

Collegiate Athletes' Motivation in Their Dual Roles: A Mixed-Method Comparison Across NCAA Divisions

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This study investigates the motivations of NCAA Division I, II, and III collegiate athletes (CAs) towards academics and athletics, while also exploring their transition out of sport plans. Using a sequential mixed-method design, the research involved 457 CAs in the quantitative phase and 13 participants in the qualitative phase. Quantitative findings revealed significant differences in academic and athletic motivations between Division I and III, and Division II and III athletes. Qualitative analysis identified three themes: 1) Self-Determination Theory: Emphasis on Motivational Components, 2) Career Planning and Goals for Transitioning Out of Sport, and 3) Impact of COVID-19. The themes reflected a strong understanding of the motivational perspectives on CAs' careers, emphasizing how motivation influenced their transition out of sports and connected with the impact of COVID-19. This study aims to inform educators, coaches, administrators, and researchers involved in college athletics, addressing a gap in the literature by including DII and DIII CA populations and comparing motivations across all three NCAA divisions.

Key words: *Intercollegiate Athletics, Motivation, Self-Determination Theory, Transition*

The lives of college athletes (CAs) have been an important subject matter of investigation over the past few decades. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), more than 520,000 CAs compete in 24 NCAA-sanctioned sports every year (NCAA, 2022). CAs are considered a special population whose university experience differs from that of their non-athlete peers due to their unique lifestyle, roles, and needs (Comeaux, 2010; Ferrante et al., 1996; Hyatt, 2003; Papanikolaou et al., 2003; Pate et al., 2011; Valentine & Taub, 1999; Watson, 2006). Most CAs, while recruited to compete in institution-sponsored sports and provided benefits such as scholarships, gear, and meals, much still balance the tremendous time demands of both athletics and academics to succeed in their collegiate lives.

Research has indicated that NCAA Division I CAs spend 34+ hours per week on sport-related activities, including training, recovery, and team meetings (Smith & Hardin, 2018). Given these demands, CAs face numerous stressors and pressures, such as scheduling classes, fatigue, financial strain, and inflexible coaches (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Hwang & Choi, 2016). Universities typically expect CAs to prioritize their responsibilities as students (Lapchick, 2006). However, the demands of excelling in athletics often lead CAs to identify more strongly with their role as athletes (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Umbach et al., 2006), particularly in Division I programs and revenue-generating sports.

Balancing academic and athletic responsibilities is a critical issue for CAs in

collegiate athletics (Choi & Smith, 2024). However, the motivations driving CAs to manage these dual roles may differ based on the level of institutional support and resources available within each NCAA division. CAs at larger Division I programs, for example, often have greater access to scholarships, facilities, and academic support, while those in lower divisions may face more limited resources, influencing how they prioritize and approach their academic and athletic commitments. Given the wide philosophical and physical differences between the NCAA divisions and their institutions, this study aimed to examine CAs' motivations regarding their dual roles (academics and athletics) based on their NCAA division through a quantitative survey. Following the quantitative survey, a qualitative study was conducted using a semi-structured interview approach to deeply explore CAs' thoughts and perceptions of their dual role motivations, career readiness, and future plans after collegiate sports.

Literature Review

Collegiate Athletes' Experiences

Collegiate athletes (CAs) generally have five years to complete their four years of NCAA eligibility. During this period, CAs are expected to perform well in both athletic and academic tasks to avoid losing or limiting their eligibility and scholarships. Lupo et al. (2015) indicated that the NCAA Division I institutional sport and education system in the United States provides relevant support to help CAs achieve both academic and athletic requirements,

such as utilizing academic support centers and providing academic advising services. To avoid penalties, academic advisors must ensure that CAs remain eligible to compete in their sports (Stokowski et al., 2017). However, despite the support that colleges and universities offer through various student success programs, centers, and advisors, many support services primarily focus on maintaining academic eligibility to play sports (Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010).

Multiple researchers have found that CAs experience stress due to time restrictions, travel, and physical demands associated with their sport (Madrigal & Robbins, 2020; Pritchard & Wilson, 2005; Yusko et al., 2008). Specifically, Division I CAs often struggle with managing their time due to the intense focus on their sport, the physical toll it takes, the extensive travel, and the emotional strain (Emma, 2008). Although the NCAA imposes a 20-hour limit on weekly athletic activities, Division I CAs report spending approximately 40 hours per week on athletic activities, including training, recovery, and team meetings (Smith & Hardin, 2018). This excessive time commitment to athletics often leads to fatigue and increased stress for CAs (Gould & Whitley, 2009).

NCAA Division Differences

Despite the increased time commitment to athletics across all three NCAA divisions, CAs still spend more time on academics than athletics. For instance, Division I CAs spend 38.5 hours per week on academics and 34 hours on athletics. Di-

vision II CAs spend 38.5 hours per week on academics and 32 hours on athletics, while Division III CAs spend 40.5 hours per week on academics and 28.5 hours on athletics (GOALS, 2016). NCAA Division II schools generally have fewer resources allocated for athletics, resulting in smaller scholarships and fewer perks compared to Division I institutions. Over 300 colleges and universities operate at the NCAA Division II level, aiming to provide CAs the opportunity to engage in competitive athletics while excelling academically and actively participating in campus life (NCAA, 2020a). For example, Division II CAs spent about 32 hours per week on athletic activities in 2015, compared to 30 hours per week in 2010 (GOALS, 2016).

Research on Division II athletes remains limited. A qualitative case study by Nite (2012) found that Division II institutions often struggle to support their athletes academically due to financial constraints, including insufficient funds to hire staff dedicated to academic development—a role more commonly assumed by Division I athletic departments (Nite, 2012; Beattie & Turner, 2020). In contrast, Division I institutions typically employ specialized staff to support their athletes' academic and athletic success. Division III, which includes over 440 institutions and more than 195,000 athletes, is the largest NCAA division. These schools generally do not offer athletic scholarships and operate with fewer financial resources compared to Divisions I and II (NCAA, 2020b).

Division III administrators emphasize that athletes should meet the same aca-

demic standards as non-athlete students (Emerson et al., 2009). Research suggests that high school students who select Division III institutions often prioritize academic considerations over athletic opportunities (Katz et al., 2015; Pauline, 2012). Katz et al. (2015) identify two key philosophies in Division III: a primary focus on the academic and social development of athletes rather than athletic victories or national exposure, and an emphasis on the interconnected, mutually beneficial relationship between education and athletics (Katz et al., 2015; Smith & Hardin, 2020).

