

Exploring Identity Continuity and Quality of Life in Post-Sport Careers of Former NCAA Athletes

Yoonki Chun, University of Florida

Micheal Sagas, University of South Carolina (Advisor)

Athletes' identity development upon retirement from sport is an emerging topic within athlete development and sport psychology literature (e.g., Stambulova et al., 2021; Wendling & Sagas., 2021). Wendling and Sagas' (2021) self-reformation model notably delineates essential liminal phases and identity exploration, guiding athletes through negotiated adaptation and partial disidentification towards reintegrated identities. Recent studies underscore the emotional, triggering, and procedural aspects of identity work during athletes' career transitions, which often involve significant life changes and identity crises. However, research on post-transition outcomes and the characterization of successful transitions remains limited. Furthermore, there is a need to examine transitional factors influencing athletes' well-being in their subsequent life chapters.

Identity scholars, including Erikson (1968) and Doeselaar et al. (2018), have underscored the importance of identity continuity, defined as a sense of self-consistency over time, particularly in domains like careers. Achieving identity continuity can mitigate confusion, enhancing well-being, job satisfaction, and adjustment to change.

This study aims to explore identity continuity among former NCAA athletes undergoing career transitions. It specifically examines: (a) the development of identity continuity among these athletes, (b) the impact of continuous identity on their life and job satisfaction and happiness, and (c) factors influencing their sense of continuous self.

Data were collected from 70 former NCAA athletes who transitioned to different careers post-retirement. Structured one-way interviews conducted via an online platform probed their perceptions of identity continuity, comparing past and current selves, and their overall job and life satisfaction and happiness levels.

Currently in the data analysis phase, set for completion in February 2024, this study employs natural language processing and qualitative analysis. Data will first be categorized into perceived continuity, neutrality, and discontinuity using thematic analysis. Subsequently, these groups will be compared based on their overall sentiment (positive, neutral, negative) via sentiment analysis. Lastly, factors contributing to identity continuity will be examined through LDA topic modeling, offering insights into weighted topics and data visualization for each group. The study's implications for holistic athlete development will be discussed.