborhood influencing their sport socialization” (Beamon, 2010, p. 287). For the participants in this study, family and their neighborhood reinforced media stereotypes.

Moreover, Harrison and Mottley (2012) tested the effect of academic engagement and identity priming on the academic test performance of African American and White college athletes. When stereotypes are made about student athletes and their athletic identity is salient in the classroom or other academic areas, stereotype threat becomes induced in college athletes

causing them to perform more poorly compared to when their athletic identity is not made salient (Harrison & Mottley, 2012). Participants in this study include 75 African American athletes and 76 White athletes who represented nine varsity sports on campus. Participants also had to complete an adaptation of the Intellectual Disengagement subscale of the Intellectual Orientation Inventory. The researchers asked non athletic students to join, in order to add a traditional classroom environment. Participants were told to take a verbal analogies test and a questionnaire. Researchers included identity prime manipulations on the test booklet cover. Some were “athlete-only prime” condition, “scholar-athlete prime” condition, and “neutral identity prime” condition. To analyze the performance on the test, the overall percentage of correct responses on the difficult and easy test items were computed separately by dividing the number of correct responses by the number of attempts on each subset of test items. The results of the study had a significant effect on stereotype threat on the test performance of academically engaged African American college athletes. Overall, African Americans who had the “scholar-athlete prime” condition induced a stereotype threat among Black athletes who place high value on academics, compared to white students who do not place a high value on their educational outcome. Thus, student athletes who are reminded of their athletic identity conform to the stereotypes and begin to focus only on sports instead of academics and career exploration (Harrison & Mottley, 2012).

Career transition. Student athletes who are fully committed to one’s sport may lack sufficient time to devote towards preparing for life after sports (Martens & Cox, 2000). As a result, they tend to be highly prepared for athletic competitions, but are often unprepared for life after sports (Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Wooten, 2005). Irons (1999) conducted a qualitative study to assess 10 former African American male student athlete’s attitudes towards career transitions.

Additionally, participants were a part of a larger study involving graduation rates and were football players attending a Division I institution. Based on Irons semi-structured interviews, five conclusions were made. Iron first concluded that seven out of the 10 athletes were currently in the careers they had said they wanted to be in 10 years ago. Secondly, all of the athletes believe their transition had been difficult, but their degrees had made the transition easier. He also concluded that all participants agreed that Black males had a harder time transitioning due to media portrayal. Seven out of 10 their socialization as an athlete had hindered their adjustments to the workplace. Finally, all the athletes agreed that if they could do it all over again, they would focus more on academics and intellectual pursuits (Iron, 1999). Similarly, Lally's (2007) study, which examined the relationship between identity and athletic retirement, indicated that "athletes who initiate the redefinition of self-prior to learning the athlete role may be better equipped to cope with its loss than those who maintain a strong commitment to the athlete role until retirement or even afterwards" (p. 98).

Harrison and Lawrence (2003) conducted a study focusing on 26 African American athletes and their perceptions of athletic career transition. Participants consisted of 15 males and 11 females varying in age and encompassing seven different sports from a Division II institution. Participants were presented with a visual elicitation and a former student profile and instructed to offer an open-ended response to the profile. Also using the Life After Sports Scale (LASS), researchers found five major themes: Inspirational Imagery Validation, Academic and Athletic Success, Classroom Accomplishments, Family Devotion, and Life After Sports. According to Harrison and Lawrence (2003), the Inspirational Imagery Validation refers to the student athlete's positive feelings and thoughts in response to the successful transition made by the athlete in the profile. Academic and Athletic Success described participants looking at the

student athlete in the profile as a role model and motivator. Classroom Accomplishments included participants commending the academic excellence of the student athlete in the profile. Family Devotion refers to the participants recognizing their personal family significance. Finally, Life After Sports identified the importance of and reality of the finalization of their collegiate athletic experience and the importance of choosing a major they were interested in (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003).

Murdock, Strear, Jenkins-Guarnieri and Henderson (2016) examined the relationship between attending career intervention sessions and career athletic identity, as well as roles of academic achievement and gender aspects of career identity in athletics attending a Division I institution. Participants consisted of both male and female student athletes who attended one of the final two career intervention program sessions conducted throughout an academic semester. The results of the Life After Sports Scale suggests that attending one or more career intervention programs did not have a significant effect on the student athletes career identity. However, gender played a strong role in the area of student athlete career development, transitions to life after athletics, social roles, decision-making, academic performance, and the probable development of a career athletic identity. The authors also suggested that “male varsity student athletes in revenue producing sports may be at especially at risk for impaired acquisition of career decision-making skills” (Murdock et al., 2016, p. 404).

Furthermore, in comparison to non-student athletes, Ferris, Finster, and McDonald (2005) found that student athletes, on average, graduate at a similar rate. However, the enrollment process for some universities sacrifice academic requirements, like admitting student athletes with lower test scores, to cater to athletic ability (Ferris et al., 2005). Additionally, research has shown a lack of academic motivation from student athletes. Simons, Rheenens, and Covington

(1999) examined Division 1 athlete's achievement motivation. Participants in this study were three hundred and sixty-one intercollegiate student athletes enrolled at the University of California. The researchers categorized the participants into male revenue sports (football, basketball), male non-revenue sports (baseball, track, cross country, soccer, and swimming), and female sports (basketball, softball, track and field, volleyball, soccer, swimming, water polo, tennis, gymnastics, and golf). The results of a paper and pencil Likert-type scale instrument based on self-worth theory, showed that the stronger the athletic identity the less commitment to the academic role. Also, males in revenue sports were more motivated towards athletics than the other group, while female athletes showed more motivation to academics. Nevertheless, "the fear of failure and the relative commitment to athletics was found to play important roles in the academic motivation of both revenue and nonrevenue student athletes" (Simons et al., 1999, p. 151).

Summary. In summary, research on athletic identity was primarily focused on Division I institution student athletes (Harrison et al., 2011; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Murdock et al., 2016; Wooten, 2005). Most studies examined the athletic identity of student athletes in various sports, including men and women sports (Harrison et al., 2011; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Murdock et al., 2016; Simons et al., 1999; Wooten, 2005). Simons et al. (1999) was the only study that distinguished between athletes who played revenue sports vs. those who did not. In addition, research designs varied between qualitative and quantitative research with most studies focusing on large scale surveys (Ferris et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2011; Simons et al., 1999) while only a few used in-depth interviews (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Irons, 1999).