Athletic Identity

The majority of athletes begin playing sports at a very young age, transitioning from leisure and play to serious sport commitment. Along this athletic path, CAs often make decisions about their future and self-identity before exploring other potential options, roles, and statuses (Beamon, 2012). Beamon (2012) also suggested that the level of commitment and dedication required to achieve athletic goals may limit NCAA Division I CAs' identity development beyond the realm of sports. Lally's (2007) study indicated that Division I CAs initially neglected their student roles, but as they progressed toward the end of their athletic careers, they were influenced by friends, family, coaches, or mentors to consider their future careers. However, many friends, family members, and even strangers often view CAs' value as dependent on athletic participation and success, which further solidifies their athletic identity and complicates their pro-

cessing of sport retirement or transition (Beamon, 2012).

Athletic identity has been defined as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). Athletic identity (an athlete's athletic involvement and experience) can impact an athlete psychologically and cognitively. Possessing a strong athletic identity can influence athletes both positively and negatively. A strong athletic identity, as a salient self-identity or sense of self, can positively affect athletic performance and help athletes maintain long-term involvement in exercise behaviors (Phoenix et al., 2005). However, many studies have found that CAs with a strong athletic identity tend to neglect other aspects of life, such as personal and social development, to fulfill their athletic role (Bimper, 2014; Brewer et al., 1993; Watson & Kissinger, 2007; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008; Smith & Hardin, 2018, 2020).

Transition Out of Sport

Only a few CAs can continue their athletic careers as professional athletes after college; the majority of CAs must find alternatives before graduation. In this context, CAs' focus on academics or other achievements outside of sports which can be substantial resources to prepare them for life after athletics. Taylor and Lavallee (2009) indicated through their conceptual model that several factors lead to positive or negative adaptation to career transition, emphasizing the importance of athletes developing coping strategies, finding social support, and participating in pre-retirement planning. CAs may not have as

many opportunities to explore their identity compared to their non-athlete peers, which can make it difficult for them to discover other talents or interests they can consider as careers after their athletic performances cease. This can potentially lead to career transition distress. If athletes experience career transition distress, they may undergo adjustment difficulties, occupational or financial problems, family or social problems, psychological issues, or even substance abuse. In such cases, athletes need interventions to facilitate a healthy transition (Taylor & Lavalley, 2009).

Generally, non-normative transitions (e.g., unexpected events) tend to be more stressful than normative transitions because athletes are less prepared for these situations (Stambulova et al., 2009). For instance, a season-ending injury, the loss of a personal coach, or an unanticipated termination from the team can be examples of non-normative transitions for athletes (Paule-Koba & Rohrs-Cordes, 2019; Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019). One of the problems for athletes who experience a non-normative transition, particularly Division I career-ending injured CAs, is that they feel more isolated during their transition process out of sport because they do not receive adequate support from their team or athletic administration (Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018).

In athletics, transitions can occur for voluntary or involuntary reasons. Voluntary reasons include both athletic and non-athletic factors, such as performance, loss of passion, achievement of sporting

goals, pursuing goals outside of a sports career, and critical life changes (Alfermann et al., 2004; Cecic Erpic et al., 2004; Stambulova et al., 2007; Martin et al., 2014; Young et al., 2006). Studies have found that athletes who are prepared and have engaged in career planning before their retirement have higher levels of perceived personal control, resulting in a successful adaptation to life after their athletic career (Alfermann et al., 2004; Stambulova et al., 2007; Taylor & Lavalley, 2009). Furthermore, athletes who receive support from family, friends, significant others, coaches, and trainers are more likely to experience a positive transition out of athletics (Fernandez et al., 2006; Wippert & Wippert, 2008; Young et al., 2006).

Theoretical Framework: Self-Determination Theory

Among many motivation theories, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is renowned in the many fields and has recently been applied in sport management to better understand consumer behavior (Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Funk et al., 2012). In sport psychology, SDT has been used to examine and explore athletes' motivation, including that of CAs (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Choi & Smith, 2024; Felton & Jowett, 2017; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Mallia et al., 2019; Readdy et al., 2014). For instance, Hollembeak and Amorose (2005) examined the relationship between perceived coaching behaviors and CAs' intrinsic motivation using the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS) with 280 NCAA Division I CAs. The study found that coaching be-

haviors significantly predicted perceived intrinsic motivation. SDT focuses on the degree to which an individual's behavior is self-motivated and self-determined, based on the psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). If an activity fulfills these three psychological needs, it is considered freely chosen and self-determined. Autonomy refers to people's belief that they have control over their actions. Competence is the need for people to develop and improve their skills. Relatedness represents the need to feel a sense of belonging to a group. Previous research in sport has found that if athletes feel autonomous, competent, and related to a group, they are more self-determined (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Vella et al., 2021).

SDT also addresses three dimensions of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is defined as engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction, such as interest and challenge (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation involves performing an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from the activity itself (Deci, 1975). For example, when a person is intrinsically motivated, they will perform the behavior voluntarily without any material rewards or external constraints (Deci & Ryan, 1985). While intrinsic motivation involves doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

For instance, Gaston (2002) stated that CAs who participate in revenue-gen-

erating sports such as men's football and basketball may play their sports due to extrinsic rewards such as financial support and social status. Extrinsic motivation can be categorized into four levels based on the degree of external control. External regulation is the most extrinsically motivated level and involves adopting behavior to obtain a reward or avoid punishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In general, external regulation contrasts with intrinsic motivation. Introjected regulation involves internal pressure to pursue self-worth or avoid guilt and shame (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Identified regulation refers to internalized behaviors that are personally meaningful (Ryan & Deci, 2000), representing a more self-regulated form of extrinsic motivation than the previous two. Lastly, integrated regulation involves behaviors congruent with one's values and needs but still has some external aspects (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. Amotivation can be defined as a lack of motivation, where people cannot see a connection between their actions and the potential outcome (Alderman, 2013). Ryan and Deci (2000) described that when a person is amotivated, they act without intent or do not act at all.

