



“You Never Saw the Light at the End of the Tunnel”: Examining the Developmental Impacts of the Redshirt Freshman Year

Hannah R. Kloetzer and Molly Harry

University of Florida

The redshirt freshman year is often used by athletics programs to build incoming athletes’ physical skills without compromising a year of eligibility. While one line of thought suggests this year allows athletes to adjust to campus life and pursue classroom interests, another describes the redshirt freshman year as a challenge, as one goes from being a key player in high school to benched their first year of college. Despite this being a crucial time for athletes’ development, little is understood about the redshirt experience and its social and psychological effects on athletes. This study investigated athletes’ identity development through a theoretical coupling of Schlossberg’s (1981) Transition Theory and Erikson’s (1950) Stages of Psychosocial Development. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 Division II football athletes who redshirted their freshman year. Findings noted four consistent themes: (1) athletes’ perceptions of their uniqueness and distinction in high school, (2) determination through the redshirt freshman year, (3) subsequent team isolation, and (4) little desire for team intimacy. Implications of this study include the importance of transparency during the redshirt freshman year and intentionally integrating athletes into team communities.

Keywords: athlete development, redshirt freshman year, transition

The redshirt year is used by college coaches and athletes—often first years—to enhance an athlete’s sport skills and academic acclimation while not compromising a year of athletic eligibility (Walker, 2024). Per National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) policies, college athletes generally have five years to complete four years of sport eligibility (Gibson & Tally, 2019; NCAA Division II Manual, 2023-2024). However, issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and injuries extend many athletes’ eligibility to include additional years of participation opportunities (NCAA Division II Manual, 2023-2024). Barring these exceptions, athletes can use one redshirt year.



Redshirting is only available to athletes in NCAA Divisions I and II. Institutions in Divisions I and II offer athletic scholarships and the goal of redshirting is to preserve athletic eligibility of athletes. To ensure transparency, coaches often initiate the redshirt discussion with athletes during recruitment or as the athlete transitions into their first year of college (Gibson & Tally, 2019; Walker, 2024). Some key advantages of the redshirt freshman year for athletes include the ability to adjust to a new campus and life without hometown family and friends, pursue emerging classroom interests, and obtain an advanced degree during their final year of eligibility. However, current literature also describes the redshirt freshman year as a challenge, as an athlete often transitions from being a high school star to riding the bench for an entire season (Matteo, 2023; Walker, 2024). Indeed, such difficulties have social and psychological ramifications for redshirt freshmen athletes (Medley, 2018). Transitions from star to redshirt might be particularly difficult for athletes in the high-profile sports of men's basketball and football given their tendency to overdevelop athletic roles and identities (Brewer et al., 1993; Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Still, athletes in these high-profile sports are the most likely to utilize the redshirt freshman year as they transition from high school to college competition (Ingram & Huffman, 2017; Walker, 2024).

The Redshirt Freshman Experience

The current research on redshirt college athletes is predominantly limited to dissertations, indicating a gap in refereed scholarship on this unique yet important area of study. Still, the limited scholarship in this area has produced mixed findings. Medley (2018) interviewed 12 Division II basketball redshirt freshmen on their experiences with the redshirt freshman year in relation to their holistic development. Findings suggested this year was a difficult transition for this sample of athletes, with symptoms of identity confusion and feelings of being overlooked and frustrated with the lack of playing time. However, participants noted under support systems from the coach and athletic department, they ultimately grew from their redshirt year (Medley, 2018).

Using the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), created by Brewer et al. (1993), Oldham (2022) compared redshirts' athletic identity to non-redshirt's athletic identity. Using survey responses from Division I athletes ($N = 398$), and controlling for gender, race, ethnicity, and age, results indicated no differences in one's athletic identity and self-esteem between redshirt athletes and non-redshirt athletes. It is important to note Oldham (2022) utilized medical redshirts and freshmen redshirts to compose the sample, which may have an influence on study results, due to potential varied experiences between injured and healthy players.

The findings above demonstrate a mixture of advantages and disadvantages of the transitional process of the redshirt freshman year. Additionally, most of this research centers the experiences of athletes in the (formerly) Power Five Conferences—the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, and Southeastern Conference (SEC) (Ingram & Huffman, 2017). Power Five institutions comprise less than 7% of the entire NCAA. With this in mind, NCAA demographics show there were 8,241 Power Five football athletes in 2022, while there were 20,163

non-Power Five and Division II football athletes that same year (NCAA, 2022). So, failing to consider the experiences of athletes outside of the Power Five—and even outside Division I—leaves much to be explored and understood about these athletes' opportunities, particularly considering their experiences with the redshirt freshman year.

While the NCAA, coaches, and other sport stakeholders espouse physical and academic benefits of the redshirt freshman year (Walker, 2024), there is limited research bolstering these claims. Similarly, there is limited scholarly exploration of athletes' redshirt experiences, especially with their identity changes as they transition from high school star to redshirt freshman and out of their redshirt freshman year to full participation. Thus, additional research is necessary to provide a more complete picture of the redshirt freshman experience, especially concerning identity development (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Matteo, 2023).

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity describes the level at which an individual identifies with their athletic role (Brewer et al., 1993; Oldham, 2022). This athletic identity is influenced not only by an athlete's level of competition (Lamont-Mills & Christensen, 2006), but also by the time they spend participating in sport (Côté et al., 2007) and their interest in sport (Lamont-Mills & Christensen, 2006). While the focus of athletic identity literature often centers Division I athletes (level of competition; Beamon, 2012; Steele et al., 2020), athletic identity development and over-identification as an athlete can and does influence athletes across the NCAA (Côté et al., 2007; Foster & Huml, 2017; Harry & Weight, 2021). Higher levels of athletic identity may lead to identity foreclosure, which, in the sport context, involves one's "commitment to the athlete role in the absence of exploration of occupational or ideological alternatives" (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017, p. 118). An athlete with a foreclosed identity will prioritize their athletic identity over identities in their academic and social spheres.