Career Maturity

According to Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, and Kiewra (as cited in Houle & Kluck 2015), “career maturity is defined as one’s ability to make reasonable and responsible career decisions with an awareness of what the requirements are to make such decisions” (p.25). Since there is only a small percentage of intercollegiate student athletes who advance to professional sports, it is important for student athletes to prepare for other careers. Research has shown a negative correlation between athletic commitment and career maturity. Houle and Kluck (2015) conducted a study to explore those relationships. Two hundred and twenty student athletes from a large, southwestern, Division I university participated in the study, representing all intercollegiate sports at the institution. Individual student athletes were recruited from outside the university’s Student Athlete Development Center and were asked to complete an Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE), and a Career Decision Scale. The findings of this study confirmed that “student athletes with higher athletic identity had lower career maturity and student athletes with greater self-efficacy for completion of career decision related tasks have greater career maturity” (p.33).

Choice of college major. Collegiate athletes demonstrate delayed career development and low levels of career maturity including choosing a major and an occupation. Findings from Beamon’s (2012) study (as cited in Poux & Fry 2015) indicate that athletes gave less consideration to the major they chose, because they saw the selection of majors as a requirement to continue playing sports, as opposed to a decision that affects their future. Navarro (2015) explored student athlete’s undergraduate major choices and career aspirations. This study was conducted at a large, Division II research institution and participants consisted of twenty-nine senior student athletes. Essentially, seniors were asked to reflect on their personal experience as

they prepared for their career. Using a qualitative design to find detailed, personal responses for the individual, Navarro was able to identify three common factors influencing major choices and career aspirations: (a) interactions with academic/student affairs professionals across campus; (b) interactions with academic/student affairs professionals internal to athletics; and (c) the struggle to balance the roles of student and collegiate athlete (p.370).

In addition, there has been research identifying patterns in major selection amongst student athletes. Schneider, Ross, and Fisher (2010), conducted a study to investigate the existence of academic clustering by exploring football players from the Big 12 Conference major selection. The authors define academic clustering as the grouping of students into one major. Academic advisors may persuade student athletes towards a particular major to ensure eligibility, contributing to academic clustering. Data was collected from the 2006 media guides found online at each institution participating the Big 12 Conference and compared to the general student body. Results confirmed the existence of academic clustering within intercollegiate athletes compared to the general student population at the respective institutions; with most athletes clustered in social sciences, business, and communications majors.

Structure of NCAA sports. Athletic requirements can cause incredible strain on the student. Student athletes must cope with public scrutiny and extensive time demands in addition to classes. Specifically, they must complete all these activities while also training three to five hours a day: attending required meetings weekly, traveling during competitive seasons, competing in home competition, and other appearances as required (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). In addition, they must fulfil and maintain the NCAA eligibility standards, including academic tasks (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Moreover, activities related to career development

such as visiting the career center and internships may be perceived as requiring time that athletes may feel they don't have (Martens & Lee, 1998).

According to Martens and Lee (1998) the degree of structure in the athletic system promotes conformity and dependence and discourages exploratory behavior. One factor that contributes to the discouragement of exploratory behavior is the hierarchical structure of athletics. For example, the coach is the leader of the whole team, and if a player defies the coach, they risk little to no play time (Martens & Lee, 1998). Another contributing factor is that intercollegiate athlete's lives are often more scheduled than that of non-athletes. For example, student athletes are given work-out schedules, food schedules, study tables, and class schedule, giving student athletes little opportunity to explore life after sports. As a result, "activities such as exploring the career center and choosing a career goal, may be intimidating for student athletes" (Martens & Lee, 1998, p. 125).

Identity foreclosure. According to Marcia (1966), identity foreclosure refers to individuals who commit to a specific identity without exploring other identities, usually encouraged by peers, parents, and significant others. Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996), suggest that due to the physical and psychological demands of intercollegiate athletes, including isolation from other college activities and restrictions on explorations, identity foreclosure is promoted among student athletes.

Relationship Between Athletic Identity and Career Maturity

Researchers have identified relationships between career maturity, athletic identity, and identity foreclosure. Specifically, Murphy et al. (1996), examined the relationship between identity foreclosure, career maturity, and athletic identity by studying 124 intercollegiate student athletes, 99 men and 25 women, attending a Division I institution. Participants ranged from

freshman to seniors and participated in various athletic sports. Students completed a demographic form, an Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status, and an Athletic Identity Measurement Scale. Results identified a significant relationship between identity foreclosure, athletic identity, and career maturity. Specifically, “findings suggest that failure to explore alternative roles and identifying strongly and exclusively with athletic roles are associated with delayed career development in intercollegiate students” (Murphy et al., p.239).

Similarly, Beamon (2012) examined identity foreclosure in 20 African American former Division I men’s basketball and football players using ethnographic interviews. The semi-structured interview questions included questions such as: “How do you define yourself” and “How do you think others define you.” The researcher found three major themes, self-identity, social identity, and the effects of identity foreclosure on retirement. Results showed that 15 respondents felt that athletics made up their self-definition. The majority of the participants (17 of 20) felt that others viewed them as athletes. Finally, all participants described difficulty transitioning out of the role of athlete. Each respondent explained that they expected to play professionally and were not prepared in college to make career choices. Moreover, most described their experience after college as being depressed and reported feelings of emptiness (Beamon, 2012).

Summary. In summary, student athletes tend to have lower career maturity, due to time, commitment to the sport, and NCAA requirements such as number of classes and GPA (Carodine et al., 2001; Martens & Lee, 1998; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). Research designs varied between qualitative and quantitative research with most studies focusing on large scale surveys (Houle and Kluck, 2015; Navarro, 2015) while only a few used in-depth interviews (Beamon, 2012). In addition, the majority of research on career maturity was focused on

Division I institutions (Beamon, 2012; Houle & Kluck, 2015; Martens & Lee, 1998; Schneider et al., 2010); there were no studies that examined career maturity at Division II institutions.

Summary

The review of literature suggests that student athletes who play in revenue producing sports are likely to have a higher athletic identity (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Murphy et al., 1996; Wooten, 2005). It also suggests that compared to their non-athletic peers, student athletes often have lower career maturity (Carodine et al., 2001; Martens & Lee, 1998; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Finally, the literature indicates that transitioning out of sports is very difficult for those in revenue producing sports (Beamon, 2012; Houle & Kluck, 2015; Martens & Cox, 2000).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the athletic identity and career maturity of male athletes in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution. The study is guided by Super's framework of career development. Participants in this study, college student athletes, fall in the Exploration stage of Super's model. This stage is particularly important to understand because it is the stage where individuals are vulnerable to identity foreclosure, i.e. students begin to identify as athletes instead of exploring other identities (Beamon, 2012).

Much of the empirical research on athletic identity and career maturity has focused on Division I institution student athletes (Harrison et al., 2011; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Murdock et al., 2016; Wooten, 2005). No studies were found that examined these concepts in Division II or III institutions. Most studies examined the athletic identity, career maturity, and identity foreclosure of student athletes in various sports, including men and women sports (Harrison et

al., 2011; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007; Murdock et al., 2016; Simons et al., 1999; Wooten, 2005). Very few studies focused specifically on revenue producing sports (Simons et al., 1999).