Initially, many scholars thought intrinsic motivation was positive and extrinsic motivation was negative. For example, researchers indicated that people who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to work hard when extrinsic rewards are not available (Vallerand, 1997; Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Weiss & Ferrer Caja, 2002). Also, intrinsically motivated people expe-

rience less performance-related anxiety and more willingness to learn skills than those with extrinsic motivation (Vallerand, 1997; Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Weiss & Ferrer Caja, 2002). However, Ryan and Deci (2000) later described SDT as a continuum, meaning that human motivation can shift from amotivation to extrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation, based on factors or rewards.

Amorose and Anderson-Butcher (2007) conducted a cross-sectional study with 581 high school and college athletes to test whether perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness mediated the relationship between autonomy-supportive coaching and athletes' motivation. The results showed that the three psychological needs positively impacted athletes' motivation. For instance, if athletes felt autonomous, competent, and a sense of relatedness, they were more likely to be self-determined. Holmberg and Sheridan (2013) also conducted a cross-sectional study to examine the relationship among the dimensions of athlete burnout and the degree of self-determination. The study surveyed 598 NCAA Division I and III CAs, finding that intrinsic motivation was negatively correlated with burnout, while amotivation was positively correlated with the dimensions of burnout (Holmberg & Sheridan, 2013). In other words, if a CA is self-determined, they may be less likely to experience burnout.

The most frequently used scale established based on SDT in sports is the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS). Readdy et al. (2014) conducted research regarding

CAs' perceptions of an off-season extrinsic reward program (Champions Club) in a mixed-method study, including the SMS in their questionnaire packets to assess football motivation before and after the reward program. The program awarded points based on various accomplishments, such as achieving good grades and setting personal records in the weight room. The results of the SMS showed that the extrinsic reward program had a significant impact, with decreases in amotivation and extrinsic regulation, and increases in intrinsic motivation (Readdy et al., 2014).

This study examined NCAA Division I, II, and III CAs' motivation in their dual roles of athletics and academics. Among many existing motivational theories, the theoretical foundation of this study was Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000). To measure CAs' athletic motivation, the study used the Sport Motivation Scale-II (SMS-II; Pelletier et al., 2013), which was established based on SDT. The Academic Motivation Scale (AMS; Vallerand et al., 1992), also based on SDT, was applied to measure CAs' academic motivation. For the qualitative part of this study, the researchers examined how and why CAs are self-determined in both their athletic and academic roles based on NCAA divisions, as well as explored the transition processes of participants. Taylor and Lavalley's (2009) model was used to guide the interviews regarding the transition process and plans.

This study extends previous research by examining both academic and athletic motivation across NCAA divisions and

exploring how collegiate athletes describe their motivational experiences and career planning. The following research questions were examined in this study:

RQ 1: Are there statistically significant differences in academic motivation among the NCAA divisions?

RQ 2: Are there statistically significant differences in athletic motivation among the NCAA divisions?

RQ 3: How do NCAA CAs' describe their athletic and academic motivations?

RQ 4: How do NCAA CAs describe their career readiness and career planning for after collegiate sport?

Methods

To examine CAs motivation toward their athletic and academic roles and to understand their transition plans, this study employed a mixed-method approach. Greene and colleagues (1989) defined mixed-method design as research that includes at least one quantitative method and one qualitative method. Tashakkori et al. (1998) later defined mixed-method as a combination of "qualitative and quantitative approaches in the methodology of a study" (p. ix). In general, research problems that cannot be sufficiently resolved with one data source are suitable for a mixed-method design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The present study used a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, in which the researcher first collects data using a quantitative survey approach and then follows up with a qualitative approach (Ivankova et al., 2006). This method effectively measured CAs' motivation levels and differences among NCAA divisions, while the follow-up qualitative

study helped explain the reasons behind and the meaning of the quantitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Ivankova et al., 2006). Additionally, this study explored CAs' transition plans through semi-structured interviews, as previous research has shown a connection between athletic and academic identity and transitioning out of sport (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Phase 1

The first part of this study primarily focused on examining CAs motivation toward academics and athletics. As established, data collection was conducted across each NCAA division.

Participants

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researchers obtained email addresses of coaches from all the NCAA member institutions. Using the randomization function in Microsoft Excel, 5,000 coaches were randomly selected and contacted via email with a request to invite their CAs to participate in the study. A total of 457 CAs completed the survey, comprising 112 from Division I, 208 from Division II, and 137 from Division III. Division II athletes represented the largest proportion of the sample (45.5%). By sport, cross country/track and field accounted for the highest number of participants ($n = 74$, 16.2%). In total, respondents represented 16 different sports, with an additional 8.5% ($n = 39$) competing in sports not included among the listed categories. A detailed distribution of participants by sport is provided in the Appendix.

Instrument

To examine CAs' sport motivation, the Sport Motivation Scale-II (SMS-II; Pelletier et al., 2013) was employed, while the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS; Valleraud et al., 1992) assessed CAs' academic motivation. Both scales are grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The SMS-II (Pelletier et al., 2013) comprises 18 items across 6 dimensions, measuring various aspects of motivation based on SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not correspond at all) to 7 (corresponds exactly). The AMS includes 28 items organized into 7 subscales, evaluating intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation towards academics. Similar to the SMS-II, responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not correspond at all) to 7 (corresponds exactly).

Data Analysis

In this study, Jamovi was utilized to analyze the quantitative dataset. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to identify differences in athletes' motivation among the NCAA divisions. Following the ANOVA, post-hoc com-

parisons (Tukey HSD) were conducted to specify differences between the divisions. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal consistency of the scales. Most alpha coefficients for the variables ranged from .71 to .91, indicating high reliability (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2013). The Sport Extrinsic Introjected Regulation and Sport Amotivation scales showed coefficients of 0.63 and 0.615, respectively. According to George and Mallery's (2019) guidelines, coefficients below 0.60 may be considered questionable but not necessarily unacceptable for reliability.

Results

Table 1 presents the results of One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for academic motivation across NCAA divisions. Among the seven subscales, Academic Intrinsic to Know (AITK) and Academic Extrinsic Motivation - Identified (AEID) showed statistical significance. Tukey's post-hoc test was employed to determine the significance of differences among the tested groups for AITK. For AEID, Division II demonstrated higher academic motivation than those in the other two divisions.

