
Theses, Dissertations, and Projects

2011

Saying goodbye to sports : a study on the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics

Lee Ostberg Welch
Smith College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Welch, Lee Ostberg, "Saying goodbye to sports : a study on the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics" (2011). Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA.
<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1026>

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu.

Lee O. Welch
Saying Goodbye to Sports: A study
on the experiences of female college
students who have disengaged from
athletics

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The study sought to identify factors that influence a young, female college student's transition out of athletics and better understand the ways that these individuals experience and perceive their transition.

Through interviews of twelve undergraduate, female, disengaged athletes, this qualitative study explored some of the unique and shared experiences that make up these individual's stories as former athletes. Study participants were asked a series of open-ended questions related to their personal athletic history, decision to disengage from athletics, and life after disengagement.

Study findings were varied with each participant having a unique story of her experience disengaging from athletics. However, many patterns arose in the findings that showed consistencies with previous research on athletic disengagement. The time commitment involved in being an athlete proved to be a major factor influencing participant's decision to disengage. Many study participants experienced their disengagement as a loss, however individuals forced to disengage due to a health concern typically found the experience much more difficult than those who chose to leave their sport.

SAYING GOODBYE TO SPORTS: A STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE
COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO HAVE DISENGAGED FROM ATHLETICS

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Social Work.

Lee O. Welch

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis could not have been completed without the support and contributions of many people. A huge thanks go to the student participants who took time out of their busy schedules to meet with me and share their stories; my friends for listening and providing moments of relief; my family for believing in me more than I was able to; and, of course, Kaydi for the much needed walk breaks and snuggles that kept me going.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	3
III METHODOLOGY.....	16
IV FINDINGS	21
V DISCUSSION	29
REFERENCES	35
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter	39
Appendix B: Recruitment Flier	40
Appendix C: Informed Consent	41
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	43

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The study sought to identify factors that influence a young, female student's transition out of athletics and better understand the ways that these individuals experience and perceive their transition. Athletics play an important role in the lives of many children and youth as they develop and grow into young adults. However, most athletes stop playing their sport sometime before or during the college years. Athletes have varied responses to their disengagement from sports, but for some it can be a difficult change. Since athletic disengagement often happens around the time many young people go to college, these individuals are then faced with the added challenge of adjusting to life as a college student as well as adjusting to life as a former-athlete. The added dimension of this study is to focus on female college students going through these transitions, as they may have a distinctive experience to that of their male counterparts. With these concepts in mind, this study has sought to answer the question of, what are the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics?

Recent literature suggests that, for disengaged athletes, the start of college may be a unique period of transition where they are not an athlete and also not a non-athlete. The disengaged athlete is in an "in-between" stage, which might influence the development of different identities and their adjustment to college (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). In this study, the review of literature will look at youth sport participation and parental involvement as factors that

influence an individual's athletic development. Aspects of the college transition will be pulled from literature, as well as information pertaining specifically to the female athlete. Literature on the how and why athletes decide to disengage, as well as their experiences as disengaged athletes will be reviewed in order prepare the reader for better understanding the findings of this study.

Through interviews of twelve undergraduate, female, disengaged athletes, this qualitative study has sought to explore some of the unique and shared experiences that make up these participant's stories as former athletes. The findings of this study provide concrete examples from these students and demonstrate similarities in their experiences. This study provides insight and as well as small glimpses into the lives of this unique population of college students. The findings will be useful to clinicians working with students going through similar experiences of disengaging from athletics and transitioning to college. However, the findings may also be useful to clinicians working with any young, female, athlete who will eventually be going through the disengagement process at some point in her life. In addition, the population for whom this study was conducted (female, disengaged, college students), may benefit from reading this study in that it will provide evidence of shared or unique experiences.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The study sought to identify factors that influence a female student's transition out of athletics and better understand the variety of ways students experience and perceive their transition. In order to understand the experience of transitioning out of sports, it is first important to get a grasp on the process of athlete development, including the major influences on an athlete's career. This chapter will review some of the recent literature relevant to the question of, what are the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics?

Literature related to the development of the student athlete will be reviewed to allow insight into the value of youth sport participation and the role parents play in the development of the athlete. These factors are important for understanding why so many youth in the United States participate in athletics and how parents might influence a child's decision to engage in athletics and later disengage. Literature on the college transition experience will be reviewed to shed light on the varied experiences of athletes, non-athletes and disengaged athletes. Since female athletes are a distinct population of people with experiences different from non-athletes and male athletes, literature specific to their experiences will be reviewed. A significant portion of this chapter will be dedicated to examining recent literature on the individual's transition out of athletics, the loss of identity experienced during this transition, and the life of the disengaged athlete.

Development of the Student Athlete

Traits and personal characteristics. Student athletes encompass a unique population of young people. The development of these individuals is greatly impacted by their participation in sports and their experiences growing up as athletes. Sport participation can play a very influential role in a child's life, often shaping the development of a person's social and moral values (Camire & Trudel, 2010), as well as how an individual sets and achieves goals (Papaioannou, Ampatzoglou, Kalogiannis, & Sagovitis, 2008). For many young people, being on a sport team is the first time they learn about teamwork, perseverance, and loyalty (Camire & Trudel, 2010). Youth sport participation is valued as an avenue to teach social skills (Houle, Brewer, & Kluck, 2010), communication, collaboration (Camire & Trudel, 2010), and develop peer relationships (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). For instance, Camire and Trudel (2010) note that athletes in their study reported learning about the importance of encouraging others through sport participation. While youth sport participation is significant in how it affects the development of a young person as a whole, it also impacts the evolution of an individual's identity, specifically athletic identity. (Houle, et al., 2010).

Parental involvement with the youth athlete. In addition to identity development, youth athletes may experience different levels of parental involvement that can be both positive and negative in nature. Wuerth, Lee, and Alferman (2004), as well as Papaioannou, Ampatzoglou, Kalogiannis, and Sagovitis (2008), talk about parental involvement as a factor contributing to the athletic development of a child. Parental support is seen as essential to a child's participation and success in sport. The parent/s will likely not only introduce the child to the sport, but also provide encouragement during the first phases of athletic development. However, some forms of parental involvement are not ideal and can be characterized as either

“under-involvement” or “over-involvement”. An under-involved parent may show a lack of interest or support of their child’s participation in sports or athletic accomplishment, while an over-involved parent may be too directive (i.e. telling the athlete how to perform, or what she is doing wrong) leading to increased feelings of pressure for the athlete. This aspect of over/under involvement parental behavior can lead to a unique brand of stress for the emerging athlete to deal with (Wuerth, et al., 2004).