The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale was popularly used in research examining athletic identity, identity foreclosure, and/or career maturity (Beamon, 2012; Harrison et al. 2011; Houle and Kluck 2015). Most of these studies used quantitative surveys to ascertain different aspects of students' identity. Only a few probed deep by using qualitative in-depth interviews (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Irons, 1999; Lally, 2007) and exploring the contextual, institutional variables that affect identity and maturity.

This study will draw on the literature in the following ways. It will focus on student athletes who are in the exploration stage of Super's career development model. It will address the gap in the literature by focusing on a Division II institution and like Simons et al. (1999) it will focus on athletes who participate in revenue producing sports. Guided by the research design of Iron (1999) and Beamon (2012), this study will use snowball sampling to identify participants and semi-structured interviews to explore the athletic identity and career maturity (Merriam, 2009) of high profile student athletes who participate in revenue producing sports. Understanding the lived experiences of student athletes through in-depth interviews may help shed light on ways to help student athletes achieve career maturity.

Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

This study sought to provide an understanding of the athletic identity and career maturity of male student athletes attending one Division II institution in the Midwest. I utilized a qualitative, phenomenological method, a method that studies participant's conscious experiences (Merriam, 2009) to explore the relationship between athletic identity and career maturity. The research questions that guided this study were:

- What is the athletic identity of high profile male student athletes who play in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution?
- What is the career maturity of high profile male student athletes in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution?
- What is the relationship between the athletic identity and career maturity?

This chapter provides a description of the research design, the research site, the sampling strategy to locate participants, and the methods of data collection and data analysis.

Research Design

I utilized a qualitative, phenomenological method to explore the athletic identity and career maturity of male student athletes. Phenomenology is a method that allows a researcher to closely examine the participant's conscious or lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Also, prior to interviewing the researcher usually explores their own experiences, in part to become aware of bias. Ultimately, "the reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling they understand better what the participant is feeling" (Merriam, 2009, p. 26).

Research Site

The participating institution is a public, liberal arts, comprehensive, coeducational university in the Midwestern United States. The institution offers 124 degrees (i.e., 87 undergraduate degrees and 37 graduate degrees). According to the NCAA standards, this institution is classified as Division II, with 20 varsity sports including 11 women's teams and nine men's teams. Also, this institution has collected 19 NCAA Division II National Championships. Among the total enrollment of 25,460 students for the Fall 2016 academic semester, there are a total of 560 student athletes. This institution was selected because it is a Division II institution with male revenue producing sports that includes several high profile athletes.

Participants

Participants of this study were high profile male athletes who play revenue producing sports at a Midwest Division II public liberal arts university. I used a criterion-based selection and snowball sampling to recruit participants. Criterion-based, a form of purposive sampling, involves a predetermined list of attributes specific to the study (Merriam, 2009). For this study, the following criteria applied: an eligible male student athlete currently enrolled at the institution; plays a revenue producing sport (narrowly defined as men's football and basketball); is a high profile athlete.

To recruit the participants that meet the particular criteria I worked with the Office of Institutional Analysis to send an email to the student athletes who met the eligibility criteria for my study. I provided the athletes with a brief description of my study and my phone number and email address so that they could contact me if they were willing to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Once participants contacted me, a mutually convenient time and location was

scheduled to conduct the interview. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions about the study before they begin the interview.

I also used snowball sampling to locate participants; this is one of the more common forms of criterion-based sampling, where a participant of the study refers the researcher to another participant (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Snowball sampling is often used to access hard-to-reach participants.

Data Collection

A semi-structured qualitative interview protocol was the primary data collection approach used for this study with one-on-one, in-person semi-structured interviews where “either all the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions” (Merriam, 2009, p.90). These interviews took place in a private setting on campus to ensure confidentiality and encourage honest responses from the participants. Participants were asked to use pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. All interviews were recorded; authorization to record was obtained prior to the interview. Proposed interview questions (located in Appendix B) reflect the goals of the study, and were approved by the institution’s Human Research Review Committee before any data were gathered. Each interview took approximately one hour; however, time varied depending on the participant’s story. I reminded myself to not express my opinions or show bias. I am not an athlete, rather my perspectives were guided by my role as a career advisor. I believe that student athletes need to have structured opportunities to explore and prepare for careers outside of sports. I asked for clarification when needed, and did not interrupt the participants as they were answering questions.

The semi-structured interview consisted of three sections (see Appendix B). In the first section, I asked open-ended questions related to athletic participation and interactions with

others. These questions ascertained the athletic identity of students and the socializing agents and the socializing environments (Beamon, 2012) that may have affected this identity.

The second section included questions that focused on their career maturity; I asked about their career aspirations, experiences with career explorations, and plans for career transitions (Levinson et al., 1998; Schneider et al., 2010; Super, 1957).

Finally, the third section included a simple demographic questionnaire, including racial identification, academic class standing, major, and years as a player in the sport. These questions were asked in order to provide a context for the participants' responses.

I transcribed each audio recording and both the audio recordings and transcriptions were stored on a password protected computer at a secure location. Audio recordings were deleted once transcriptions were completed. Hard copies of transcriptions were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

Data Analysis

After all the data were collected, all audio recordings were transcribed. Next, transcripts of interviews were coded line-by-line using open coding and axial coding. Open coding involved identifying pieces of data that I thought might be useful (Merriam, 2009) and naming them with conceptual codes. For example, codes that emerged during the line-by-line coding included parents, family, friends, coach, physical ability, athletic scholarship. Axial coding refers to grouping these codes and corresponding data into categories. For example, the codes previously mentioned led to category, socializing agents. The categories were then grouped into themes in order to identify patterns in the responses of participants (Merriam, 2009). Codes and categories came from the participants' responses and my knowledge of the literature on the topics of athletic identity and career maturity. Table 1 summarizes the themes, categories and

codes that structure the framework of the findings. Lastly, to ensure credibility, I used direct quotes from participants included in the study.

Table 1

Themes, Categories, and Codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Athletic Identity	Status	Recognizable, Popular, Visible, Low-key, Scorer
	Socializing agents	Parents, Family, Friends, Physical ability, Athletic scholarship
	Socializing environments	Inflexible practice schedule, Coach, Academic advisor
Career Maturity	Career decision	Lifestyle, Available role models, Choice of major, Knowledge of requirements, Athletic aspirations
	Career Exploration	Fulfilling graduation requirements, Experiential learning, Job shadowing,
Identity Foreclosure	Self-perception	Athletic characteristics, Social characteristics, Leadership
	Meta-perception	Athlete, Student athlete

Summary

This study sought to explore the relationship between athletic identity and career maturity. Participants included current high profile student athletes in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution. Through semi-structured interviews, participants were able to provide narratives of their experiences as athletes, and opportunities they had had to develop their career maturity. In the next chapter I present the key findings in the study.