Table 1. *One-Way Analysis of Variance for Academic Motivation*

Scale	Sub-Scale	NCAA Division	N	Mean	SD	SE	DF	DF2	F	P
AMS	AITK	D I	112	5.26	1.2	0.1136	2	454	6.89	0.001
		D II	208	5.17	1.25	0.0866				
		D III	137	5.56	1.09	0.0928				
	AITA	D I	112	4.82	1.42	0.1345	2	454	1.56	0.211
		D II	208	4.61	1.43	0.099				
		D III	137	4.87	1.45	0.1242				
	AIES	D I	112	3.43	1.49	0.1404	2	454	1.63	0.197
		D II	208	3.38	1.38	0.0958				
		D III	137	3.66	1.53	0.1307				
	AEID	D I	112	6.01	0.776	0.0733	2	454	4.23	0.015
		D II	208	5.75	1.178	0.0817				
		D III	137	6.04	0.769	0.0657				
	AETT	D I	112	5.07	1.36	0.128	2	454	0.519	0.596
		D II	208	4.9	1.53	0.106				
		D III	137	4.98	1.37	0.117				
	AEER	D I	112	5.85	1.08	0.1021	2	454	1.9	0.151
		D II	208	5.58	1.36	0.0944				
		D III	137	5.64	1.04	0.0886				
	AAM	D I	112	1.83	1.13	0.1071	2	454	2.16	0.116
		D II	208	1.84	1.22	0.0844				
		D III	137	1.59	1.04	0.0892				

Table 2. *Tukey Post-Hoc Test (AITK)*

		Division I	Division II	Division II
Division I	Mean Differences	-		
	p-value	-		
Division II	Mean Differences	-0.0836	-	
	p-value	0.821	-	
Division III	Mean Differences	0.3911	0.475	-
	p-value	0.028	< .001	-

The results indicated significant differences between Division I and Division III ($P < .05$), as well as between Division II and Division III ($P < .001$).

Table 3. *Tukey Post-Hoc Test (AEID)*

		Division I	Division II	Division II
Division I	Mean Differences	-		
	p-value	-		
Division II	Mean Differences	0.2576	-	
	p-value	0.065	-	
Division III	Mean Differences	-0.0326	-0.2902	-
	p-value	0.963	0.020	-

The results revealed significant differences between Division II and Division III in terms of Academic Extrinsic Motivation Identified (AEID).

Table 4. *One-Way Analysis of Variance for Athletic Motivation*

Scale	Sub-Scale	NCAA Division	N	Mean	SD	SE	DF	DF2	F	P
SMS	SI	D I	112	5.54	1.19	0.1125	2	454	0.566	0.568
		D II	208	5.46	1.19	0.0826				
		D III	137	5.59	1.17	0.0999				
	SEInte	D I	112	5.55	1.22	0.115	2	454	3.97	0.02
		D II	208	5.22	1.18	0.0821				
		D III	137	5.12	1.45	0.1242				
	SEIden	D I	112	5.58	1.17	0.1108	2	454	1.24	0.289
		D II	208	5.39	1.22	0.0844				
		D III	137	5.58	1.37	0.1166				
	SEIntro	D I	112	4.49	1.22	0.1154	2	454	0.753	0.472
		D II	208	4.4	1.24	0.086				
		D III	137	4.57	1.4	0.1193				
	SEEx	D I	112	2.79	1.36	0.1285	2	454	0.0242	0.976
		D II	208	2.78	1.37	0.0947				
		D III	137	2.76	1.41	0.1202				
	SA	D I	112	2.51	1.26	0.1191				
		D II	208	2.58	1.27	0.0881	2	454	0.213	0.808
		D III	137	2.49	1.29	0.1102				

Table 4 presents the results of One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for athletic motivation across NCAA divisions. Among the sub-scales, only integrated regulation, which represents the least extrinsic motivation, showed statistical significance at a significance level of .05. Tukey's post-hoc test was conducted to identify specific differences between groups.

Table 5. *Tukey Post-Hoc Test (SEInte)*

		Division I	Division II	Division II
Division I	Mean Differences	-		
	p-value	-		
Division II	Mean Differences	-0.336	-	
	p-value	0.048	-	
Division III	Mean Differences	-0.437	-0.101	-
	p-value	0.028	0.776	-

The results indicated significant differences between Division I and Division II, as well as between Division I and Division III.

Qualitative Study

The quantitative questionnaire included a question asking participants if they would be interested in an interview about their experiences, and a total of 13 participants expressed interest in the qualitative phase of the study. An interview guide was developed based on Self-Determination Theory and the results of the quantitative phase aligning with the sequential mixed method design. To better describe the

CAs' experiences and address aspects that could not be explored through the quantitative study, this qualitative phase was essential. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The participants included three Division I CAs, five Division II CAs, and five Division III CAs. Among them, nine CAs identified as women and four as men, competing in a wide variety of sports, reflecting a diverse sample in terms of academic class.

Table 6. *Qualitative Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	NCAA Division	Sport	Gender	Academic Class
Ava	Division I	Water Polo	Female	Redshirt Junior
Bailey	Division I	Rowing	Female	Sophomore
Brad	Division I	Track & Field	Male	Junior
Cathy	Division II	Swimming & Diving	Female	Senior
Denis	Division II	Track & Field	Female	Junior
Emily	Division II	Swimming & Diving	Female	Senior
Fred	Division II	Track & Field	Male	Freshman
Gwen	Division II	Soccer	Female	Freshman
Harry	Division III	Baseball	Male	Sophomore
Helen	Division III	Volleyball	Female	Freshman
Jen	Division III	Golf	Female	Sophomore
Kelsey	Division III	Track & Field	Female	Freshman
Lilly	Division III	Track & Field	Male	Senior

The qualitative portion of this study employed a three-phase coding process: open coding, axial coding, and a priori coding. Open coding involves breaking down the data into smaller segments and assigning descriptive codes to categorize it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this phase, 66 codes were initially identified from the dataset. Next, axial coding was applied to identify relationships between the categories developed during the open coding phase (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), refining these codes into nine meaningful categories. Finally, using a priori coding to analyze patterns based on the theoretical framework of this study (Stemler, 2001), three distinct themes emerged.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative results in a mixed-methods study provided description of participants' experiences, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the research questions and the quantitative data collected, with added flexibility (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Through the three-phase coding process, three meaningful themes emerged: (1) Self-Determination Theory: Emphasis on Components of Motivation, (2) Career Planning and Goals for Transitioning Out of Sport, and (3) The Impact of COVID-19.