As such, parents can have a significant influence on a child’s emerging sense of self in sports settings. “Parent’s attitudes and behavior... are associated with [the child’s] self-perception of ability, positive and negative affect, motivational orientation, attitudes toward sport and physical activity, and physical activity” (Papaioannou, Ampatzoglou, Kalogiannis, & Sagovitis, 2008). In this way, the ideal moderately-involved parent will offer their young athlete positive support, encouragement, praise, warmth, understanding, as well as the space and freedom to work with coaches. This type of parental involvement, in particular positive emotional support, increases the athlete’s chance of reaching a higher level of play (Wuerth, Lee, & Alferman, 2004).

In another study on the affects of parental involvement, Ullrich-French and Smith (2009) examined if youth soccer player’s perceived relationships with parents and peers (peer soccer players) would predict soccer continuation. The study found a “three-way interaction between perceived peer acceptance, friendship quality, and mother relationship quality.” If two or more of these relationships are positive, then there is a higher probability of sport continuation. For example, “when [the] perceived mother relationship quality was low, probability of continuation was low except when both peer acceptance and friendship quality were high.” In addition, however, there is higher probability of sport continuation “when perceived mother relationship

quality was high, regardless of level of peer relationships” (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009).

Additionally, “For every unit increase in positive friendship quality, there is roughly a three- to six-fold increase in the likelihood of continuing to play soccer.” Friendships and stable relationships are an important source of support for sport continuation and will promote more long-term outcomes, like continued sport participation (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009).

The College Transition Experience

Social factors for all students. Many young athletes dream of playing their sport at the collegiate level; some of these youth will reach this goal, some will work hard but never achieve that level of play, and others will either choose to stop their sport or encounter some other hurdle that prevents continuation athletics. Whether athlete, non-athlete, or disengaged athlete, the transition to college is often a significant change in the life of a young person. The college years can be examined as a period of emerging adulthood (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008), when students, especially in their first year, must adjust to a new environment with many social and academic changes (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). These experiences can expose students to periods of instability, exploration, and sometimes the reshaping of one’s self-concept (Swenson et al., 2008).

Social factors, especially friendships and identification with groups, can play a role in how a student adjusts to college life. In this course of thought, Swenson, Nordstrom, and Hiester (2008), conducted a study examining the impact of friendships (both high school and college friends) on the college adjustment experience. The study found that during a student’s first few weeks of college, the relationship with one’s best high school friend is of great import. “Having an old familial friend to turn to when in need of peer support was related to both emotional/personal adjustment and institutional attachment” (Swenson, et al., 2008). Later in the

semester, making new college friends is important to adjustment, and thus relationships with high school friends may slowly become more distant. The best “academic and social adjustment and institutional attachment are associated with finding a [college friend] who will be loyal and who shares common interests” (Swenson, et al., 2008).

The athlete’s experience. While all new college students are faced with a significant adjustment during their transition to college, student athletes experience a unique set of challenges. Student athletes must learn to manage the typical academic, emotional and personal tasks of every college students. However, they must also deal with the stressors of being an athlete, such as increased time demands (Melendez, 2006), increased competition level (Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005), fewer opportunities to socialize with the general student population (Melendez, 2006; Storch et al., 2005), negotiating relationships with teammates and coaches (Storch, et al., 2005), coping with physical injury (Watson & Kissinger, 2007), increased performance anxiety (Storch, et al., 2005), and maintaining a high level of physical conditioning (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). “While many freshman must learn to successfully navigate the increased academic and social demands associated with college success, the freshman student-athlete has the additional stress of athletic responsibilities” (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005, p. 5). The athlete is constantly faced with the competition of her multiple identities, including, but not limited to, the athlete identity, academic identity and social identity. “The relationships between these three [identities are] described as competitive, and student athletes, unable to completely fulfill any of them, [are] forced to make a number of compromises and negotiations between the three” (Miller & Kerr, 2002, p. 352).

The pressure of dealing with multiple identities or focus areas in a new college environment can cause significant stress on college student athletes. Developmental,

psychological, and social aspects of life directly impact athletic participation (Melendez, 2006). The combination of these factors and their impact on college adjustment in athletes appear to be overlooked at times. “The proportions of athletes reporting significantly higher levels of [mental health problems] underscore the need for early detection and intervention” (Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005, p. 94). Although some may overlap, the stressors that affect college student athletes are unique from those of non-athletes, where athletes reported more stress due to relationships and the high number of responsibilities (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

The disengaged athlete’s experience. Disengaged athletes entering college may have a unique experience different from both their athlete and non-athlete peers. In their study, Lubker and Etzel (2007) examined the differences in the reported athletic identity and college adjustment patterns of first-year college males and females and how disengagement from sports may affect those variables. Findings from the study suggests that the first semester of college is likely a time of unique transition for disengaged athletes “where there is simultaneously both a residual identification with the athletic role and a divestment from this self-view” (Lubker & Etzel, 2007, p. 471). Disengaged athletes fall into a unique category where they are not athletes and they are not non-athletes, and thus their college adjustment experiences may differ from other students in the areas of identity formation and exploration. Not surprisingly, disengaged athletes who were able to make the decision to disengage, experienced better adjustment during their first semester in college than those athletes who were forced to disengage (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). However, no matter whether the disengagement was chosen or forced, perceived social support was one variable that aided the college adjustment process for disengaged athletes (Lubker & Etzel, 2007).

The Female Athlete

Although women are now well accepted into the male dominated domain of athletics, it is important to distinguish women's uniqueness as athletes. Women experience sports participation, including the joys and stressors that coincide, in ways that can be very different from their male counterparts (Lance, 2004; Lubker & Etzel, 2007; Melendez, 2006-2007; Smallman, Sowa, & Young, 1991; Storch, Storch, & Killianny, 2005; Wiechman & Williams, 1997). One aspect that makes the female athlete's experience distinct is that "she must step out of her stereotyped gender role to experience success in sport" (Lance, 2004). As a result, some female athletes may experience conflict between their role as female and their role as athlete (Lance, 2004). Possibly due to this type of role conflict or other stressors, Storch, Storch, and Killianny (2005), found that female intercollegiate athletes experienced "higher levels of depressive symptoms, social anxiety, and non-support than male athletes" (p. 94).