Brewer and Petitpas (2017) noted identity foreclosure is strengthened from outside influences, including those described as key parts of Schlossberg's (1981) transition environment. Such outside influences strengthening identity can come from individuals in the internal support systems—family members, coaches, teammates, and others on campus—who only or predominantly give positive feedback and praise for athletic success compared to academic success (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Similarly, the structure of college athletics, including institutional support or lack of support, available resources, and culture and values, may also play a role in signaling the importance of athletic identity over the development of other identities (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Steele et al., 2020).

Other important factors involved in athlete identity emerge concerning race and sport, with perhaps the strongest athletic identities emerging amongst Black men in the highly commercialized sports of football and men's basketball (Beamon, 2012; Harrison et al., 2011; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). For example, Beamon (2012) conducted 20 ethnographic interviews with former Division I Black football and men's basketball players by examining their experiences with identity foreclosure. Former athletes in the sample noted support systems and institutional culture per-

petuated notions that they were just athletes. Similarly, even with some participants being decades removed from sport, the majority still strongly identified with their athletic role (Beamon, 2012). While identity foreclosure may be especially problematic for Black men in football and men's basketball, research notes this phenomenon is a prevalent experience for most college athletes (Houle et al., 2010; Lally, 2007; Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Managing the potential for identity foreclosure becomes increasingly difficult for college athletes during times of transition, such as moving from high school to college or college to post-competition life (Harry & Weight, 2021; Stokowski et al., 2019). During transitions, athletes are faced with managing various, often conflicting, roles and must work to address identity conflict and diffusion (Erikson, 1950). During a transition, identity foreclosure and focusing on one role, like athletics, may seem easier in the moment (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). With this in mind, similar findings may emerge during athletes' transitional period of the redshirt freshman year.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this study is a theoretical coupling of Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory and Erikson's (1950) Stage Model for Psychosocial Development. Nancy Schlossberg established Transition Theory (1981), a framework for understanding the process individuals navigate when they experience life transitions. According to Schlossberg (1981), a transition is an event or nonevent prompting an individual to change their assumptions about themselves and/or the world around them and shift their behaviors. Importantly, transitions are a process, rather than a singular moment in time (e.g., one day you are a redshirt athlete, the next you are not; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1981). Considering the transition itself, Schlossberg (1981) offered five key aspects in the transition: the transition itself, perceptions of the transition, individual characteristics, transition environment, and adaptation. Taken together, these components determine an individual's success and/or struggles during transitions.

Perceptions of the transition encompass an individual's view on the process and could involve role gains/losses, transition sources, and stress from the process. Previous research notes one of the biggest factors for athletes in their perceptions of transition processes is their role change—gain or loss—and its connection to athletic identity (Harry & Weight, 2021; Lally, 2007; Stokowski et al., 2019; Weight et al., 2020).

Connected to perceptions of transitions are one's individual characteristics. Schlossberg (1981) posited there are eight individual characteristics that influence transitions: Sex, race, age, health, class, psychosocial competence, value orientations, and previous experiences with transitions. Additionally, she highlighted the significance of the transition environment. This includes the physical setting, internal support systems, and institutional supports. When it comes to college athletics, internal supports include relationships with significant others, coaches, teammates,

family, and friends outside of sports. Institutional supports center around programming and resources provided by the athletic department and personnel (e.g., Harry & Weight, 2021).

The final component of Transition Theory is the adaptation to the transition, or how one moves through a life change to reconfigure their thoughts and actions. The transition is no longer integrated in a way that is stressful or distracting (Schlossberg, 1981). Adaptation is determined by the balance of one's resources and differences pre/post-transition between the aforementioned components: perceptions, individual characteristics, and the environment.

Schlossberg's (1981) framework is perhaps the most commonly used theory to examine the experiences of college athletes transitioning out of sport (Harry & Weight, 2021; Kloetzer & Taylor, 2023). And while this work is seminal in the athlete development field, more attention should be given to other transitional experiences within collegiate sport, such as the transition into college athletics. In addition, Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory is rarely combined with other developmental lenses to explore athlete experiences (Patton et al., 2016). So, in it with Erikson's (1950) model for Psychosocial Development, we offer an extension to the field's understanding of athlete development and transitions, particularly when it comes to redshirt football athletes.

Erik Erikson was the first clinical psychologist to define the identity development journey from adolescence through adulthood, emphasizing social interactions, relationships, and context in this process (Patton et al., 2016). Each developmental stage is defined by a conflict or crisis—a point in which an individual must grow or change—to transition into the next stage. Similarly, a life transition also prompts the conflict and/or crisis that Erikson (1950) described in his Psychosocial Development model. If no psychosocial growth takes place, the individual will stay at that stage socially due to a lack of certain skills needed in self-development (Erikson, 1950).

Stages one through four include childhood, entrance into adolescence, and emerging adulthood. Stage Five is the crux of one's identity development (Patton et al., 2016). Finally, stages six through eight comprise adulthood. Given the ages of the general college athlete population and our sample we focused on Stages Five (Identity versus Identity Diffusion) and Six (Intimacy versus Isolation). Table 1 briefly summarizes the first four stages before athletes reach college and incorporates a sport-related example in each.