Chapter Four: Results

In this chapter, I present the findings for this study. First, I provide the context for the study, including where the study was conducted and basic demographic characteristics of the participants. Next, the findings of the study are discussed using three major themes and their categories. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Context

This study was conducted at a public, liberal arts, comprehensive, coeducational university in the Midwest United States. Offered at the institution are 124 degrees (i.e., 87 undergraduate degrees and 37 graduate degrees). According to the NCAA standards, this institution is classified as Division II, with 20 varsity sports including 11 women's teams and nine men's teams. Also, this institution has collected 19 NCAA Division II National Championships. Among the total enrollment of 25,460 students for the Fall 2016 academic semester, there are a total of 560 student athletes. This institution was selected because it is a Division II institution with male revenue producing sports that includes several high profile athletes.

Out of 27 male student athletes formally contacted to participate in this study, a total of five high profile student athletes agreed to participate in this study. Of the five athletes, three were football players and two were basketball players. All the participants had been participating in their respective sport since their early middle school years. Three of the five students were majoring in criminal justice, one was majoring in sports leadership, and another in bio-medical science. Four of the five self-identified as Black/African American and one identified as White/Caucasian.

Findings

The main purpose of this study was to examine the athletic identity and career maturity of high profile male athletes at a Division II institution. I also sought to explore the relationship between athletic identity and career maturity of the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for each participant. The interview questions were organized around three broad topics. The first section probed for athletic identity and asked participants to describe their athletic participation and interaction with non-athletes. The second section included questions that focused on their career maturity including career exploration and preparation for life after college. Finally, the third section included a demographic questionnaire that asked for racial identification, academic class standing, major, and years as a player in the sport.

The demographic information was used to give context to the participants. Demographic information of the participant is as follows: There were two basketball players and three football players; four were African American and one was a Caucasian; their majors varied with three majoring in criminal justice, another in sports leadership and one in biomedical science; all of them were seniors and had been playing their sport since age nine.

While analyzing the transcribed interviews, I read the responses carefully line-by-line summarizing significant sections with codes. Like codes were then grouped into categories, and finally categories were grouped into themes. Based on the research questions, three themes were classified (See Table1). The theme *athletic identity* included three categories (1) *status*, (2) *socializing agents*, and (3) *socializing environments*. The second theme, *career maturity* included two categories (1) *career decision* and (2) *career exploration*. The final theme, *identity foreclosure*, which included two categories (1) *self-perception* and (2) *meta-perception*.

Athletic Identity

Understanding the athletic identity of high profile male student athletes who play in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution is a focus of this study. Houle, Brewer, and Kluck (2010) define athletic identity as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (p. 146). Participants were asked to describe themselves as a student athlete, factors that influenced their choice of sport, and to describe their daily schedule. Participants described their athletic identity and three categories surfaced (1) *understanding of the term high profile athlete*, (2) *socializing agents*, and (3) *socializing environments*.

Status. First, participants were asked if they heard of the term high profile athlete. All the participants said they had heard the term, but were not quite sure how to define it. However, when asked about their status as a high profile athlete, four out of the five participants confirmed that they saw themselves as a high profile student athlete. Athlete 1 said:

A lot of people know who I am, or know of me. But, it depends too on the role, like what type of athlete you are. For my sport, if you are a great scorer they will know who you are, if you are an energetic guy they know who you are and know of you, or if you are on a poster.

Athlete 1’s sentiment was echoed by Athlete 3 and Athlete 5 who stated:

I’m out there on the field playing, people recognize me. (Athlete 3)

Because you are doing your research on revenue sport and football is like a sport that everyone kind of looks at, a sport that most people go to, and whether we like it or not, eyes are kind of always on us, and that’s high profile, whether that be a good thing or bad thing. Like if you have a football shirt on around campus, people tend to notice who you are and that you are on the team. (Athlete 5)

Athlete 2 was the only participant who did not consider himself a high profile student athlete. He explained that he was “low key” and kept to himself, therefore did not consider himself to be a high profile athlete.

Overall, when describing themselves as a high profile athlete or not, each participant referred to popularity as opposed to skill; they interpreted high profile to mean high visibility not highly skilled. Specifically, the participants alluded to being recognized on campus by peers as an indicator of their high profile status. Athlete 1 mentioned being a great scorer, however none of the other participants mentioned any other sport skills that were required to be considered a high profile athlete.

Socializing agents. All five participants described choosing their sport because of family and friends. Specifically, they all recalled a family member or friend who played the same sport. The experiences of family members or friends had encouraged them to participate in the same sport. For example, Athlete 5 remembered playing catch with his father at a young age. He stated:

It wasn't so much of them forcing me to play. My parents were just big on me doing stuff, like physical activity, like when I was younger one of the things we always did, like my dad would always have us go into the yard and throw the football around and stuff like that. It wasn't always football but that was one of the ways. It more so influenced me to be physically active you know?

Similarly, Athlete 4's family and friends had an influence on his choice to play football and were once athletes. Athlete 4 said:

I have three older cousins who have went and played college football and went to pretty big schools, and they just influenced me. Just going to their games and stuff like that I wanted to be just like them growing up.

In addition, all participants displayed enthusiasm when talking about those who influenced them. There was a particular rise in their voices and grins as they reminisced on their childhood and those who influenced their decision to play sports.

Another factor that influenced choice of sport was the opportunity to get a full ride scholarship to pay for their education. Athlete 1 described having a choice to play baseball or basketball at the collegiate level, but chose basketball because education was his priority and basketball paid for it:

My brothers, my oldest brother, my dad, my mom, and it was more of like I never thought to pursue basketball at the college so it was more to pick my education. That picked my education, so that was my main focus. Have someone pay for my education.

Athlete 3 discussed how playing football in high school gave him the opportunity to come to college and play. Moreover, Athlete 2 explained that in order to continue his education, he needed to make sure his basketball requirements were met, which include attending practices, games, and following NCAA academic requirements.

Finally, three of the five student athletes felt that they had chosen to become an athlete because of their natural physical ability to play the sport. Athlete 2 talked about basketball just coming naturally to him:

Just came naturally, my family all played basketball and it was just something I wanted to do. I just loved and liked and I just grew to love it even more over time.

Athlete 4 expressed loving being active when he was younger and getting involved in physical sports. Athlete 5 discussed his physique and how it had influenced his decision to play a contact sport. He also explained his natural attraction to physical activity that had prompted him to become an athlete:

When I was younger I was always a bigger kid and I liked physical sports. When it came around time I could play, I just signed up and loved it.