Self Determination Theory: Emphasis on the Components of Motivation

Despite fundamental differences among the three NCAA divisions in terms of financial support, academic resources, competition level, and mission, as well as factors such as travel demands, all CAs

across these divisions must cultivate sufficient motivation to meet the demands of both their academic and athletic roles. This theme, rooted in the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), aims to provide further insights into the quantitative study, exploring the varying levels and types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among CAs.

Academics

Collegiate athletes (CAs) may academically underperform due to various influences, including demographic background and motivational factors. However, the results of this study showed that the majority of the participants, including those from all three NCAA Divisions, expressed intrinsic motivation towards academics. One of the ways participants demonstrated their intrinsic academic motivation was through the selection of their academic majors. Ava, a Division I water polo player, explained her intrinsic motivation towards academics by discussing her choice of institution and major. Ava said, "You're able to pursue the major that you want, and so I chose this university primarily because the coaches said, you can be in mechanical engineering."

Another Division I rower, Bailey, plans to transfer to another institution because her current university does not offer the major she wants to study. She was intrinsically motivated in her academics, stating,

I want to transfer because they don't have the degree I want here. They don't have any degree, I'm not because of the school itself really

it's just that they just don't have the degree, I want I've asked about it, what other degrees I could do, but they just don't lead me down the career path I want. So, my choices were student-athlete, not athlete-student. The student comes first before the athlete.

Cathy, a Division II swimming and diving athlete, also expressed a strong inherent interest in her academic major and connecting her major to benefits for her eventual career path. She said,

I love it a lot, it's great because I love my classes, and so I don't feel like it's a chore. I love what I study, I love it a lot and I know that whatever I do with it I'm going to be happy and proud. I really like aerospace inside, that was a good balance to do like mechanical engineering and then that kind of can apply to mechanical specific or aerospace specific or manufacturing. You know it's a little bit broader and so I felt like that kind of gave me a good baseline knowledge for being able to kind of get a variety of jobs, after graduation, and like be able to work in like an aerospace or similar field as well.

Despite division, nearly all participants expressed a stronger intrinsic motivation toward academics. Many of these athletes selected majors that are considered particularly rigorous and demanding and again, did this for the passion and love of the subject matter indicating intrinsic motivation.

Another Division III track and field participant, Lilly, expressed her passion

for another academic major, history degree, which she is very interested in. She said,

History it's always been my favorite subject in school, so I just wanted to continue doing that. Obviously, English is not a traditional route for Pre-Med, but I always liked English. I like bio more than I like chem, but that's kind of expected, and I like my English course a lot obviously as well.

One of the most common extrinsic motivations for CAs' academics is future career paths and opportunities. Division III volleyball participant, Helen, talked about her extrinsic motivation towards academics based on her future career path. She said,

Unfortunately, I can't make a future out of volleyball, but I can make a future of whatever my academic career leads me so that's where the priority kind of comes in, just because, like you know I'm not going to go play professional volleyball, but I can get a career with my academics.

Kelsey, also highlighted her academic extrinsic motivation based on a job perspective. She said, "Because they're what is going to carry me through my life and give me a job. And athletic part is it's like a hobby, though."

Lastly, Kelsey, a Division II track and field CA, explained that her motivation academically was driven by external sources/players like her teachers indicating her talent for math. She said,

I guess I like additional work in math because my teacher said that

I had a talent. I just liked math ever since you know my teachers saw that there's something that I could, there's something that could be developed. I guess that passion towards math never left me, and I just want to keep going, and I want to stay in school and individually, I want to teach it to other college kids.

Athletics

NCAA Division I institutions allocate the largest budgets to their athletic programs and compete at the most competitive level of collegiate sports. Accordingly, Division I CAs possess the greatest potential to pursue professional opportunities or extend their athletic careers beyond graduation. As a result, two Division I participants in this study exhibited strong extrinsic motivation, primarily oriented toward the aspiration of becoming professional athletes. One of the Division I track and field participants, Brad said,

Yeah, I mean when I follow some professional athletes and track, the dream is always to go the Olympics and stuff like that. That's a big motivation, you know it'd be really cool if I could just run professionally and that would make career that'd be awesome that sounds a lot better than sitting in an office all day.

On the other hand, Ava expressed her athletic motivation was intrinsically motivated based on a desire to continuously improve at her sport and be healthy. She said,

I love this sport so much, and I wanted to be like the best player on my team or the best that I could be at it and so that was enough for me, but also it's just different for everyone. I think I'm working out makes me feel like healthier and better and so it's just something that I wanted to continue doing even after high school ended in college and I'll probably keep playing water polo after college some way because I do love water polo and if I could continue I would. The best I can be every day and almost everything I can do.

Even though they play a lower level than Division I CAs, Division II and III participants were very passionate and showed their love towards their respective sports. Most Division II participants were intrinsically motivated regarding playing their sport. Denis a track and field athlete said, I didn't start pole vaulting until my senior year of high school. And that's what I had gotten recruited for, but once I started pole vaulting, I really just fell head over heels with it. So, we could throw away all the running parts of track and field, because that's gross but, when it comes to pole vaulting, I've become really passionate about it.

Another Division II participant, Gwen, also showed her intrinsic motivation towards soccer and how much she loves the sport itself. She said,

I just absolutely loved it like I just really, really love soccer and I like physical activity and sports in gen-

eral I think they're so cool, so I was like just like just to do it is just amazing for me so it's like I guess that was my motivation, just like the love of the game, I guess.