Within the sport context, athletes typically finish high school having mastered different skills, like athleticism, and have a sense of competency in their sport (Erikson, 1950; Patton et al., 2016). With these skills in hand, many athletes will arrive at college during Stage Five: Identity versus Identity Diffusion (ages 12-18; Erikson, 1950). Stage Five marks an important era in the development of the self with Patton and colleagues (2016) claiming "it signals the transition between childhood and adulthood and a push to define oneself" (p. 289). At this point, individuals are dealing with their identity and their ego.

Table 1*Stages 1-4 of Psychosocial Development Adapted from Erikson (1950)*

Stage	Explanation	Sport Example
1. Trust vs. Mistrust (Birth-18 months)	Trust in an adult for dependency	An individual learning how to float in a pool
2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (18 months-3 years)	Developing independence and decision-making skills	An individual choosing what sports they want to play
3. Initiative vs. Guilt (3-5 years)	Asserting power and control over environment	Initiating leadership in a team setting
4. Industry vs. Inferiority (6-11 years)	Beginning to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities	Earning a first-place finish in a track race and bringing the medal to school the next day

Identity “provides a sense of continuity within the self and in interaction with others” (Rageliene, 2016, p. 97), as well as distinction between the self and others (uniqueness). Furthermore, individuals are navigating how they see themselves and how others perceive them, which further aligns with Schlossberg’s (1981) discussion of individual characteristics in the transition. Ego is one’s perception of their identity or sense of self. As an individual moves through and masters each of Erikson’s stages and resolves conflicts within those stages, this ego strengthens (Patton et al., 2016). However, there is a struggle to develop and define a core sense of self, Erikson (1950) described this state as identity diffusion. Diffusion is particularly problematic when one does not feel they have created a clear sense of self or purpose (Patton et al., 2016). Additionally, diffusion may cause an individual to over-identify with one role over others due to comfort within one role and fear of other roles. This is not unlike an athlete foreclosing identities outside of sport and focusing solely on cultivating their athlete identity (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Finally, diffusion and over-identification with certain roles often leads to struggles in transitions that involve significant role changes, such as a high school athlete transitioning to college competitions and an athlete moving from redshirt to non-redshirt (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Matteo, 2023).

So, in Stage Five, youth (e.g., entering college athletes) seek out “real accomplishments” or achievements that have “real meaning in their culture” (Erikson, 1950, p. 90). For high school athletes transitioning to college, this can include winning a state championship or earning a college scholarship. Through these “real accomplishments,” they begin to develop their identity, and possibly ego. For athletes, as their athletic capabilities grow, they gain recognition from others (e.g., family, peers, recruiters, etc.) for their skills and accomplishments. This attention not only develops an athlete’s ego but may also establish an athlete’s identity as a star. Identity

development as a star high school athlete may pose future challenges, specifically if an athlete redshirts their freshman year of college (Medley, 2018). Indeed, an athlete used to starring in game winning plays who transitions to sitting out for an entire college season may suffer from identity and ego struggles (Medley, 2018; Walker, 2024). This hurdle can result in identity diffusion, and possibly role engulfment (Erikson, 1950).

Stage Six, Intimacy versus Isolation (ages 18-40), provides enhanced understanding for examining college athletes' developmental experiences. Erikson (1950) posited after the identity development of Stage Five, one needs to develop intimate relationships with others to avoid distantiation, or isolation. So, for individuals to successfully maneuver Stage Six and establish healthy relationships which helps them cultivate intimacy, they must have a strong sense of their identity/identities (Patton et al., 2016). In the case of college athletes, these identities include those related to their athlete, student, and social roles. Similarly, relationships in this stage often include those from home, like family and friends, and new teammates and other athletes, coaches, non-athletes, and faculty. During their early years and throughout college, athletes are away from family (often for the first time), navigating new social circles (e.g., classmates and teammates), and learning their interests and skills (inside and outside of sports). Therefore, developing meaningful relationships within their athletic circles and ideally across campus (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016), is essential for athletes to transition through this stage.

Importantly, Stage Six marks not only the beginning of adulthood, but also the period in which one often solidifies their permanent identity or "commitment for life" (Erikson, 1950, p. 111). This identity commitment is often connected to one's environment, including the physical space and internal and institutional supports (Schlossberg, 1981). For college athletes, the environment of campus and sport play particularly vital roles influencing commitments and thus identity development. For athletes in Stage Six, an over commitment to one identity at this developmental point, often the athlete identity (Brewer et al., 1993), may mean struggles for the athlete in later psychosocial stages.

In the context of this study, an athlete's successful transition through the redshirt freshman year would include identity development and intimacy building across athletics, academic, and social domains. However, a transition often poses challenges for athletes, including redshirts, as they maneuver through conflict and/or crisis in order to move on—or transition—into the next stage of development. Despite many athletes using a redshirt freshman year (Matteo, 2023; Medley, 2018; Oldman, 2022), little is understood about how the redshirt experience—and the transitions within—supports or hinders athletes' identity development in Stage Five or establishes or limits athletes' intimacy in Stage Six. So, the influence of the redshirt freshman year, a transitional time with potential identity struggles and isolation, should be further explored through psychosocial and transitory lenses. Thus, the redshirt freshman year could result in permanent shifts in athletes' identity and long-term identity development processes (Erikson, 1950; Schlossberg, 1981).