Ultimately, family encouragement and participation, friends with a similar interest, the opportunity for education to be fully paid for, and natural physical attributes contributed to their athletic identity.

Socializing environments. A student athlete's schedule has a significant impact on their athletic identity. Each athlete admitted to spending more time on sports than academics during the season. Athlete 1 described his schedule as "hectic":

Besides the two to two-and-a-half-hour practice, it's more, I feel like I spend more time on basketball than academics. Because I do films, scout reports, you know we don't have to do it, but somethings benefit our team if I go over a scout report on my own, so when we go to practice I won't be behind and so you can remember it when you get to the game. Instead of doing homework that is what I do sometimes.

Similarly, football schedules provided chaotic days for their players. Athlete 3 described having the same issue as Athlete 1 when it came to academics. Athlete 3 explains:

During the season, we really don't have much time because we watch film and we have meetings before practice, then we have practice. Then after that we have class, so we too tired to do anything afterwards like homework. But now, since it's not during the season we have more time, but not that much.

As a result of this busy practice schedule it was difficult for the participants to have free time, attend social events or interact with non-athletes.

Each participant expressed limited interaction with non-athletes. Athlete 4 talked about having non-athlete roommates, but only hanging out with them when at home. The majority of participants admitted to only intermingling with non-athletes when they were in class and working on group projects. Moreover, four out of the five participants explained that social events were rare and if they ever attended, it was with the team.

This busy practice schedule was not necessarily initiated by the athletes. When asked to describe who determined their schedules, although different rhetoric was used, the coach's practice schedule was most commonly mentioned. Each participant talked about how important it was for them to keep the coaches practice schedule in mind while setting their schedule.

Athlete 1 said:

Our academic schedules are [determined by] our advisor, but somewhat our coaches too because whatever time they set the practice is what we have to work around. If they [coaches] look at our schedule they say, don't take this class, take this class, so it's a little bit of the coaches nagging us.

Overall, limited schedule flexibility affects the student's athletic identity. Specifically, student athletes are surrounded by student athletes all the time and have limited contact with non-athletes. Their social network is fulfilled with other athletes which limits them from exploring other identities. In addition, coaches allocate a big portion of time for practices and other meetings, so students must adjust and schedule classes around that, which limits classes they can and cannot take that semester.

Career Maturity

A second objective of this study was to understand the career maturity of high profile male student athletes in revenue producing sports at a Division II institution. According to Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, and Kiewra (as cited in Houle & Kluck 2015), “career maturity is defined as one’s ability to make reasonable and responsible career decisions with an awareness of what the requirements are to make such decisions” (p.25). Participants were asked questions to describe factors that influenced their choice of majors, and ways they are preparing for life after college. Two categories emerged (1) *career decision* and (2) *exploration*.

Career decision. Participants were asked to describe their majors and post-graduation goals. There was a pattern in the responses regarding factors that influenced their choice of career. However, not all of the participants knew what they want to do after graduation. For example, Athlete 2 could not tell me exactly what career he wanted after graduation. He explained that he only wanted to live “comfortably” but was not able to name a specific career:

Just do whatever it takes for me to live comfortably. Like not having to worry about paying bills at the last minute or like worrying about eating. Accomplish my goals in life, whether that’s making a certain amount of money or doing stuff for other people. Leave my mark on the world I guess. I just want to be involved in sports.

Wanting to live comfortably is common. However, not knowing what you want to do career wise in order to get to that comfortable lifestyle defines a lack of career maturity.

Another factor that influenced the majority of the participants’ choice of career was family or close friends. Three of five participants connected their major choices to their family and close friends. Athlete 3, who wanted to become a coach, remembered his high school coach being an influence on his career decision. He stated:

Me and a friend, we grew up together and we went to the same high school and we basically grew up around a bunch of stuff and we had this football coach. He basically showed us the way. I want to basically do the same thing that he did for us and help kids so they can be successful in life.

Athlete 4 acknowledged his grandfather as an influence on his career choice:

My grandfather was a police chief, and that really influenced me. He did that for 35 years before he retired and that influenced me to go into criminal justice.

Similarly, Athlete 5 describes how he came to the decision of being a surgeon:

I always knew I wanted to go into something in the medical field. That's what my sister majored in it. Then I met with an advisor freshman year, and basically said what I wanted to do and I wasn't exactly sure what in the medical field so she said, go biomedical science because that covers multiple avenues. So, I just kind of stuck with it. And I am applying to medical school in the summer so I stuck with it and it worked out.

Participants also mentioned lack of time to fully commit and succeed in a major.

When the demands of practice time conflicted with the demands of time to study for the college courses, two of the five participants explained their decision to change their majors. Athlete 1 talked about switching from a pre-medicine major to a criminal justice major:

Initially I was a pre-med biomedical science major. Then I realized I don't have time for this. I talked to other pre-med students and they said how much they study and how much freedom and I was like I don't have the freedom or time to just worry about one class and this class might be harder and I have four other classes to worry about plus basketball and traveling I couldn't do it.

Athlete 2 described his transition from one major to another saying:

I actually just changed my major last semester because the major I did have was going to take me a little while to graduate. Originally computer information systems. Because I transferred from a different school, everything was different so I didn't want to take an extra two-three years to graduate. So, I changed to sports leadership because I was already interested in it so I did that and I have a minor in information systems. Some of my coaches and my some of my teachers persuaded me to do it.

The two participants insisted that due to the amount of time they needed to commit to their sport, they needed to change their majors to adjust. However, Athlete 5, a bio-medical science major, chose to stay in his major.

Evidently, time and family had an impact on career choice. Being able to make realistic career decisions is essential to career maturity. Making career decisions also takes a plan and being aware of the requirements needed to be met and sticking with it, even when the going gets tough to achieve that career.

Career exploration. Each participant was asked to describe how they were preparing for life after college. This included any experiential learning opportunities, long term and short term goals, and resources used for career development. Most of the participants stated that staying on top of their academics to graduate was the only way they were preparing for life after college.

Athlete 3 explained his plan:

Right now, I really don't have time to. I mean after I'm done with football, I'm going to go train for the Pro Day. Or just enter into a police academy.

Athlete 5 described his plan:

So, I am on the executive board for [an organization]. It kind of looks good for graduate applications and what not. I start working at [a hospital] next week. Well those are more

things to help me with my application. I have done well in the classroom and I'm studying for the MCAT.

Ultimately, each participant described the first step of life after college as graduation. For example, Athlete 2 said:

Going to class and doing everything I need to do in the classroom. Make sure I take care of basketball because that's paying for my education. Just pretty much being responsible. Not messing around and going to parties.