Despite some of the stressors that female athletes may experience, the positive relationship between athletics and academic success is no secret. Troutman and Dufur (2007) reported findings indicating females who played sports in high school were more likely to graduate from college than those who didn't play sports. In multiple studies, female athletes have demonstrated high levels of academic adjustment (Lubker & Etzel, 2007; Melendez, 2006-2007), social adjustment and institutional attachment (Melendez, 2006-2007). Social support is one factor identified as important in helping both female athletes and female disengaged athletes feel better adjusted socially and more attached to the institution (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). One reason for higher levels of academic and social adjustment in female athletes may be because "women's opportunities to compete beyond the collegiate level, while improving, are still vastly

fewer in number [than men's]. Therefore, a greater focus [is placed] on educational and social opportunities" (Melendez, 2006-2007, p. 50).

The Transition Out of Athletics

All athletes eventually disengage. Athletes transition out of sports at various times and for varying reasons. Sometimes it is a decision made over time, and sometimes athletic disengagement is forced by a game-ending injury. No matter how or why athletic disengagement happens, the transition out of athletics often brings with it new experiences and challenges. Children often begin sport participation at a young age, and so, one's identification as an athlete develops over time. Athletic identity may become stronger through the stages of childhood, adolescents and young adulthood, or it may begin to diminish as the individual develops other identities and interests. Typically, the more competitive experience and years in the sport an athlete has, the greater her athletic identity will be (Wiechman & Williams, 1997). However, "retirement from active sports competition is an inevitable part of the life span of every athlete" (Ballie, 1993, p. 399). At some point, for some reason, every athlete will have to retire from sport participation. Sport retirement, as referred to by many authors and defined by Ballie and Danish (1992), is "a point of transition from an activity in which there has been a commitment of time and energy and a role identification (p. 77). The transition out of formal athletics is likely to occur at predictable times, such as the end of high school, the end of college, or after a significant event (Ballie, 1993).

The process of deciding. The end of high school is one of the most common times to withdraw or retire from sport participation because it is a natural break in an individual's life. Students may choose not to participate in college athletics, or they may be unable to make the college team. According to Wiechman and Williams (1997), athletes who think they will go on

to play at elite levels have a higher athletic identity. These individuals have more invested in their role as an athlete and have more confidence in their abilities. However, many young athletes dream of playing sports at elite levels and are faced with the reality of competitive sports as they get older.

Swain (1991) explained that for participants in his qualitative study, “withdrawal from sport was not simply an event, but a process over time, which frequently began soon after the athletes became engaged in their career” (p. 154). A variety of factors may remind an athlete that her career is not forever. An athlete at the high school level, for example may experience an injury, have decreased playing time, get demoted to another team (i.e. varsity to junior-varsity) or may experience a decline in performance ability. For these reasons and others, high school juniors and seniors tend to have more realistic expectations (as compared to high school freshman and sophomores) of their ability to compete in intercollegiate athletics (Wiechman & Williams, 1997).

Impact of identity on the decision making process. In a qualitative study on the relationship between identity and athletic retirement in college student athletes, Lally (2007) found that “athletes proactively decreased the prominence of their athletic identities as retirement approached” (p. 96). In these students, the athlete identity took a back seat to allow for exploration of other identities. Thus, there is a “point during the overall transition experience when athletes begin to negotiate a new sense of self” (Lally, 2007, p. 96). Lally (2007) also found that when athletic retirement was predictable, such as at the end of high school or the end of college, athletes could approach their sport careers accordingly and prepare for sport termination. Having control over sport retirement is important because it “facilitates psychological adjustment to retirement by allowing the athlete time to prepare herself, both

psychologically and practically, for the retirement event” (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). Of course, sport retirement is not always predictable, such as when an athlete experiences a game ending injury or is cut from a team. The unexpected nature of injuries makes it difficult to prepare and also more difficult to come to terms with after the fact (Webb, et al., 1998).

Loss of Identity

Exclusivity of the athlete identity. Despite the process one goes through to reach sport retirement, most athletes will experience some sense of loss as their athletic career comes to an end. For many individuals this may be due to the loss of identity as an athlete. An individual is “comprised of many different identities, each with its own implications for thoughts, feelings and actions. Who one is and how one performs at any given moment depend critically on the relative salience of one’s social identities” (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005, p. 333). When athletic identity is formed early in a child’s life, “the time commitment to the role of athlete is such that by the time they reach high school, highly successful athletes have internalized the athletic identity, frequently at the expense of other highly successful roles” (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). So, although social identities can be malleable and change from moment to moment (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005), the exclusivity of the role of athlete can restrict an individual’s development of other identities, skills, and roles (Wiechman & Williams, 1997).

Making room for other identities. As an athlete retires from sport, she is faced with not only the loss of the actual sport, but she may also suffer the loss of a personal identity as an athlete. For some athletes, “the centrality of sport in their social, personal, financial, recreational, and vocational lives may also make retirement more problematic” (Ballie, 1993, p. 401). However, Lally (2007) found that “athletes who decrease the prominence of the athlete role as self-protection long before their actual sport withdrawal and actively foster other identity

dimensions may successfully avoid identity issues following athletic retirement” (p. 97). It makes sense then, that individuals who find satisfaction from other roles in their life, would adjust better and find more satisfaction after retiring from athletics.

Yopyk and Prentice (2005) found this to be the case in their study on the salience of competing identities in college student athletes when they found that individuals at highly selective academic colleges were more able to assume their student identity when it was needed (like when the athlete identity was no longer available). Similarly, Killeya-Jones (2005) describes that “less discrepancy between the Student and Athlete roles was significantly associated with more positive well-being, and higher levels of life satisfaction and academic satisfaction” (p. 177).

The Disengaged Athlete

Challenges of disengagement. Individuals who have retired or disengaged from athletics may face an array of challenges. The unique hurdles a person faces following athletic retirement may be dependent on her support system (Constantine, 1995), her psychological make-up (Ballie & Danish, 1992), her identity structure (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997), and her reason for disengagement (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan, & Van Raalte, 2010), to name a few.

In a quantitative study of former elite athletes’ experiences after retirement, Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon (1997) found that “individuals who maintain a strong and exclusive athletic identity up to the point of retirement may be vulnerable to career transition difficulties” (p. 198). Similarly, Ballie and Danish (1992) stated that “when the foundation of self-esteem is based on sports excellence, the end of the athlete role becomes more difficult” (p 78). In response to these

difficulties, some retired athletes devalue the athletic parts of themselves as a way to protect and preserve their self-esteem (Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan, & Van Raalte, 2010).