Thus, through the lens of Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory and Erikson's (1950) Stages of Psychosocial Development, we examined athletes' identity development as they transitioned from high school to their redshirt freshman year and then transitioned from redshirt freshman year to full sport participation. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do football players' identities develop through the transition from high school to the redshirt freshman year?
2. How do football players' identities develop through the transition from the redshirt freshman year to full eligibility?

Method

Participants and Recruitment

A purposive sampling method was utilized to conduct semi-structured interviews with 11 participants from four Midwest Division II football programs. Purposive sampling relies on researcher judgment when selecting potential participants from a population (Miles et al., 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015). The four institutions were selected due to their Division II classification and localized proximity to each other. Project funding was part of a greater regional focused grant, and thus, dictated region and institution selection. Participants were required to be an active member of the football team and must have utilized their redshirt freshman year during the 2020 or 2021 football season. These criteria ensured participants had both completed their redshirt freshman year while also completing at least one season of eligibility. This would potentially allow time for athletes to have developed a deeper reflection of the redshirt experience and its role in their identity development, given they are through the transition of high school to the redshirt freshman year as well as the transition of redshirt freshman year to full eligibility. Following IRB approval, all potential participants eligible for this study were recruited by email. Two follow-up emails were sent out to gain enough participants to reach saturation ($n = 11$).

Participants redshirted either in the 2020 ($n = 2$) or 2021 ($n = 9$) football seasons with all participants still competing at the time of the interview. One participant, Ethan, transferred following his redshirt season to one of the four institutions represented in this study (See Table 2 for more information). It is important to note these participants were redshirting in and around the COVID-19 pandemic. While participants noted some change to their academic experience (e.g., online classes), but limited shifts in their football experience.

Table 2
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Race & Ethnicity	Sub-team	Redshirt Year
Aidan*	White, Non-Hispanic	Linebacker	2020
Ben*	White, Hispanic	Defensive back	2021
Caleb*	White, Non-Hispanic	Offensive Lineman	2020
Drew*	White, Hispanic	Linebacker	2021
Ethan*	White, Non-Hispanic	Offensive Lineman	2021
Frank*	White, Non-Hispanic	Linebacker	2021
George*	White, Non-Hispanic	Linebacker	2021
Harrison	White, Non-Hispanic	Quarterback	2021
Isaac	Black	Wide Receiver	2021
Jack	White, Non-Hispanic	Quarterback	2021
Kai	White, Non-Hispanic	Linebacker	2021

**allowed recording*

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview protocol was created to explore participants’ retrospective perceptions of the redshirt freshman year and their identity development throughout the process. Semi-structured interviews involve a process in which the interviewer has a set of pre-determined but open-ended questions designed to facilitate open dialogue across redshirt-related topics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2019). To bolster validity of the interview protocol, it was reviewed by a scholar specializing in both interview methods and college athlete development (Miles et al., 2019). Interview questions centered high school experiences, the transition from high school to the redshirt freshman year (e.g., During this year, did your view of yourself as an athlete change? Your value on a team? Your identity as an athlete?), and the transition from redshirt freshman to full football participant (e.g., If/when you did play for your team, how did this impact your identity as a football athlete? Did you experience changes in relationships with your teammates? And/or with your coaches?).

Interviews were conducted via Zoom to accommodate the locations of researchers and participants. Importantly, only one researcher was involved in the data collection to limit participants’ distraction and built rapport due to the potentially sensitive nature of topics like development and transitions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This researcher is a former athlete and made this known to participants to develop a sense of rapport (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews averaged 45 minutes in length with six participants consenting to being recorded/transcribed. In the other five interviews, the researcher took detailed notes on participants’ responses (Miles et al., 2019). At the conclusion of each interview, all notes were compiled with the transcription document, if present. These transcription documents were initially generated via the zoom app, then edited for accuracy by the researchers.

Data Analysis

Both researchers were involved in the data analysis. In reading through the transcripts and interview notes, researchers performed analytic memoing, fostering deeper reflections in the analysis process (Miles et al., 2019). Through this process, each researcher read and re-read each transcript to familiarize themselves with the data and develop in-depth memos (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). From there, the research team met regularly to create the codebook from Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory and Erikson's (1950) Stages of Psychosocial Development, thus utilizing a deductive coding strategy. Deductive coding helps harmonize studies with multiple theories and further ties theories with research questions and methods (Miles et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2013). Given the unique coupling of Schlossberg's and Erikson's theories, utilizing deductive coding was appropriate for this study.

Through this coding process, both evaluation and emotion strategies were employed (Saldaña, 2013). First, evaluation coding was used to analyze the judgments and appraisals made by participants regarding experiences (1) transitioning from high school to their redshirt freshman year, (b) the redshirt year itself, and (c) transitioning from redshirting to full participation. Evaluation coding describes a process/practice, like redshirting, and helps assess the quality of this process/practice (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, this method assisted in exploring how the redshirt freshman year influenced athletes' identities over the three periods. Evaluation coding also assists in elucidating recommendations to inform improvements for the process/practice under investigation (Saldaña, 2013).

Second, emotion coding was used to advance understanding of the values and attitudes athletes expressed about their redshirt freshman year and related experiences. Saldaña (2013) stated that emotion coding "tap[s] into the inner cognitive systems of participants" (p. 5). By capturing their feelings—such as frustration, motivation, anxiety, or growth—emotion coding provided deeper insight into how athletes internalized and made sense of this transitional period. Such examination into these inner thoughts of athletes is key to deeply understanding their identity and ego development or diffusion and experiences with intimacy or isolation (Erikson, 1950; Patton et al., 2016).