Although going to class and doing well academically will get you to graduation, Athlete 2 doesn't make any reference to any career exploration that will make him look more employable after college, such as internships, job shadowing, or networking with others.

Only two of the five participants had participated in any experiential learning. Both athletes described networking with people in their field and job shadowing. Athlete 1 talked about his internship experience:

I had an internship this past summer with the court systems juvenile courts and it was just basically community service, I would schedule community service locations for the kids and schedule their hours, go to the work site with them and work, help them work and they would plant and clean up. Also, interact with them like talk to them and that led me to get a job next door.

Athlete 5 talked about shadowing doctors and working at a local hospital. However, the remaining three athletes confirmed that they had not participated in internships, job shadowing, or study abroad because of the lack of time. Four of the five participants also admitted not going to any career events offered by their career center. When asked why, Athlete 1 and Athlete 2 stated that they did not have time and/or never had the opportunity to learn about events unless

their coaches made an announcement. Also, when asked about their preparation for life after college, it was clear that the participants had not given it much thought. One of the participants would say, “no, but I should” when asked about attending career events or experiential learning. With career choices among participants consisting of surgeon, U.S Marshall, school social worker, entrepreneur, and professional football player, the lack of exploration and preparation for the chosen career goals, I concluded that most the participants have a lower career maturity.

Identity Foreclosure

According to Marcia (1966), identity foreclosure refers to individuals who commit to a specific identity without exploring other identities, usually encouraged by peers, parents, and significant others. Given the participants’ narratives, identity foreclosure seems to be a common theme. Two categories emerge (1) *self-perception* and (2) *meta-perception*.

Self-perception. First, during the interview the participants were asked to define themselves and asked to describe how others might define them. Although three of the five participants described themselves using basic characteristics such as being goofy, hardworking, and quiet. Two of the five defined themselves solely around their athletic identity. For example, Athlete 1 stated:

I define myself as a leader. Because it’s like all eyes are on me. Because even while I’m here people know my name and know of me and like. ‘oh he’s a basketball player.’

When you think about it you have to carry yourself a certain way, you can’t be obnoxious out in public. With me and my teammates I’m like uhh you need a tie it down some because you don’t know who’s watching you at times. Some students can get away with it, but us, we will get a phone call to the coach saying, ‘oh your athletes did this’ and it happens a lot actually. Especially with football and basketball. We have to have a filter.

You can't say certain things even though you should say certain things. Just jokes and playing around, you just don't.

Like Athlete 1, Athletes 5 stated:

I would say, student athlete at [an institution] because I go to school and play football.

These two participants are experiencing identity foreclosure, because they talk specifically about themselves as an athlete. Their answers stem from their experiences as an athlete in college as opposed to other identities they possess.

Meta-perception. When asked how others defined them and why, again, the same three participants (Athletes 2, 3, and 4) answered using basic characteristics, and the same two student athletes' (Athlete 1 and 5) answers consisted of an athletic identity. Specifically, with hesitation, Athlete 5 said, "I think they would say he is a football player. That's it." Athlete 5 also admitted that it scared him to think of how people might describe him.

Athlete 1 responded with some frustration:

Well some see me as a basic athlete that's just trying to pass by. I have to let them know in class sometimes like no, you all are going to listen to my advice and what I have to say is valid. You are not going to just pass it off. Some athletes just coast through it and just go with other peoples ideas.

Not only was such identity foreclosure evident in the way athletes defined themselves, it was also obvious in their limited career exploration.

Only one of the participants seemed to have explored different careers and only two of the five had even participated in internships or job shadowing. All the participants, except Athlete 1, were encouraged by family and peers into their careers. In addition, Athlete 1, Athlete 3, and Athlete 4 expressed a desire to continue with athletics and then consider other careers.

Specifically, Athlete 3 and Athlete 4 said that they would like to first tryout for the NFL, and Athlete 1 would like to be a high school coach.

Summary

When exploring the participant's athletic identity, I noticed a pattern in the participants' responses. First, four out of the five participants regarded themselves as high profile athletes based on the fact that they were well known on campus as opposed to their skills as athletes. Because of the high visibility and high status of their athletic performance, their athletic identity dominated the way in which they described themselves. Second, with regard to factors that influenced their choice of sport, the athletes' narratives included family, role models, friends, educational opportunity, and natural physical ability. Finally, the participants described their day-to-day activities being limited by the rigorous athletic schedules that were determined by the coaches. Each participant confirmed that they spend most of their time on sports, rather than academics. A few participants admitted to prioritizing factors including compromising their academics in order to improve their sport performances. Furthermore, all the participants reported very little to no interaction with non-athletes outside of class.

Participants were influenced in their career decisions by family and friends whom they regarded as role models, a desire for a comfortable lifestyle, and the hope of a career that would enable them to continue to participate in their sport. Institutional factors also contributed to the athletes' choice of career, as two of the five participants changed their majors due to lack of time to fully commit to their academic major. When a conflict arose between fulfilling the requirements for the major and the athletic requirements, athletes switched majors. Career maturity is also determined by how students are preparing for the careers they have chosen to pursue after college. Surprisingly, only two of the five participants had participated in

internships, job shadowing, or networking. In addition, four out of the five student athletes mentioned an aspiration to find a career that would enable them to stay in sports, whether as a coach or as a professional athlete.

Due to the lack of opportunities for exploring career opportunities outside of athletics, several participants expressed a desire to continue to work in sports, and defined themselves with an athletic identity; some more than others, seem to have succumbed to identity foreclosure. Moreover, each participant's choice of career seems to have been motivated by his family and peers; most had limited opportunities for their own career explorations.

In conclusion, the overall purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between athletic identity and career maturity of high profile male athletes at a Division II institution. Most participants exhibited a failure to explore roles other than that of an athlete, such as, interacting with non-athletes or attending career related events. In addition, a rigorous athletic training program scheduled around long practices, games, and travel for competitions, gave the athletes very limited time for career exploration or experiential learning, thus leaving them unprepared for life after college.

In the next chapter I will summarize the study, discuss the findings in relation to Super's career development theory and the extant literature, and provide recommendations for practice as well as recommendations for future studies on this topic.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

In this chapter, I begin with a summary of the study. Next I discuss the findings using the theoretical framework, and also draw connections between my findings and the existing literature. Finally, I suggest recommendations for practices, and for future research surrounding the topics of athletic identity and career maturity amongst male student athletes at Division II institutions.

Summary of Study

This study sought to provide an understanding of athletic identity and career maturity of high profile student athletes in revenue producing sports attending a Division II institution. This study was initiated because a literature review revealed the lack of qualitative research on athletic identity and career maturity of student athletes, with no studies having been conducted at Division II institutions. Most research studies on these topics focused largely on Division I institutions, and had been conducted using quantitative research methods. However, given the large number of student athletes at Division II institutions, there was an opportunity felt to explore their athletic identity and career maturity, especially amongst high profile athletes competing in revenue producing sports.