Unexpected or involuntary retirement from athletics can lead to increased difficulties for some athletes (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan, & Van Raalte, 2010). “If the student-athlete has built an identity around his or her role in competitive sports, the physical inability [due to injury] to participate can have serious psychological and career implications” (Martinelli, 2000, p. 203) As indicated by Blinde and Stratta’s (1992) study on unexpected or involuntary retirement from athletics, these athletes experience a “great amount of trauma and disruption in their lives and frequently equated their feelings with death and dying.” In a study specifically examining the self-protective changes in athletic identity of athletes who have undergone anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstructive surgery, the researchers found that “decreases in athletic identity were most pronounced for participants experiencing slow recovery progress” (Brewer, et al., 2010, p. 3). Additionally, these injured athletes experienced a decrease in athletic identity over a two-year period, with the most substantial decrease occurring between six and 12 months post surgery (Brewer, et al., 2010).

Benefits of disengagement. While athletic retirement, especially when unexpected, can pose challenges for former athletes, there may be some benefits available as well. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) took a different perspective by asking the questions:

Is sport retirement a final (and negative) event that totally severs the athlete from the system of sport? Or could sport retirement be a transition process that allows an athlete to resume participation in other activities without completely leaving sport? (p. 101).

True to that point, in some cases, sport career termination prompted former athletes to “explore neglected, abandoned, or entirely novel” parts of their identity (Lally, 2007, p. 95). In fact, some former athletes felt relief from the pressures of formal sport participation, and welcomed the opportunity to engage in other activities (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985).

Need for support. Whether athletic retirement is planned, welcomed, unexpected, or involuntary, all athletes transitioning out of sport or recently retired from athletics will benefit from the support of others (Constantine, 1995; Green & Weinberg, 2001). “Higher levels of coping skills and social support were related to lower levels of mood disturbance in retired athletes (Green & Weinberg, 2001, p. 54). Peer, family, or professional support can allow an individual the opportunity to explore grief and loss issues related to retirement from sports. The support of others can help disengaged athletes decrease stress, and identify short- and long-term goals (Constantine, 1995).

This chapter sought to review the recent literature relevant to understanding the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The reviewed literature touched upon the development of the student athlete, the college transition experience, the female athlete, the transition out of athletics, the loss of identity, and the disengaged athlete. The following Methodology chapter will explain the procedures undertaken for the present study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The study sought to identify factors that influence a female student's transition out of athletics and better understand the variety of ways students experience and perceive their transition. This study was a qualitative exploration into the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The use of a qualitative, exploratory research design was useful for the purpose of this inquiry because the study aimed to interview female college students in an effort to gain insight into the varied experiences they encountered before, during and after their disengagement from athletics. An exploratory study allowed for a beginning familiarity on this topic and may be useful in providing information for future studies (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). The small scale of the qualitative interview approach allowed for more in-depth exploration with each individual. As an exploratory and qualitative study, the hope is that this study will provide insight into the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics, which is a population where limited research has previously been conducted.

For the purpose of this study, the following definition can be used in understanding the terminology referenced throughout. *Disengaged Athlete: an individual who does not have either the opportunity or the desire to continue athletic competition* (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). This definition is derived from an empirical study conducted by Lubker and Etzel (2007) and refers specifically to students who competed in formal athletics while in high school, but disengaged

prior to or during college. For this study, it is important to note that all disengaged athletes utilized will be individuals who participated in formal athletics (i.e. varsity sports, club sports, gymnastics, etc.) while in high school, but have disengaged from athletics at some point before or during their college career. To be more specific, these students may or may not have participated in athletics while in college. For the purpose of this study, it is important to distinguish the college student athlete as a student engaged in a college varsity-level sport, as opposed to as intramural sport. This distinction is important because some students may have disengaged from formal varsity athletics, but continued to play at the intramural level, requiring significantly less dedication and training.

Sample

The criteria for participation in this study initially required enrollment as a full-time student at a particular four-year, undergraduate college in New England. However, part way through the recruitment process, the participation requirements were expanded to include students enrolled full-time at any four-year, undergraduate college in New England. Other inclusion criteria included that the participant must be female and between the ages of 18 and 23. The participants needed to be able to read and answer questions in English and needed to have the ability to meet in person for a maximum of one hour. Participants must have participated in formal athletics during high school (i.e. varsity sports, club sports, gymnastics, etc.), but must no longer be an active participant in any formal athletics. Participants who met these requirements were not excluded for any other reasons. Due to the scope and limits of this study, it was a non-probability sample, made up of a limited number of the available population of eligible female students at four-year undergraduate colleges in New England.

The sample for this study was recruited out of convenience. Due to proximity, several four-year undergraduate colleges in New England were chosen as the base of the sample from which participants will be recruited. Participants were recruited using posters to advertise the study. Posters situated around the college campuses briefly explained the nature of the study, the purpose, the criteria for participation, the time commitment needed to participate, identifying information about the researcher, and how to contact the researcher. In addition, emails containing the same flier were sent to a group of students identified as former athletes by one of the college's athletic directors. Initially, a snowball effect was meant to be used to identify and recruit additional participants, however this method did not work effectively and no new participants were recruited this way.

As a qualitative study, the sample size twelve students. Efforts were made to recruit a diverse population of students for the study, particularly in regard to race and previous sport played. However, due to the sample size and the constraints of the study, diversity in terms of race and ethnicity was limited.

Data Collection

For this study, a qualitative research design was used, consisting of 15 to 45 minute interviews during which students were asked a series of open-ended questions about their athletic experiences before, during and after disengagement. Students met individually with the interviewer in a private setting, typically in an empty classroom or room in the library. The interview was recorded and transcribed by the researcher at a later date. To start, the interviewer reviewed with the student the informed consent form, which addressed the anonymity and confidentiality of the interview. The student was then asked to sign the form. The interview began with a series of demographic information questions about the student's age, race/ethnicity,

anticipated graduation year, and major or anticipated major. The interviews then proceeded with prepared questions related to the student's personal athletic history, decision to disengage from athletics, and life since disengagement. At the completion of the interview, students were given resources to contact if they had concerns, questions, or wanted to follow up with a mental health professional.

At the completion of all interviews, they were transcribed to print by this researcher. Following transcription, the interviews were examined for themes and other potential data that could insight into the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. This researched signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure confidentiality of study participants and data. No other individuals came into contact with the raw data.

Data Analysis

As a qualitative research design specific methodological operations were avoided in an effort to afford optimal flexibility in analyzing the data. Following the completion of all interviews, the transcribed data first went through the process of open coding. Open coding allowed for categorizing the data, as well as comparing similarities and differences in the stories (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Data analysis will strove to identify patterns, consistencies, and outliers throughout various stories. As an exploratory study, the goal of this research is not to provide specific answers based on the data, but rather to supply insight into the experiences of this particular population of female disengaged athletes.