One of the psychological needs of SDT is relatedness. Participants often described their inherent interest in sport, and other participants also emphasized the importance of relatedness, people, and team during their college career. Emily, a Division II swimming and diving athlete distinctly expressed the importance of relatedness being on the team and playing sport. Even though her college career had ended, she still practiced and swam with her team. She said, "I still love it, I mean, even though I'm a senior and technically swimming's over I still go and practice, just because I enjoy the activity and I enjoy doing it with the people." Another Division II participant, Cathy, also mentioned her experience and thoughts on her college career regarding relatedness and connection. Cathy said,

The times I'm swimming and stuff and more about the people that I'm getting to spend time with and the fact like remembering like how much I like the water and just like how just relax and like I feel when I get in the water. Yeah, it's kind of like a second home to me, type of thing which sounds so cheesy, and I totally know it. But I mean I don't really know how else to describe it like it just feels so natural. Yeah, when I get in the water. And so I think that yeah it's more just like about like. Like yes, you, you get to work out and you like you have

like coaches, who are supporting you and stuff but you also it gets fun and you get to see people that you. like that, like the same things as you and that you just really you really enjoy time with, and then you get to kind of just like work hard together, I think that that's something that's really cool about swimming.

Many CAs obtain benefits from their athletic activities, and Division I programs provide more benefits and resources than the other two divisions. The benefits include scholarships, housing, meals, etc. Since tuition is very expensive for most students in the United States, the benefit of a scholarship can be a huge motivational factor to play sports in college for CAs. Being motivated due to some outside source is considered an extrinsic motivation. Even though Division I CAs compete at the highest level of athletics, since Division I programs provide more monetary benefits, Division I participants showed more extrinsic motivation to be a CA during the interviews. Division I CA, Brad, said,

Always chasing scholarship money to make it more affordable to go to college. I mean, I would have stayed a student here so it's really expensive for me to be going to school like lucky my parents can help me with that, but some people don't have that luxury, so I mean getting a scholarship is also a big reason why I'm on the team.

Another participant, Bailey, also talked about her motivation regarding her financial benefits. She said, "Um so then

it's motivated by scholarship because I couldn't go to where I couldn't go to this college without scholarship academic and athletic." Interestingly, participants of Division II and Division III institutions did not express and label extrinsic motivation regarding athletics.

Even though Division III CAs spend an immense amount of effort in their sport during their collegiate careers, many participants understood that they have a very limited possibility of being a professional athlete or continuing their career after college. Division III participants expressed their passion and intrinsic motivation towards athletics; however, most of the Division III participants highlighted the value of academics for their lives. For instance, a Division III baseball player, Harry said,

I love baseball, but I just think that there's a lot more to life than baseball and I know. Especially since I've gotten to college, like I realized that everybody's time playing sports comes to an end, whether it's in college or after high school. Or after like a 20-year professional career, like everybody's time comes to an end, eventually, then you have to have something else besides your sport to kind of put yourself worth and identity.

Another Division III participant, Jen, also echoed Harry's perspective. Jen recognized that her career would end after her college career, and she needed to play her sport as a hobby even though she really loves the sport. She said,

I wanted to continue the competitive aspect and just to continue

getting better and kind of take my game to the next level, and I could only do that if I could continue to play in college so. It's been a huge part of my life like playing competitive golf, but I know that, like I'll still probably do it as like a hobby. Like I won't completely like shut it off.

Career Planning and Goals for Transitioning Out of Sport

Athletes' transition out of sport has become a very critical issue in the fields of sport management and sport psychology. Since CAs' transition out of college has a huge impact on their future, they are required to make prudent decisions during their college careers to set themselves up for future life and career success. If CAs have high academic performance and use support services during their collegiate careers, there is a higher possibility of a successful transition process based on proper career goals and planning for after their collegiate athletic careers.

From this study, Division III participants showed more detailed transition and career plans for after their collegiate careers. Many Division III participants seem to know what they really wanted to do and the path of chasing their lives after college. Lilly was interested in becoming a doctor and talked about why she wants to be a doctor. She said, "I'm interested in orthopedic surgery. I really love the kidneys for some reason. When I studied anatomy, that was like my favorite part, and I think it's so cool how it all works." She also emphasized the important role of academics to chase her career dreams.

She said,

It's my way of getting to where I want to be because if I don't focus on my academics, I'm not going to be going to medical school, I'm not going to be a doctor, I'm not going to do the things I wanted to do so, academics are important to me.

Division III CA, Helen, was also interested in entering medical school after her career. She specifically talked about why she chose a Division III school for her volleyball career. She said,

Of the reason why I chose a Division III school because, especially if I want to go pre-med, I know it takes a lot of time and energy, and I wanted to make sure that was my number one priority so. Like as much as much as I love volleyball and I do give 100% effort into it, I know that unfortunately I can't make a future out of volleyball, but I can make a future of whatever my academic career leads me so that's where the priority kind of comes in, just because, like you know I'm not going to go play professional volleyball.

On the other hand, Division I participants mostly showed uncertainty and ambiguity for their future after college. For instance, one of the Division I participants, Brad said, "So, I'm not quite sure what I want to do I'm hoping that the internships I get this summer will kind of helped me discover like a more specific path." Also, another Division I participant, Bailey expressed higher motivation to transfer to

lengthen her rowing career and get an athletic-related job after college. She said, "I've been offered a coaching position this summer and for the rest of the summers and I want to, I haven't told my coaches, but I want to transfer to another school to do rowing because they have kinesiology."

Like Division I participants, some Division II participants also showed less preparation plans for their transition and career after college. Emily mentioned, "I don't know, I guess to hopefully find a career that I feel matters, like I really with my public health degree. I really just want to help people and make a difference in their life." Even though some Division II participants showed uncertainty, some were motivated in athletics and planned to keep pursuing their athletic careers after college. Gwen, said that she wants to keep competing as much as she can and would like to be a coach after her college career. She said,

So I'm going to kind of continuing the little kind of like athletic round, I intend on doing if I can get into GA position and then from there, hopefully, an assistant position to finally a head coach position if I'm good enough.

Impact of COVID-19

The entire sports industry has been negatively affected by COVID-19 in an unprecedented manner. Collegiate athletes (CAs) were also greatly impacted by the pandemic. In response to this unforeseeable circumstance, the NCAA sanctioned a one-year extension of eligibility

for CAs. The reality is during COVID-19, CAs faced numerous challenges, including self-training and maintaining physical conditions for athletics during this unique period. Division I CA, Brad, explained the difficulty of being away from training facilities and his teammates,

Me before the pandemic, it was just awesome like you can have free use of all the facilities, which is really nice, we have a really nice nutrition center here, so you can go get like food, I always get breakfast like we watch every morning it's free breakfast which is nice. Yeah, you could just kind of go in and work out whenever you want it's really easy to do that, we could do like team activities outside of practice which is awesome you know us like hang out and stuff. But now, with the pandemic I can't really do that, we like don't really have a lot of like team like hangouts or like team dinners or anything. This year it's just kind of you wear a mask and you're not really allowed to interact with anyone and there's really no spectators and obviously the budget's less this year so we're not really traveling anywhere super fun we're running these really little meets, which is less fun.