From the strategies above, researchers were able to produce thick, rich descriptions of the data, bolstering credibility (Saldaña, 2013). In addition, themes were created, uncovering recurring patterns from participants' narratives about their redshirt freshman experiences. The theming process involved multiple cycles of analysis, where initial codes were refined and synthesized into overarching themes that best captured the athletes' collective experiences. The research team met regularly to ensure analyses were congruent. When there was a disagreement within the coding and theming process, the research team discussed until an agreement was made (Saldaña, 2013). By iteratively comparing data across participants, the researchers ensured themes were grounded in the lived experiences of the athletes rather than imposed by external assumptions (Miles et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2013). Ultimately, participants described the redshirt freshman year as challenging, but ultimately a worthwhile experience. These themes are expanded upon below in the Findings and Discussion with implications to follow.

Findings and Discussion

Four themes describe the participants' experiences before, during, and after the redshirt freshmen year as it relates to their identity development: (1) uniqueness and distinction during high school, (2) determination through the redshirt freshman year, (3) team isolation, and (4) little desire for team intimacy. The following subsections describe the aforementioned themes in detail and aim to describe the sequential process of participants' experiences. The themes are further connected to Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory and Erikson's (1950) Psychosocial Development Model.

Uniqueness and Distinction During High School

Overall, participants described their high school football experiences as overwhelmingly positive. All athletes competed for their high school teams, many of which were in small towns where attending football games on Friday nights was the main activity. Frank expressed how significant it was to play for his high school team:

I guess being in a small town... it's a big deal. Every Friday that's what everybody's doing. The town, the traditions. I wouldn't say our school was like football only, per se. But I'd say predominantly if people were gonna go to a sporting event, it was gonna be football. And we're traditionally a pretty good high school. So yeah, it was always a pretty big deal.

Other players noted how this energetic atmosphere created by the local and school communities made them passionate about the sport. For example, Harrison noted Fridays were his favorite day of the week, feeling a "high" off the energy of home games. He stated this atmosphere not only allowed him to build strong connections with his high school teammates, but also fostered his love for football. So, the supportive environment from football created team and community intimacy for participants (Erikson, 1950). In fact, no athlete interviewed expressed feelings of isolation during high school as a result of their football experience. It is likely intimacy was also established as participants had cultivated or were starting to cultivate strong athletic identity salience, with such identity salience necessary before intimacy (Erikson, 1950).

Within this context, players began understanding themselves as unique, talented, and distinct from other athletes and students in their high school. Feelings of intimacy and support from their communities developed their strong connection to football. In line with previous scholarship (Gayles & Baker, 2015), these feelings of being unique, talented, and distinct from other athletes and non-athletes bolstered their athletic identity. A few participants referred to themselves as a "star football player" which conferred their status. Ben explained how status was related to the social hierarchy at his school:

Everyone was at football games on Fridays. Everyone came out and supported. We were also pretty good. So that also helped; people always support winning teams. I'll say, socially, obviously there's somewhat of a social hierarchy. I don't like using it, but it is what it is kind of. So being an

athlete and being a good football player and someone who's good at a lot of sports... I guess you could say, [I was] popular. So yeah, absolutely I love the experience of high school.

Through Ben's and other athletes' similar narratives, recognition from interactions with others bolstered athletes' perceptions of themselves as athletes, and thus, matched their athletic identity cultivation. This also aligns with Erikson's (1950) model and the significance of others in informing youths' identities and egos (Patton et al., 2016).

With this status and athletic identity, nine of the eleven participants reflected they did not need to give much attention to other parts of high school, like academics or social activities, to maintain their stature. This is summed up by Isaac's statement: "I was a star football player, so I never needed to do much work in school. I always found a way to finesse my way around things." Isaac's statement aligns with other scholarship on the significance of athletic identity for high school athletes (Gayles & Baker, 2015) and football players (Beamon, 2012; Brewer et al., 1993), specifically.

From their high school experiences and interactions, athletes may have already begun to solidify their sense of purpose—and thus identity and ego—as an athlete compared to other identities, such as their student roles. Thus, participants emerged as the "star" of their high schools and transitioned to pursue their dreams of competing in college.

Determination Through the Redshirt Freshman Year

Participants spoke in depth about the challenges of the redshirt season. All participants knew prior to their transition—going into summer training camp or the fall season—they would be redshirting; however, this knowledge did not change the fact that the redshirt freshman season was difficult. For example, Caleb described the physical intensity of the redshirt workouts, noting they were the "most brutal workouts" he experienced. He continued:

When you first get to college, you know no one... They're from all over, and you're with these dudes every morning at 5 a.m. doing the most horrific workouts you've ever thought of. People are dying. There are bodies all over the floor. There's throw up on the ground, on the sleds. You're going through it with a bunch of guys you've never met before.

In conjunction with advancing through the mental and physical grind of the workouts, participants' described goals of gaining weight and improving technical skills that would enhance their performance in the seasons to come. Indeed, Schlossberg (1981) described the significance of physical health, extended here to include physical growth, as key to successful transitions, such as transitioning beyond the redshirt year.

George noted while the non-redshirts were instructed to just maintain weight and muscle during the season, the redshirt freshmen were specifically trained to gain weight and muscle. George stated: "gaining weight, even if you're sore, is the main priority. All of the technical stuff comes after." He further reflected nothing would stand in his way of his ultimate goal of competing the following year. Thus, physical

goals were internally motivated by desires to get on the field the next season. However, physical goals were also externally motivated by coach and staff who emphasized making progress in this area, an important detail considering the transition environment of the redshirt athletes (Schlossberg, 1981). These internal (e.g., personal fitness goals) and external motivators (e.g., directions from coaches), in addition to the amount of time athletes dedicated to their craft, helped solidify participants' athletic identities compared to student and social identities (Côté et al., 2007; Erikson, 1950; Patton et al., 2016). Furthermore, utilizing internal/external motivations and understanding them are important as individuals cope and adapt to transitions (Schlossberg, 1981).