The qualitative research design utilized for this study promoted the use of a small sample size, thus allowing for the gathering of more in-depth information. However, this design also created some limitations in the research. Due to the scope of the study and the limitations of the researcher, the sample pool was small. In addition, as a qualitative study, the sample size was

small, consisting of only 12 participants. These factors likely contributed to the lack of significant racial or ethnic diversity in the sample.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The study sought to identify factors that influence a young, female student's transition out of athletics and better understand the ways that these individuals experience and perceive their transition. The findings of this research project center on three major themes that arose from the interview, transcribing, and coding process: (1) the experiences of being an athlete, (2) the decision to disengage from athletics, and (3) life after athletics. Basic demographic information was also collected, including age, race/ethnicity, anticipated year of graduation, and academic major or anticipated major. Below, pertinent demographic data will be reviewed, followed by a description of the findings as they relate to the three major themes listed above.

Description of Participants

Twelve participants were interviewed for this study. All participants identified as female and all were (at the time of the interview) enrolled in an undergraduate college working towards a bachelor's degree. Eleven of the participants identified their race or ethnicity as white or Caucasian, while one participant identified as Asian-American. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22, with the majority (58%) being 19 or 20 years of age. The average age of all participants was 19.75. Participant's anticipated year of graduation ranged from 2011 to 2014. Five students represented the class of 2014 (first year students), three students were from the class of 2013 (sophomores), one student was from the class of 2012 (junior), and three students were from the

class of 2011 (seniors). Participants' major or anticipated major showed significant variety.

Three students reported having either a double major or a minor. Represented academics majors and minors included: Comparative Literature, English Language and Literature, Latin American Studies, American Studies, European Studies, Anthropology, History (represented twice), Psychology (represented twice), Math, Environmental Science and Policy, Neuroscience/Pre-med (represented twice), Italian, and Spanish.

Experiences of Being an Athlete

Youth sports and exercise. Each of the interviews began with the participant describing her athletic history, including the sports she has played. Every study participant made reference to engaging in some form of youth athletics or exercise. Seven participants reported playing youth soccer, four played youth softball, two participants each listed youth basketball, swimming, gymnastics, and dance, and one participant each listed skiing, tennis, volleyball, and figure skating. Three participants referenced the carefree and fun nature of youth athletics. One participant stated, "I just picked flowers or whatever kids do when they're on a soccer field." Another participant explained,

When I was younger and I played rec softball, I feel like that was actually the most fun that I've had playing softball. I mean, at that point I would look forward to the first day of the season for like weeks leading up to it.

Advanced athletic participation. All study participants engaged in a sport at an advanced level, beyond the typical "youth sport". Eight participants were members of a sports team associated with their junior high school. Ten participants were members of a sports team associated with their high school. Seven study participants competed on a team or in a sport

outside of their junior or high school, such as in gymnastics, alpine skiing, tennis, club and YMCA swimming, club softball, club soccer, and club volleyball. Two of these individuals solely participated in athletics outside of school, while the remaining five participated in both school and outside athletics. In addition, four study participants participated in a varsity sport while in college.

Collectively, study participants named a total of twelve sports that they had individually played at an advanced level. Cross country, and track and field, were the most common sports listed, with four participants competing as runners and one competing in track and field as a thrower. Soccer, softball, tennis, and volleyball were each listed by two participants, and field hockey, swimming, gymnastics, skiing, basketball, and rowing were each listed by one participant.

Reasons for choosing sport. When participants were asked why they chose to play or pursue their particular sport/s of choice, they responded with a variety of answers. Parental influence proved to be a strong factor for why participants originally started playing their sport/s. One participant explained, “My parents were the ones who initially signed me up.” While another respondent said, “I think it was pretty much my parents who decided.”

Beyond the parent/s’ role, friends and other family members seemed to be a major factor influencing sport participation. One participant explained, “I had my older brother influencing me and then my next door neighbors.” Another respondent stated, “My best friend played and we just wanted to spend more time together. It was my main social group.” Uniquely, one participant was drawn to her sport from watching it on TV. She said, “I was sitting on the couch watching TV with my dad... and we found Wimbledon. I was immediately captivated.”

When describing why they chose a sport or continued with a particular sport, the respondents' "love" for the sport proved to be a major factor. One such participant said, "I just loved it so much that I just couldn't quit." A small number of participants also used the word, "fun," to describe their sport of choice. Such as, "It was really fun and that's what it was about."

Families response to sport participation. A major proportion of respondents described their parent/s as "supportive" of their athletic participation. A two sport athlete and study participant explained, "They generally supported it... I think that as soon as they realized I was having so much fun they began to really support both sports." While most parents were reported to be supportive, a few participants stated that their parents showed some concern about their sport involvement due to the intensity of the sport and/or the time commitment required. One such participant said, "I think there was some slight reluctance [from my parents] because it was like 15 hours a week and it took some time away from academics."

The study results show that, for the most part, parent/s of the study participants frequently attended athletic competitions. In addition, a few parents were reported to have been involved in their child's sport beyond attending competitions, such as volunteering or doing extensive driving to and from events. Though family presence and support at sports events was considered important to some participants, a few commented that it was stressful or embarrassing. One such respondent explained, "I was embarrassed that I wasn't in a good boat, so I almost didn't want them to come." Another stated, "I actually [played] better when they weren't there... I didn't really like having them there because it felt like more pressure." In comparison to the above, one participant's parents were not involved in her athletic life at all, which did not seem to bother her. She stated, "My parents have never gone to a single meet or a single race. I'm not even sure

if they know what cross-country is... I honestly don't care. I feel like it's a personal thing, its with my team.”

Deciding to Disengage from Athletics

When do athletes disengage? Results from the interviews show that an equal number of participants disengage from their sport during high school, during the transition from high school to college, and during college. Of the participants who disengaged while in college, some had previously disengaged from another sport prior to entering college.

Making the decision to disengage. During the interviews, study participants were asked why they stopped playing their sport and what influenced their decision to stop. In response, a majority of participants explained that they were no longer enjoying or no longer having fun doing their sport. One participant stated, “Cause I had done it for so long, and cause our team was so competitive, it wasn't so enjoyable for me any more. It was a really big pressure I remember, especially towards the end.” In addition, study results show that the physical, emotional, and time demands of athletic participation also played a major role in influencing respondents' decision to disengage. One such participants said, “I was sick of having to go straight to practice every day... I hated getting up [early] on Saturday mornings for practice. I dreaded it so much.”