Gwen who is a Division II CA experienced and expressed other challenges while in the pandemic related to COVID-19 testing. She said,

As athletes, we had to test every single week and then, if there was a game, we have to test like two to

three times a week like right before the match right after the match and everything to make sure it was all safe.

Another Division II CA, Fred, discussed motivational changes between pre-pandemic and during-pandemic related to athletics. He said,

I ran every day, well five days a week from March until July. And then the day that I found out that we didn't have a cross-country season I just stopped for like two, three weeks. I just lost all motivation there and sort of the team everyone's like when I started talking to people that they said, like they were running and then the season got canceled and I was just like all right what's the point of running at this point.

Almost all students, including CAs, were forced into online courses when the pandemic began. CAs could only utilize minimal academic support from the athletic department during the pandemic because everything had transitioned to remote services, such as Zoom and email. Since CAs were accustomed to receiving various privileges to support their academic tasks from their institutions, most participants expressed that they struggled with their academic loads during the pandemic, regardless of NCAA division. They specifically mentioned extended timelines for communication, which made it difficult to manage time and communicate effectively. Additionally, the participants explicitly expressed issues with online coursework. Division I CA, Brad, said:

Now we're in the first full year of online classes and I'm getting into my upper division stuff and my classes are getting pretty hard so it's just kind of, it's harder for me to learn and I don't get to know the professors as well, which is tough, because now I'm looking for jobs in the job market really competitive, because everything is remote. So that makes it really, really, tough because I'd have to schedule a meeting with them over zoom and it's not really the same. And then, some of my classes if it's something I'm struggling with it's really tough to get help because it's over zoom again, which is, I don't know it's like it's tough for me to get hands on work with them, you know, like if they were to teach me over zoom you'd be the exact same as I'm just teaching an online class because it's like it's not gonna be any different it's not going to help me in any way in which has made it tough. So much online classes are just go and wait and then talk about it in this kind of feels like I'm wasting a lot of time.

Another Division I participant, Bailey, also talked about her negative experience during the pandemic with members of her team getting sick. She said, "I think half of our team gets covid we get shut down for the spring. Very crazy everything's turned upside down, basically, it's been about a year now."

Like the Division I participants, nearly all of the Division II participants expressed

challenges and difficulties in taking classes online rather than taking in-person classes. One of the Division II participants, Cathy said,

I think that, because of COVID unfortunately it's become really difficult just because it is one of the harder degrees out there yeah um but normal, whenever I'm in person I love it. Yeah, COVID is hard I don't want to do any of my schoolwork. I can't sit there and stare at a computer screen for 14-16 hours a day.

Another Division II participant, Gwen, also talked about her difficult experiences during the pandemic. Also, she clearly indicated how COVID-19 negatively affected her academics. She said,

As a bio kid I have to write lab reports and I have to send emails all day long and I'm in three-hour long classes like it's hard to do it online and like, I don't like it at all. No, absolutely not, I will tell you right now I went from being a 4.0 student to like a 1.6.

As the other divisions' participants experienced, Division III participants also expressed their challenging experiences during the pandemic, and they mainly talked about decreased motivations. Helen said,

I find it's a little harder because a lot of my classes are on zoom. I think it's just a harder learning style for me but my grades are important to me, so I do make a priority of things sure I keep that GPA up even if it's a little more difficult. My

motivation probably has decreased a little bit, but I think it's just been a struggle overall because the learning style is so different.

Another Division III participant, Jen, also briefly talked about her pandemic-related academic difficulties regarding a lack of motivation. She said, "I find it harder to focus when I'm like completely online just because there's like I'm not in the classroom setting."

The pandemic was a sudden, uncommon situation for all the CAs, and primarily it negatively affected CAs both academically and athletically. As most participants described, COVID-19 caused communication and technical issues. Most importantly, COVID-19 negatively influenced CAs' motivation which may cause other problems such as their process of transitioning out of sport and into a new career path, especially given the remote/hybrid work world they would be entering.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine CAs' motivations regarding their dual role based on their NCAA division and to explore their transition plans. Consistent with the literature (Boyd, 2010), the findings indicated that Division III CAs are more balanced between their dual roles and spend more time considering and planning their education/major choices than those in other divisions. The quantitative results showed that Division III CAs had significantly higher intrinsic academic motivation factors compared to the other two divisions. The qualitative study did not directly support this claim as

all three divisional athletes in the qualitative study demonstrated intrinsic academic motivation. This could be perhaps because of the participants that self-selected to complete the interviews were highly intrinsically motivated individuals or perhaps it was due to their sport selection. Previous research has found that athletes competing in traditional revenue generating sports (i.e., football and men and women's basketball) have lower academic motivation than their Olympic sport peers (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Umbach et al., 2006). However, the qualitative findings did allude to the potential division difference in terms of transition planning, as many Division III participants discussed a realistic emphasis on their academic goals and future career paths in comparison to the Division I and II participants in the qualitative study.

In contrast, Division I and II participants exhibited uncertainty or a desire to continue pursuing their sports post-college. During the qualitative study, most participants from all three divisions demonstrated an inherent interest in academics, indicating intrinsic motivation. However, since Division III participants have fewer opportunities to continue their athletic careers after college, this may explain why they showed higher intrinsic academic motivation in the quantitative study. Division III participants articulated explicit academic goals and plans both during and after college more clearly than participants from the other divisions in the qualitative study.

The quantitative study did not reveal significant differences among divisions in

terms of extrinsic academic motivation. However, in the qualitative study, Division III CAs displayed extrinsic academic motivation (e.g., specifically identifying future career placements), whereas CAs from the other two divisions did not explicitly indicate their extrinsic motivation regarding academics. Being a Division III CA may contribute more significantly to career preparation after college compared to the other divisions. Therefore, many Division III participants emphasized the importance of the transition process and firmly indicated that their sport would not sustain their lives after college, recognizing that academics would provide them with career opportunities.