Importantly, the redshirt freshman season was also a mental challenge for players, connecting mental health to psychosocial competence in Schlossberg's (1981) model. When discussing watching his team play while on the bench, Drew said, "It took a toll on me mentally for the first couple of games. It just felt like you were practicing just to practice. You never saw the light at the end of the tunnel." Jack explained that even during practice, the good days consisted of participating in five total plays. Ethan added to these statements:

Most coaching staff bring in kids and put them on the redshirt year. They put 'em through the wringer just to see if they're mentally tough enough to stay in the program for the whole four years, because football is hard. So, I just feel like they're tougher on the freshmen and the redshirts just because they're pushing them. And they want to see what they can do. They want to see how mentally tough they are.

Ethan's perception about why the redshirt freshman year is particularly challenging aligns with other athletes' perceptions of the redshirt and coaching mentality from previous scholarship (Harry & Weight, 2021; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Matteo, 2023). Additionally, Aidan described the changes he felt as a player during this transition:

We don't do a lot of things full speed, such as tackling in our practices. So, coming from high school when you're playing every Friday, you're live tackling everything...and then you don't do that for a year...you start to think like, 'oh, do I even remember how to do this?' It's not the same as a game environment at all...I think it's detrimental not only to your mental state, but also how you see yourself.

These perceptions explained by Drew, Jack, Ethan, and Aidan align with previous scholarship noting athletes' mental health struggles with transitions (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Matteo, 2023).

Still, athletes displayed determination during their redshirt freshman year. Despite not taking the field on Saturdays, participants such as Issac and Kai, told themselves they still possessed athletic talent. This mentality not only aligns with Schlossberg's (1981) perceptions of the transition, but also with the positive self- and world-attitudes she described as significant forces for positive transitions. Internal reassurance allowed participants to stay motivated and determined to work through the redshirt season and transition out the other side. This athletic confidence is also

important for maintaining athletic identity salience (Brewer et al., 1993; Harrison et al., 2011; Weight et al., 2020; Oldham, 2022). Further, the participants acknowledged that transitioning to compete in college, even as a redshirt, was an accomplishment. Ben stated:

I struggled a lot throughout that fall. Coming in, I had already been second guessing myself. Am I good enough to be here? That type of deal. And coming in and being on the bottom of the totem pole, from the start, I think, affects one as an athlete, especially in terms of confidence, because at least me personally, I've always been a good athlete, like I've always been the best, or one of the best. And on every team, baseball, football or wrestling. It was new for me to be on the bottom of the depth chart... It affected my confidence as an athlete quite a bit. But I mean I got a lot better; that's what that redshirt season is for.

Participants began increasingly focusing on themselves, specifically their athletic abilities. Due to the rarity of transitioning through the redshirt freshman year, participants felt more assured in their physical and mental abilities in football contexts. For multiple participants, including Harrison, Issac, and Jack, this experience heightened their athletic identity and led to a hyper-focus on football and competing the following season, which seemed to limit other identity-forming activities in academic and social spheres. Overall, athletes in the sample described using determination to overcome physical and mental obstacles of the redshirt freshman year, proving to themselves and others that they were athletically gifted and deserving of their roster spot. This determination strengthened their athletic identity and ego, likely contributing to subsequent team isolation.

Team Isolation

While the participants described how the redshirt freshman season brought them together with others in similar situations, they simultaneously described how it isolated them from non-redshirt freshmen and other athletes on the team. According to transition literature (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1981), experiences of isolation during a transition period are common. This is also particularly prevalent for college athletes (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Harry & Weight, 2021).

First, athletes described how the challenge of the redshirt freshman year “bonded” the redshirt athletes together. Ben offered, “We just bonded a lot over how difficult it was because it’s a transitional period. It’s difficult for all of us and its long season.” Caleb revealed an akin statement noting how the “humbling” nature of the redshirt freshman year brought him closer to his peers: “when you come into college. You’re the best player in your school, or one of the best. Then you come here and you’re just like everybody else.” Thus, humbling amongst a group—rather than alone—made the redshirt freshmen tight, as Caleb added, “You eventually start becoming friends, and then probably a little bit more than friends.”

The isolation experienced by the athletes in this transition phase was structural and environmental (Schlossberg, 1981). For example, during the redshirt freshman year, participants such as Isaac and Jack, noted that they usually worked out as a

redshirt group separate from the other freshmen and athletes on the team. Coupled with not practicing, competing, or traveling with the team, this segregation isolated and otherized the participants.

Furthermore, Harrison and Kai described limited access to coaches as they were focusing on the athletes who could compete on Saturdays, not the redshirt freshman. This isolated the participants and limited relationship building during the transition to the redshirt freshman year and throughout that year. With limited exposure to non-redshirts and coaches, participants noted feeling more connected with their redshirt teammates, bonded by this isolation and redshirt identity (Erikson, 1950). Drew reflected:

I think the connection between us redshirts was stronger. Obviously, because we are staying back here on the weekends, not travelling. And then we would talk to each other and stuff like that. So, obviously every single class has a connection because they are the same class. But I think being redshirts too, it's a little different.