A participant's relationship with her coach or her rank/position on the team proved to be a major factor influencing the decision to disengage. One such participant stated, “I was not appreciated at all. I didn't feel like all the sacrifices I made, all the time that I spent running and training had amounted to anything really.” Injury, illness, or mental health concerns played a factor in athletic disengagement for a moderate number of study participants. Among these respondents, one explained, “I had all these problems with my shoulder. I kept dislocating it... I

sort of developed a mental block after I had surgery.” Finances or the cost of participating in their sport of choice were listed as an elements impacting the disengagement decision for a minor number of the participants. In addition, a moderate number of participants said that academics and their college plans played a role in their decision to stop playing sports. One such participant stated, “I can’t be a serious student and a serious athlete. I can’t have my attention divided that way.”

Family’s response to disengagement. The majority of study participants reported that they made the decision to disengage from their sport alone, without the help or feedback of their family. One of these participants said, “[My parents] sort of refused to say anything. They knew it was a really hard decision for me and didn’t want to insert their opinions at all.” In addition, for the most part, study participants felt that their parent/s supported their decision to disengage. In this way, one participant stated, “She was really supportive. She was like, ‘yeah, school comes first. I support that.’”

Life After Athletics

Coping with the loss. Many of the study participants experienced their disengagement from athletics as a loss with the majority reporting that they miss some aspect of being an athlete or being part of a team. One participant said,

I really missed running... I missed the competitive nature, like the rewards of winning. I missed being able to train for something... and I missed being part of a team. That was one of the things, like bonding over workouts and just like reconnecting to my body and my fitness was important to me.

The loss of athletic identity or image following disengagement arose as a concern for a moderate number of participants. As an example, one individual explained,

Then I had to start living life as a non-runner. For such a long time it was like missing a limb... I was just completely cut off. When you're on the team, you're constantly with everyone, and when you're off, you're done."

Another respondent stated, "There was always something that I liked about [being an athlete]. Like, it made me feel brave and like, hard working... I just felt like I was supposed to be there."

In reference to life after athletic disengagement, health was a major factor addressed by most participants. Some participants stated that they had actually gained weight since stopping their sport, while some had been concerned about gaining weight and changed their eating habits as a result. Several participants found that their athletic disengagement had a negative impact on their mental health. In reference to the period of time after stopping her sport, one participant said, "I was horribly depressed. From literally going one day being a highly conditioned distance runner to the next day not, was just so disorienting."

Life as a non-athlete. When asked how life has changed since disengaging from athletics, the majority of the participants pointed out that they have much more time than they did as an athlete. This was frequently seen as a positive thing, allowing time for "indulging" in other interests or focusing on academics. One such participant said,

It gave me a lot of time to pursue other things, in terms of academics and in terms of other extra curricular activities that I'd always wanted to try but never had the chance to in high school because of cross country.

However, in contrast, some participants found the extra, “unstructured,” time to be difficult. For example, one participants said, “I think it was really weird when I stopped playing softball to come home from school at like 2:05. I would come home and be like, oh my god, I have all this time... I was sort of overwhelmed.”

Engaging in some form of exercise on a regular basis after disengagement appears to be a major trend among these former athletes. One individual stated, “I still run almost everyday... I’ll never stop running cause it’s healthy, and I still get a lot of enjoyment from it. It’s still an important part of my life.” However, a few participants said that they have found it difficult to maintain a regular exercise routine on their own. A participant stated,

Not being on a team means I don’t have anyone pushing me to go to the gym or go for a run. Without any team to make me go to the gym, it’s been a bit of a struggle to push myself to do that.

The findings of this study, as recorded above, were organized into three major themes to capture the experiences of female, college-aged students who have disengaged from athletics. The following Discussion chapter will connect the findings to the relevant literature discussed in the literature review. The next chapter will also address the strengths and limitations of the study, and how the study relates to clinical social work practice

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female college students who have disengaged from athletics. The study sought to identify factors that influence a young, female student's transition out of athletics and better understand the ways that these individuals experience and perceive their transition. The findings of this study center on three major themes: (1) the experiences of being an athlete, (2) the decision to disengage from athletics, and (3) life after athletics.

This chapter will connect these findings to the relevant literature presented in the literature review. In addition, this chapter will aim to identify the strengths and limitations of this study, as well as how the study relates to clinical social work practice.

The Experiences of Being an Athlete

As discussed by various authors (Houle, Brewer, & Kluck, 2010; Camire & Trudel, 2010; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009), youth sports are a valued part of American culture for the lessons that they can instill and the healthy life-style they encourage. As mentioned in the findings, all participants in this study engaged in youth sports and many of the participants were signed up by or encouraged to play sports by their parents. This is consistent with the writings of Wuerth, Lee, and Alferman (2004), Papaioannou, Ampatzoglou, Kalogiannis, and Sagovitis (2008), who talk about parental involvement as a factor contributing to the athletic development of a child.

Parental support is seen as essential to a child's participation and success in sport. The parent/s will likely not only introduce the child to the sport, but also provide encouragement during the first phases of athletic development. At this early stage in athletic development, children are dependent on an adult to sign them up for athletics and encourage involvement by providing transportation and attending events. In the case of this study, youth sport participation led to advanced sport participation in all study participants, but it did not necessarily determine the sport played or predict sport participation beyond the high school level.

As athletes get older and become involved in more advanced sports, parental involvement and support remains important. Ullrich and Smith's (2009) study on soccer player's perceived relationships with parents and peers found that a positive relationship with the mother could predict soccer continuation. With the size of the present research study, it is difficult to analyze the direct influence that parent relationships had on sport continuation, however there is evidence of the import of the athlete-parent relationship. A significant number of study participants identified their parents as "supportive" of their athletic involvement. In addition, the majority of participants said that their parents regularly attended their athletic events. In these situations, it can be surmised that parental support was important for the athlete to feel good about their sport involvement, as well as for providing some of the basic necessities of sport involvement, such as transportation and monetary support.

There were some consistencies between the current study and the study of Wuerth, Lee, and Alferman (2004), which found that parental support and behavior that is desirable to one athlete may be stressful to another athlete. A few of the participants in this study reported some ambivalence about having their parent/s attend athletic events. This ambivalence included references to increased pressure and a decrease in the quality of their performance experienced

with the presence of their parent/s. The extra “pressure” these participants experienced from their parent/s presence may be due to how their parent/s acted at athletic events, how their parent/s talked to them about their performance, or how they think their parent/s perceived their performance.