Previous research has indicated that CAs often have lower academic motivation due to various factors, including a higher prioritization of their athletic roles and related activities (Adler & Adler, 1985). Studies by Boyd (2010) and Smith and Hardin (2020) found that Division I CAs exhibited a higher athletic identity than Division III CAs. However, less than 2% of CAs have opportunities to become professional athletes after their college careers (NCAA, 2018). Consequently, most participants in the qualitative portion of the study, from all three divisions, perceived minimal chances of becoming professional athletes. Division III participants, in particular, demonstrated higher intrinsic motivation towards academics and expressed clearer transition plans post-college. They also seemed to recognize their post-collegiate career aspirations sooner than their counterparts.

The results showed no significant differences in intrinsic athletic motivation

based on NCAA divisions. Division I CAs generally have more opportunities to become professional athletes and play in better environments than the other two divisions. Despite this, participants from all three divisions exhibited intrinsic motivation in their sports. Division I programs demand more athletic-related activities, causing Division I CAs to rely more on athletics than Division II and III participants. The qualitative results supported this quantitative finding. Most Division III participants indicated that they played sports because they genuinely loved them, even without external benefits. Division I and II participants also had an inherent interest in their sports and were intrinsically motivated.

CAs' athletic motivation can be influenced by their athletic identity. Various studies have explored divisional differences in CAs' athletic identity. For instance, Smith and Hardin (2020) conducted a qualitative study and found that both Division I and III CAs showed high athletic identity. In contrast, Griffith and Johnson (2002) found that Division III track and field CAs exhibited higher levels of athletic identity than their Division I counterparts. Athletic identity may vary based on factors such as the type of sport, academic class, academic major, and experience. Future studies are encouraged to explore the relationship between CAs' self-determination motivational perspectives and athletic identity.

Division I participants received more benefits than the other two divisions, such as scholarships and meals. Consequently, Division I participants showed significantly higher motivation in one of

the extrinsic motivation factors, Sport Extrinsic Motivation Integrated Regulation (SEInte). SEInte is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, where behavior is valued and aligns with other goals and needs (Pelletier et al., 2013). Therefore, CAs may consider their athletic benefits as extrinsic motivation related to achieving future goals. This may be influenced by Division I CAs generally receiving more benefits than Division II and III CAs.

Practical Implications

The results of this study are expected to impact various areas within sport management and psychology, particularly in collegiate athletics. This study featured a notably large number of participants currently competing in NCAA institutions across all three divisions, addressing a noted challenge in capturing collegiate athlete (CA) participants. Each NCAA division offers distinct types and levels of support and environments related to CAs' academic and athletic roles and motivations. This study examined CAs' motivations across NCAA divisions and identified significant differences in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) dimensions. These findings provide crucial insights for creating environments that better support CAs' well-being during and after their collegiate careers. Specifically, Division I and II athletic departments, administrators, and collegiate coaches need to ensure that major choice and transition out of sport planning happens earlier and often. Although resources can be either abundant or scarce depending on the NCAA divisional level,

one suggestion for athletic departments is to ensure that academic (i.e., tutoring, mentoring, academic advising) and career planning (i.e., internship and career fairs, job application material checks, and mock interviews or networking events) are available to CAs. If campuses cannot provide this funding and support internally within athletics, creating cross-collaborations with other branches of the larger institutional system are paramount. Lastly, as time demands was deeply discussed in the introduction of this paper and of note by the CAs, coaches and administrators should purposely and intentionally create space in their CAs schedules for these events.

Additionally, the transition of athletes out of sport is a contentious and important issue in the field of sport management. This study offers further insight into CAs preparation for transitional planning based on their NCAA divisions. Given varying time commitments for athletics and levels of academic support, CAs may approach motivation and transition planning differently post-college. Educators, administrators, and researchers can use these findings to establish appropriate and effective support systems tailored to the needs of CAs based on their specific circumstances.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the participants did not represent all NCAA CAs. Various factors such as NCAA division, institutional financial status, participants' demographic backgrounds, and others may influence CAs'

motivations and transition processes. While this study randomly distributed surveys to NCAA coaches, the participants cannot fully represent the diversity of all NCAA CAs. Second, there was a disparity in the number of responses from each NCAA division, with Division II participants accounting for 45.5% of the total respondents. The model fit after conducting Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was suboptimal. Future studies are recommended to develop more robust scales for measuring CAs' motivations, ensuring questions explore differences based on NCAA division and other pertinent variables.

Additionally, COVID-19 posed a impactful limitation to this study. Data collection occurred during the pandemic, impacting respondents' mental and physical well-being due to the unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances. Additionally, as the data was collected when CAs were away from their sport, this could have led to them contemplating life without sports sooner than expected. Future researchers could employ well-established motivational theories and transition models to explore additional factors influencing CAs' motivations and transitions. Validating research tools to assess athletes' motivations and post-sport career transitions is crucial for future studies. Furthermore, there is a paucity of research involving Division II and III institutions and CAs compared to Division I. More comprehensive studies across all NCAA divisions are essential for fostering supportive environments for CAs.

Lastly, this study was conducted during

the COVID-19 pandemic, a unique and unforeseen circumstance that shaped the experiences of CAs. The pandemic influenced not only their athletic participation but also their academic engagement, social connections, and overall well-being. Given these disruptions, future research should continue to examine the long-term effects of the pandemic on CAs to better understand how these challenges may shape their post-collegiate lives and careers.

Conclusion

This study examined CAs' motivations across NCAA divisions and their transition plans. The findings revealed divisional differences, with Division III CAs demonstrating stronger intrinsic academic motivation and clearer transition planning compared to Division I and II athletes, who often prioritized athletics and expressed greater uncertainty about post-collegiate careers. At the same time, CAs across all divisions reported high intrinsic athletic motivation, underscoring the central role of sport in their lives. The study also highlighted the influence of athletic identity and extrinsic benefits, particularly in shaping Division I athletes' motivations. Conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research captured how an extraordinary context affected CAs' academic engagement, athletic participation, and overall well-being. While acknowledging limitations related to sample representation and pandemic conditions, the findings provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and researchers seeking to enhance support

systems that promote CAs' holistic development and successful transition beyond sport.

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