The research questions that guided this study were focused on uncovering the participants' athletic identity, career maturity, and factors that influenced these two variables. A qualitative phenomenological research design was adopted for this study. Participants of this study were high profile male athletes who play revenue producing sports at a Midwest Division II public liberal arts university. They were recruited using criterion-based purposive sampling and snowball sampling. For this study, the following criteria were applied: eligible male student

athlete currently enrolled at the institution; plays a revenue producing sport (men's football and basketball); is a high profile athlete.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants that prompted participants to describe their experiences as high profile student athletes and how those experiences contributed to their athletic identity and career maturity. The interviews were transcribed and coded in order to identify the relevant categories and themes. Three major themes that were used to organize the findings include, Athletic identity, Career Maturity, and Identity Foreclosure.

Conclusions

It is important to note that the sample size was small and findings are not intended to be generalized to all student athletes. Nevertheless, the qualitative data provided by participants suggest that participants had a strong athletic identity, an identity that was influenced by early socialization by family and friends, high social status afforded to them as well-known athletes, and by institutional factors such as their athletic schedule and limited interactions with non-athletes. The findings also indicate that three of the five participants demonstrated lower career maturity.

The main, perhaps only, career decisions they had made was the selection of a major. While all participants had been influenced in their choice of major by family members who served as role models, for four of the five participants, it appeared that the major had been selected based solely on the ability to fit course requirements around the practice schedule, and the ability to meet the minimum requirements for graduation. Since an athletic scholarship paid the college tuition, there seemed to be a priority given to meeting athletic obligations; academic obligations were of secondary importance. Although participants had a possible career in mind,

three of the five participants had not engaged in any career exploration. Most participants had not explored roles other than that of an athlete; they had limited interactions with non-athletes and had not attended any career related events. Finally, a rigorous athletic training program scheduled around long practices, games, and travel for competitions, gave them very limited time for career exploration or experiential learning, thus leaving them unprepared for career after college.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that for the participants in this study, the higher the athletic identity the lower the career maturity. Of the four participants who described themselves as high profile athletes, only one had engaged in any meaningful career exploration. On the other hand the participant who described himself as a student first and an athlete second, had a non-athletic career in mind, and had spent significant amount of time preparing for that career.

Discussion

Theoretical Framework

Donald E. Super's (1957) career development theory provides the theoretical framework for interpreting the findings of this study. In Super's career development model the five career stages highlight changes in goals across five periods of life and include, growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Brown & Associates, 2002). According to Super's theory, college students are in the second stage, exploration. During this exploratory stage, there are three vocational development tasks that move an individual from occupational daydreams to employment in a job: crystallization, specification, and actualization (Brown & Associates, 2002). The findings of this study suggest that three of the five participants have not fulfilled any of the tasks needed at the exploration stage.

According to Super (1957), the first task, crystallization, is to explore broadly to form tentative ideas about where an individual fits in society. Three of the five participants in this study had chosen a major based on the advice of family and friends and the struggle to balance the time commitment to the sport with the time needed to be successful in the major. They had not taken the time or effort to assess their own interests, values, or passions prior to committing.

The second task, specification, is to develop a preferred plan of action in preparation for declaring an occupational choice. Two of the three participants had a career in mind, but did not engage in specific experiential learning such as internships, study abroad, or job shadowing. One participant was unable to even articulate his career goals. Only two of the athletes had developed a career plan. One of the two participants planned to take the MCAT later that year and become admitted into a medical school so he could become a surgeon. The other participant applied for graduate school to become a school social worker. Both participants have spoken with people in the field and participated in experiential learning as well.

The third task, actualization, is to execute that plan on either an exploratory basis or with a more definite but still tentative commitment (Brown & Associates, 2002; Super, 1980). Only two of the five participants had explored, developed a plan, and were now executing that plan by seeking job opportunities or applying for a graduate degree. Of the other three, one was daydreaming about a job that would give him a comfortable life style and the other two put most of their faith into playing professionally. Although not unrealistic, statistically, there is only a 1% chance of becoming a professional athlete (Beamon, 2012).

Athletic identity

In this study, each participant seemed to have a strong athletic identity. Researchers have found that athletes often develop a strong commitment and identity related to a sport early in life

through reinforcement from parents, coaches, and peers (Martens & Cox, 2000). This study revealed similar findings; participants described being exposed to sports very early in life. Moreover, similarly to Beamon's (2010) study at a Division I institution, findings show both socializing agents and socializing environments contribute to the athletic identity of the participants. Each participant described family and friends as influencers in their decision to play a sport. Also, each participant mentioned how both the institution and sports determined their schedules as a student and athlete. Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (as cited in Beamon, 2012) confirm that due to the limited time and energy devoted to non-athletic interactions, students' athletic identities seem more rewarding and encouraged by peers, parents, and coaches. Participants were aware that they were recognized on campus because of their athletic participation. This high social status led them to perceive themselves as high profile athletes. Each participant said they only interacted with non-athletes in class, or at home if they had roommates who don't play sports. One participant also stated that when he attended social events, he was usually with his teammates.

Career Maturity

Findings suggest that three of the five participants exhibited low career maturity. According to Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, and Kiewra (as cited in Houle & Kluck 2015), "career maturity is defined as one's ability to make reasonable and responsible career decisions with an awareness of what the requirements are to make such decisions" (p.25). The three participants had realistic career choices, however the lack of internships and career-related experiences, will probably make it hard for them to find a job, or when trying to pursue those careers.

Two out of the five participants exhibited a relatively higher career maturity. One of these two participants had explored multiple careers, had internships and jobs in the field he was

aspiring to enter, and had networked with professionals to get a better understanding of his future career. In addition, the other participant had been involved in organizations specific to his career, had sought career help from the institution's career services, and had completed applications for graduate schools, including the necessary entrance exams.

Navarro (2015) was able to identify three common factors influencing major choices and career aspirations: (a) interactions with academic/student affairs professionals across campus; (b) interactions with academic/student affairs professionals internal to athletics; and (c) the struggle to balance the roles of student and collegiate athlete (p.370). Similarly, the findings in this study identified two factors: (1) influence of others, such as family, former coach, and academic advisors; and (2) the amount of time they were able to commit to major because of their sport. Additionally, Schneider, Ross, and Fisher's (2010), study confirmed the existence of academic clustering within intercollegiate athletes compared to the general student population at the respective institutions. Because of the small sample size in this study, it is not possible to make any conclusions regarding clustering, however, two participants describe their academic advisors as determining their schedules or serving as an influencer.