The Decision to Disengage

Swain (1991) found in his study that withdrawal from sport was a process that occurred over time. In this way, it would seem that many athletes start to think about or anticipate their disengagement from athletics in advance. This may coincide with Ballie’s (1993) suggestion that the transition out of formal athletics is likely to occur at predictable times. As athletes are thinking about or anticipating their withdrawal from sport, it only makes sense that they would choose a natural or convenient time to stop. The most predictable time, when it seems the most athletes disengage, is during the transition from high school to college. A third of the participants in this study disengaged during this transition.

However, Ballie (1993) also suggests that a common time for transition out of athletics is following a significant event. In the current study, an injury or a health concern could be considered an “event” that occurred, thus forcing the athlete to stop playing her sport. A third of the participants in this study experienced some kind of injury, health or mental health concern that led to their athletic disengagement. In these cases, the opportunity to plan for disengagement is taken away. In comparison, athletes who remain healthy and able to continue with their sport, may naturally lose interest, experience a decrease in motivation, become interested in other things, or become more realistic about their skills and abilities, thus allowing for them to go through a process where they prepare themselves for disengagement.

Life After Athletics

As discussed above, according to prior research, the unexpected nature of injuries can make the adjustment to life as a non-athlete more difficult. When athletic disengagement happens suddenly and without time to prepare, the individual may struggle to come to terms with her situation both “psychologically and practically” (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). One study participant who suffered an athletic injury described the experience as follows, “It was really hard to watch everyone play when I couldn’t. And I just feel like that entire season I was just an emotional wreck... I mean, my grades fell that semester cause I was really depressed.”

However, even study participants who made the decision to disengage talked about their sense of loss at giving up their sport. One participant explained, “I miss being able to say, I’m captain of the volleyball team. Like, that image, of being an athlete, I liked that all through school.” An earlier study by Grove, Lavalley, and Gordon (1997) found that when an individual maintains a “strong and exclusive athletic identity up to the point of retirement”, she may struggle more with her adjustment out of athletics. For this reason, athletes who were uncertain about they’re decision to disengage, or athletes who made a last minute decision may struggle more with the transition than athletes who “had always just assumed my career would end after high school,” as one study participant explained.

In comparison to individuals who struggled with their disengagement from athletics, there are those who embraced the change as an opportunity to explore other parts of themselves. In prior research, Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) found that some former athletes experienced their disengagement as a relief from the demands of their formal sport. Lally (2007) found that some of these individuals were eager to “explore neglected, abandoned, or entirely novel” parts of themselves (p. 95).

This eagerness was true for many of the participants in the current study. Several suggested that they were eager to pursue other interests and activities, while several others put their time, energy and focus into academics. Previous research found that women tend to have more of a balance between academics and athletics because there are fewer opportunities for women to excel in athletics beyond college (Melendez, 2006-2007). In addition, Yopyk and Prentice (2005) found that student athletes who found satisfaction from other roles in their life (such as academic) were able to take on other identities when needed. These studies seem to explain why, for some of the participants in the current study, it was a relatively smooth transition from a student athlete, to just a student.

This study has some limitations that were previously addressed in the methodology. The small sample size, in particular, poses a limitation. This, along with the small geographic area represented by the sample make it so that the findings may not be applicable to larger populations. In addition, with eleven of the twelve participants identifying as white or Caucasian, the study findings do not represent a racially diverse group of people. Again, this limitation makes it difficult to generalize the findings.

The findings in this study have important implications for social work practice. Clinicians working with adolescent or college aged women need to be aware of the unique experiences and challenges that disengaged athletes may encounter. The findings of this study will help clinicians better understand the experiences of disengaged athletes, and be better prepared to work with these women. The findings of this study may also be useful for clinicians working with young female athletes, athletes who have experienced an injury or illness, as well as working with parents and families who have a young female athlete. This study has identified various factors that influence young, female student's transition out of athletics. The study has sought to provide

greater understanding of the ways these individuals experience their transition so that, in the future, they and others going through similar changes will be better supported.

References

- Ballie, P. H. F. (1993). Understanding retirement from sports: therapeutic ideas for helping athletes in transition. *The Counseling Psychologist, 21*(3), 399-410.
- Ballie, P. H. F. & Danish, S. J. (1992). Understanding the career transition of athletes. *The Sport Psychologist, 6*, 77-98.
- Blinde, E. M. & Stratta, T. M. (1992). The 'sport career death' of college athletes: involuntary and unanticipated sport exits. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 15*(1), 3-20.
- Brewer, B. W., Cornelius, A. E., Stephan, Y., & Van Raalte, J. (2010). Self-protective changes in athletic identity following anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 11*, 1-5.
- Camire, M. & Trudel, P. (2010). High school athletes' perspectives on character development through sport participation. *Physical Education and Sport Pedegogy, 15*(2), 193-207.
- Constantine, M. G. (1995). Retired female athletes in transition: a group counseling intervention. *Journal of College Student Development, 36*(6), 604-605.
- Green, S. L. & Weinberg, R. S. (2001). Relationships among athletic identity, coping skills, social support, and the psychological impact of injury in recreational participants. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 13*(1), 40-59.
- Greendorfer, S. L. & Blinde, E. M. (1985). "Retirement" from intercollegiate sport: theoretical and empirical considerations. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 2*, 101-110.
- Grove, J. R., Lavalley, D., & Gordon, S. (1997). Coping with retirement from sport: the influence of athletic identity. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 9*, 191-203.
- Houle, J. L., Brewer, B. W., & Kluck, A. S. (2010). Developmental trends in athletic identity: a two-part retrospective study. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 33*(2), 146-159.

- Killeya-Jones, L. A. (2005). Identity structure, role discrepancy, and psychological adjustment in male college student-athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 28(2), 167-185.
- Lance, L. M. (2004). Gender differences in perceived role conflict among university student athletes. *College Student Journal*, 38(2), 179-190.
- Lally, P. (2007). Identity and athletic retirement: a prospective study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 8, 85-99.
- Lubker, J. R. & Etzel, E. F. (2007). College adjustment experiences of first-year students: disengaged athletes, non-athletes, and current varsity athletes. *NASPA Journal*, 44(3), 457-480.
- Martinelli, M. A. Jr. (2000). Career decision making and student-athletes. In D. A. Luzzo (Ed.), *Career Counseling of College Students: An Empirical Guide to Strategies that Work* (pp. 201-215). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Melendez, M. C. (2006-2007). The influence of athletic participation on the college adjustment of freshman and sophomore student athletes. *College Student Retention*, 8(1), 39-55.
- Miller, P. S. & Kerr, G. (2002). The athletic, academic and social experiences of intercollegiate student athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 25(4), 346-367.
- Papaioannou, A. G., Ampatzoglou, G., Kalogiannis, P., & Sagovitis, A. (2008). Social agents, achievement goals, satisfaction and academic achievement in youth sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 9, 122-141.
- Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2010). *Essential research methods for social work*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