Thus, this isolation experienced by the redshirt freshmen was not just structural and environmental—by the design of the redshirt freshman year, but also interpersonal—from relationships or lack thereof between non-redshirts and redshirts (Erikson, 1950). Schlossberg (2005) noted, “knowing that others are experiencing transitions like one’s own provides a kind of emotional support” (p. 178). So, relationships and their provided supports are key to both intimacy and successful transitions (Erikson, 1950; Schlossberg, 1981), including for college athletes (Weight et al., 2020). The participants’ experiences with isolation during the redshirt freshman year contributed to their limited wants for greater team intimacy after their redshirt freshman year. Instead, the focus became on their performance and work ethic, items that were in their control, as mentioned in the second theme. Throughout the redshirt freshman year and beyond, participants’ sense of athletic identity solidified, specifically through periods of isolation (Erikson, 1950).

Little Desire for Team Intimacy

The culminating theme of the interviews centered around participants’ lack of desire for team intimacy post-redshirting. Athletes repeatedly referenced that not all redshirts make it through the freshman year and transition into their eligibility years. With this understanding, the divide between redshirt freshmen and the rest of the team widened. Ben reflected:

Throughout that redshirt fall, you’re not as close with those [upperclassmen] guys yet, because a lot of people quit. A lot of people get weeded out. So, now that I’m on the other side of it, looking at them I’m like, ‘I’m not gonna get super close to you guys if you’re gonna to quit.’ It’s more of a once you get through the redshirt fall now you’ve earned respect. You’ve made it through the trenches. Like, you’re serious about being here. You’re serious about our program... Now I’m glad that you’re along for the ride to help us win.

Interestingly, despite Ben’s determination to make it through the redshirt freshman

year and understanding the difficulties, he and other participants did not necessarily want to support or form relationships with the redshirt athletes once they transitioned to the “other side.” In this way, Ben did not share the totality of who he was as an athlete, or his other identities, hindering his intimacy with others, but also potentially intimacy across the team (Erikson, 1950). Schlossberg (1981) emphasized the importance of intimacy during times of transition. Further, just as he had to “prove himself,” in this transition period, Ben wanted others to do the same, maintaining the environment and culture of isolation. This further limited team intimacy.

Unfortunately, this mentality often negatively impacted participants’ relationships with other players, especially athletically. While some athletes described teammates as “friends,” they still described this relationship loosely, using verbiage like “we’re cool” and “I like them.” Drew described the “business” of his relationship with teammates as follows:

I’m gonna talk to them [teammates]. But I’m not gonna give away how I’m doing, what I’m doing. I’m gonna keep riding it out. . . . So yeah, competing for the same spots, once we’re out on the field, it’s all business. I’m gonna beat out whoever I can, however I can.

For most participants, football eventually evolved into a “job” in which they focused on their performance and competition with teammates. Thus, while they had a strong athletic identity, other social identities (e.g., teammate) did not emerge from participants’ narratives.

Ben did not want to form intimate relationships with teammates who would not persevere through the challenges of the redshirt year, while Drew did not want to create relationships in which he might “give away” his athletic secrets, which could decrease his chances of taking the field. Drew displayed a scarcity mindset, likely informed by his redshirt experience in which playing—even practicing—was scarce. Thus, the concept of having to continuously prove yourself and earn/keep your spot that was constantly in the back of athletes’ minds during the redshirt freshman year, remained omnipresent as they transitioned through to football seasons post-redshirt (Patton et al., 2016). This environment reaffirmed and solidified ego and athletic identity for the participants (Erikson, 1950; Schlossberg, 1981), lessening desires for team intimacy.

The perspectives of Ben and Drew, along with the perspectives of other athletes, demonstrate a pragmatic understanding of the team dynamic, potentially stemming from the pragmatic ways in which they were treated as redshirt freshmen (e.g., coaches and staff giving more attention to key players taking the field on Saturdays and less attention to redshirts who could not have an immediate impact). In line with the previous quotes, the isolation and resulting missing team intimacy created a cyclical pattern in which participants continued to focus more on their own athletic development and less on team development, perpetuating less intimacy within their teams. For example, participants discussed more individual goals and recognition compared to team goals. Drew stated, “I’ve gotten in multiple games, which is exciting. I’ve done well on special teams. I’m hoping to be an All-conference guy for special teams this year, which is a big step.” In a similar sentiment, Caleb explained

that his goals go beyond playing time, "Now, instead of just trying to earn a starting spot, there's motivation toward accolades and being the best in the country."

Another example illustrating little desire for team intimacy comes from Ethan, who, after realizing he was not going to make the field after his redshirt freshman year, decided to transfer. He explained:

We had a fifth-year senior that had a COVID year, so a sixth year. He was starting in my position. When he decided to come back for the sixth year that's when I said, 'I don't want to wait. I want to go to a different institution, get on the field instead of waiting two years to play.'

Thus, while a potentially bonding experience for those "in the trenches" as Ben expressed, the redshirt freshman year ultimately led athletes to describe a less intimate team environment and culture, fueled by personal athletic goals and desires.

Implications

Below we discuss theoretical and practical implications for the fields of sport management and athlete development.

Theoretical Implications

There are a handful of theoretical implications from this study. First, limited sport scholarship has employed psychosocial development lenses, like Erikson's (1950), to understand college athletes' experiences (Patton et al., 2016). Indeed, much of the literature regarding athletes' transitions, experiences, and development has used other theories such as Astin's (1984) Input-Environment-Outcome framework, Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) Conceptual Model for Student-Athlete Success, Raedeke and Smith's (2001) athlete burnout, among others. These theories are appropriate; however, more theoretical plurality in the athlete development and wellbeing sphere can offer more nuanced and in-depth understandings on athletes' time in college. In fact, the field of sport management intersects with a host of other disciplines, including psychology and sociology, and thus, employing a psychosocial perspective, like Erikson's (1950), is not only viable, but also works to achieve theoretical extension.