Finally, activities related to career development such as visiting the career center and internships may be perceived as requiring time that athletes may feel they don't have (Martens & Lee, 1998). Similarly, the participants of this study explain their reasoning for not visiting the career center, or participating in internships because of the demands of their athletic schedules. Two of the five participants described their decisions to switch out of their original majors because of their requirements as an athlete. One gave up a future in bio medical science and another a career in computer information systems. Moreover, the participants prioritize athletics over everything else. Since the education of the students was funded by athletic scholarships,

three of the four participants described feeling an obligation to complete athletic requirements over academic requirements.

Identity Foreclosure

Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996), suggest that due to the physical and psychological demands of intercollegiate athletes, including isolation from other college activities and restrictions on explorations, identity foreclosure is promoted among student athletes. Although the sample size is small, the findings suggest identity foreclosure among the participants. Two of the five participants defined themselves solely in terms of being an athlete. When asked about how others defined them, the two participants again related it to being an athlete, as opposed to other identities. These findings mirror those of Beamon (2012) who examined identity foreclosure among African Americans at a Division I institution. In Beamon's study, interview questions included questions such as: "How do you define yourself" and "How do you think others define you." Moreover, Beamon's study revealed that athletes wanted to play professionally and were not being prepared to make career choice. Similarly, in this study, four of the five participants described wanting to stay in sports. Specifically, two of the five participants said they wanted to play professionally.

Thus, the findings of this study reflect those of research conducted at Division I institutions, which suggests that collegiate athletes are not adequately prepared for life after termination of their sport (Beamon, 2012; Poux & Fry, 2015). Specifically, just like their peers in Division I institutions (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), the majority of students in this study who participated in revenue producing or high profile sports were found to have a low career maturity and lacked the ability to make realistic career decisions.

Recommendations for Practice

College is a space for students to explore careers, intern at prospective companies, and gain additional experiences beyond the classroom. Students who participate in revenue producing or high profile sports have been found to have less career maturity or lack the ability to make realistic career decisions compared to their nonathletic peers. With only 1% of collegiate athletes becoming professional athletes, and the average professional sports career lasting around three and a half years, it is very important for student athletes to explore options beyond athletic professions.

The findings of this study provide the basis for the following recommendations to help student athletes explore career options. First, student affairs practitioners should take a more developmental academic advising approach when meeting with student athletes instead of a prescriptive academic advising approach. According to Crookston (1994) developmental academic advising,

is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills.

With a prescriptive academic approach a student would come to an advisor for a solution or an advisor would typically answer specific questions but would not address more comprehensive academic concerns (p.5).

A student athlete's entire day, from the time they wake up to the time they go to sleep, is structured and scheduled for them by their coaches. Advisors should challenge athletes to explore a bit with majors, especially in the first year, and support them in the decisions they make. This approach to advising student athletes will help expose them to career opportunities

and thus enable them to take ownership of their schedules. Students may not be able to control the athletic part of their schedule, but they should be empowered to take control of their education.

Second, student athletes need to be exposed to the Career Centers on campus early and often. This means outreach targeting student athletes by Career Centers. This could take a variety of forms. One way is to schedule career events around the athletes' practice schedules so that they are able to attend. Another way might be to relate career content to the athlete's situation. For example, career advisors could have discussions about how students' role as athletes connects to the skills they will need in the real world. This will give the athletes more exposure to the Career Center, help them better articulate their skills as athletes, and give them the opportunity to explore career options.

Finally, the relationship between student athlete and coach is a critical one. If the coach becomes more proactive in advertising career events, student athletes will be more proactive in attending those events. In addition, getting the coaches on board will require outreach and persistence from the Career Center staff as well as athletic administrators.

Recommendation for Further Research

This is a qualitative study that focused on high profile student athletes in revenue producing sports at Division II institutions. The findings of this study are limited by the small sample size that could be obtained in the limited time period. Additional research could examine whether these findings are replicated in a much larger sample of student athletes. A larger sample size may also allow comparison between high status players and regular players, and may also enable an exploration of racial patterns in athletic identity and career maturity at a Division II institution.

Also, a larger sample size would enable the examination of academic clustering at Division II institutions. Although in this study no more than two participants had the same major, but given the reasoning behind their choices, an exploration of the rationales for selection of major of college athletes would be a fruitful line of research. Finally, there is need for research comparing student athlete development across NCAA Divisions. This will provide substantial data to examine and thereby support the career maturity among student athletes.

Appendix A

HRRC Approval

This research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at Grand Valley State University. Reference No. 17-113-H

Appendix B

Greetings,

My name is Renida Clark and I am a graduate student completing my master's degree in Education. For my master's thesis, I am exploring the topic of athletic identity and career maturity of high profile student athletes. I am inviting you to participate in my study because you are a high profile student athlete who plays in a revenue producing sport. I would like to have a conversation with you during the winter semester, at a time and location that is mutually convenient. The meeting will not take more than one hour of your time.

For this study, your identity will be protected by using pseudonyms and not utilizing any personal information that may link you to the study. If you would like to participate or would like more information about the study, please contact Renida Clark at 616-331-3311 or via email at clarkr2@gvsu.edu.

Thanks,

Renida Clark
Graduate Student, College Student Affairs Leadership
College of Education
Grand Valley State University

Appendix C

Section 1: Athletic identity

1. What sport do you play?
2. Why did you choose to play this sport?
3. Do you consider yourself a high profile student athlete?
4. Who are some people that influenced your decision to play this sport?
5. Can you describe your schedule from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep?

Probe for the following:

- a. how much time is spent on the sport?
- b. how much time for academics?
- c. how much time for social events?
- d. how much do you interact with non-athletes?
- e. how much time attending career related events?
- f. how much free time?
- g. who determines the schedule – coach? Or athlete?

Section 2: Career Maturity

Identity Foreclosure

1. How do you think others define you? Why?
2. How do you define yourself? Why?

Career Aspiration

1. What is your current major?
 - a. Probe for academic clustering.
2. Why and how did you choose your current major?

Probe for the role of different agents/agencies at the university:

- a. Academic advisor
 - b. Academic/student affairs professionals?
 - c. Advising center?
 - d. The coach?
3. Describe your long-term goals.
- a. What do you want to do once you graduate from college?

Career Development

1. What sort of experiences have you had to explore your future career?
2. Have you participated in experiential learning? For example, internships, study abroad/away, etc. If not, Why not? If so, Why?
3. Have you attended any career development programs offered by the career center?
4. What other resources have you used on campus to help with career development?

Career Transition

1. How are you preparing for life after college?

Section 3: Demographic Variables

1. Pseudonym
2. Race/Ethnicity
3. Major
4. Years in sport

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