- Smallman, E., Sowa, C. J., & Young, B. D. (1991). Ethnic and gender differences in student-athletes' responses to stressful life events. *Journal of College Student Development, 32*, 230-235.
- Storch, E. A., Storch, J. B., Killiany, E. M., & Roberti, J. W. (2005). Self-reported psychopathology in athletes: a comparison of intercollegiate student athletes and non-athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 28* (1), 86-98.
- Swain, D. A. (1991). Withdrawal from sport and Schlossberg's model of transitions. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 8*, 152-160.
- Swenson, S. M., Nordstrom, N., & Hiester, M. (2008). The role of peer relationships in adjustment to college. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(6), 551-567.
- Troutman, K. P. & Dufur, M. J. (2007). From high school jocks to college grads: assessing the long-term effects of high school sport participation on females' educational attainment. *Youth & Society, 38*(4), 443-462.
- Ullrich-French, S. & Smith, A. L. (2009). Social and motivational predictors of continued youth sport participation. *Psychology of Sports and Exercise, 10*, 87-95.
- Watson, J. C. & Kissinger D. B. (2007). Athletic participation and wellness: Implications for counseling college student-athletes. *Journal of College Counseling, 10*, 153-162.
- Webb, W. M., Nasco, S. A, Riley, S., & Headrick, B. (1998). Athletic identity and reactions to retirement from sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 21*(3), 338-362.
- Wiechman, S. A. & Williams, J. (1997). Relation of athletic identity to injury and mood disturbance. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 20*(2), 199-210.
- Wilson, G. & Pritchard, M. (2005). Comparing sources of stress in college student athletes and non-athletes. *The Online Journal of Sport Psychology, 7*(1), 1-8.

Wuerth, S., Lee, M. J. & Alferman, D. (2004). Parental involvement and athletes' career in youth sport. *Psychology of Sports and Exercise, 5*, 21-33.

Yopyk, D. J. A., & Prentice, D. A. (2005). Am I an athlete or a student? Identity salience and stereotype threat in student athletes. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 27(4)*, 329-336.

Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter

December 11, 2010

Lee Welch

Dear Lee,

Thanks for sending your corrected materials. We are happy now to give final approval to your project.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

It is an interesting and useful study.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Elaine Kersten, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Recruitment Flier

Are you a FORMER ATHLETE?

Did you play a sport in high school?
Have you stopped playing since being in college?

If so, I want to hear your story!

My name is Lee Welch and I am a Master of Social Work student at the Smith College School for Social Work and a clinical intern at the Smith College Counseling Center. I am conducting my Master's thesis on women's experiences of disengaging from athletics and I am looking for participants.

In order to participate **you will need to meet the following criteria:**

- 1) You participated in formal athletics while in high school (this may range from varsity sports, to club sports, to individual sports)
- 2) You *may* have also participated in formal athletics since being in college (but it is not necessary)
- 3) You are a female college student currently between the ages of 18 and 23
- 4) You are no longer a participant in any kind of formal athletics
- 5) You can be available to meet with me for a 45 minute interview

If the above criteria matches you and you are interested in participating in my study or you would like more information, please contact me using the information below. Thank you very much for your consideration in taking part in this study.

Sincerely,
Lee Welch, MSW Intern
Smith College Counseling Services

██████████
██████████

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Participant # _____

January 15, 2011

Dear Participant,

My name is Lee Welch, and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study on the experiences of disengaged college athletes. Your story and perspective are important to developing an understanding of female college students' experiences disengaging from athletics. With a better understanding of yours, and other's experiences, future disengaged student athletes will be better supported when going through similar transitions. The data from this study will be used to write my Master's Thesis and may also be used for future presentations and publications.

You have been asked to participate in this study because of your unique experience as a female college student who participated in formal athletics while in high school, and also possibly in college, but has since disengaged from athletic participation. As a participant in this study, you will take part in an interview during which you will be asked some demographic questions, as well as questions pertaining to your athletic history and experiences as a disengaged athlete. It is estimated that the interview will take less than 45 minutes to complete.

Your interview will be audio recorded to allow for transcription at a later date. I plan to transcribe all materials myself, however if another transcriber is used, he/she will sign a confidentiality agreement. Data from your interview will be coded and used to write a thesis paper which will be assessed as part of my educational requirement toward receiving a Masters of Social Work degree. Some brief quotations or vignettes from your interview may be used in the paper, but all identifying information will be carefully disguised. I will be the primary person to handle the data, however if any other person assists with coding, he/she will also be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. I will store all data for at least three years in a locked filing box, consistent with federal regulations. If, after three years, the data is no longer needed, it will be destroyed. If the data needs to be saved for longer than three years, it will be kept secure and destroyed when no longer needed.

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study. However, your participation will allow you the opportunity to share your experience of being a disengaged athlete and the impact it has had on your life. Your contributions will provide important information that may be utilized by professionals in the future. There are some potential risks related to your participation in the study. During the process of answering interview questions, you may experience varied

emotions as the result of your personal reflections on the content. At any time during the interview, you may refuse to answer a question. At the completion of the interview, you will be provided with a list of referral resources in the event that you feel you would like support or further exploration.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time during the process until the day of April 1, 2011. If you choose to withdraw from the study within this timeframe, you may contact me via phone or email. If you have any questions or you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact me using the information provided below. If you have any questions about your rights or other aspects of the study, you are encouraged to contact me or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Signature of the Participant

Date

Signature of the Researcher

Date

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICPATION!

Lee Welch, MSW Intern
Smith College Counseling Center
Northampton, MA 01060



Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Demographic Information:

- What is your age?
- How would you describe your race or ethnicity?
- What year do you anticipate graduating from college?
- What is your major or anticipated major in college?

Experiential Interview Format/Questions:

(as the interview progresses, if a question has already been answered, it will be skipped)

- Why don't we start by having you tell me about your athletic history and what sports you played.
- Why did you choose to play that/those sport/s?
- How did your family and friends respond to your participation in your sport/s?
- When did you stop playing your sport/s?
- Why did you stop playing your sport/s?
- What influenced your decision to stop playing your sport?
- How did your family/friends react when you stopped playing your sport?
- Has your life changed at all since you stopped playing your sport/s? If so, how?
- Presently, do you exercise or participate in any informal sports (i.e. intramurals, recreational teams, etc).
- Do you have anything to add about your experience disengaging from your sport?