Second, Erikson's (1950) theory, paired with Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory, is particularly appropriate for understanding the redshirt experience. As noted in our findings and previous scholarship (Matteo, 2023; Medley, 2018), redshirt freshman athletes face challenges during and after the redshirt transition. Athletes not only questioned their role as an athlete, but also their future in sports (e.g., Aidan and Caleb). So, while the redshirt freshman year is often promoted as a transitional time of acclimatization and avenue for athletes to explore areas outside of sports, the theoretical coupling of Transition Theory and Psychosocial Development helped us elucidate that there is perhaps minimal identity exploration and strong athletic identities for redshirt athletes. This theoretical perspective and subsequent findings also support prior literature on non-redshirt athletes' identities (Matteo, 2023; Oldham,

2022) and bolster the idea that athletic identity does not only impact athletes in the most visible conferences and teams, but in reality, impacts most college athletes.

We also found athletes struggled with their ego, an area underexamined in previous literature on athlete development and identity (Brewer et al., 1993; Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). More in-depth examination of the ego may be lacking because limited previous scholarship has used psychosocial lenses, and Erikson's (1950) model specifically. One's ego, or perception of their identity, is especially critical as solidifying ego helps lay the foundation for interactions and intimacy building in Erikson's (1950) Stage Six (Patton et al., 2016). The ego is also important for intimacy and subsequent support in times of transition (Schlossberg, 1981, 2005). Indeed, one reason redshirt athletes in our study may have encountered issues cultivating intimacy could be because they struggled to define their egos, which could also be a symptom of athletic identity and role engulfment (Erikson, 1950).

Additionally, Erikson's (1950) Stage Six is critical for athletes as they establish relationships in the hopes of building intimacy with others, especially teammates and coaches. In line with much of the previous athlete development literature, our sample of athletes expressed limited intimacy with individuals outside of the athletics community. However, perhaps most interestingly, the athletes also expressed that they sometimes floundered in creating relationships with non-redshirt teammates and even coaches. Ben described how upperclassmen did not want to get to know him well until after he completed the redshirt freshman year in case he did not transition through. This lack of intimacy led to a missing sense of belonging for a handful of the participants. While athletes did develop and maintain a sense of athletic identity, allowing them to move from Stage Five to Stage Six, it is likely that the overemphasis on athletic identity led athletes to flounder in building more intimate relationships across their teams and with coaches.

While sense of belonging/lack of belonging has been somewhat examined in the athlete experience literature (Gayles et al., 2018), this notion has not been framed from an intimacy versus isolation perspective and has considered this phenomenon more from an environmental or cultural lens, rather than developmental perspective. Importantly, Erikson's (1950) model and its coupling with Schlossberg's (1981) framework, offers ways for scholars to consider both environment/culture and human development when it comes to redshirt and non-redshirt athletes' experiences and transitions (Patton et al., 2016).

Practical Implications

Athletes in this sample noted that while challenging, they generally considered the redshirt experience worthwhile. However, given participants' transition struggles, heightened athletic identities, and experiences with isolation from teammates and others across campuses, we conclude that the redshirt freshman year is under-accomplishing the goal of academic and social acclimation and inclusion. However, the findings from this study provide multiple practical implications for practitioners, specifically coaches, to bring the goal of improved athlete development back to the forefront of the freshman redshirt experience. These implications include enhanced

support for identity exploration, such as networking events with team alumni, increased transparency about the redshirt process, and more events and strategies for increased team intimacy.

This study revealed that upon graduating high school, athletes' athletic identities may already be solidified, or at least, already highly developed (Gayles & Baker, 2015). With this in mind, college coaches should offer athletes more opportunities to explore interests beyond sports, including academic and social spheres of college campuses. In fact, some of this exploration could be required by the coaches or mandatory in athlete development programming, such as volunteer activities or study groups mixed with athletes across sports. As the participants in this study noted, coaches are some of the most prominent and influential individuals in athletes' college and transition environments (Harry & Weight, 2021; Weight et al., 2020), and thus their support is key to athletes' greater evolution within and beyond sport. Additionally, identity and interest exploration are beneficial for long-term identity development (Erikson, 1950; Patton et al., 2016), and also development of psychosocial competence and values orientations (Schlossberg, 1981).

Similarly, participants described feelings of isolation from not only other athletes across the athletic department and football program, but also from the greater campus community. Many participants in the sample noted that their schools allowed them to take the majority of their classes online and/or asynchronously. A similar option was offered during their COVID-19 years and also remained a commonplace after. The online and/or asynchronous curriculum was beneficial in their aspirations and desires to focus on football, but it may also have contributed to their athletic identity development or over-development. Additionally, in line with previous research on athlete isolation (Gayles et al., 2018; Weight & Huml, 2016), this siloed environment, and structure hindered their interactions with non-athletes, faculty, and others outside of sports.

Second, it is pertinent coaches communicate with athletes before they arrive on campus that they should be prepared to redshirt and what this process looks like. This informational support is key for athletes, so they are less surprised as they navigate the transition to college. However, as most participants noted, while they were notified in advance they would be redshirting, they did not receive transparency regarding the challenges of the redshirt freshman year. Including redshirt processes into conversations, perhaps with older teammates who have gone through this year, before athletes begin their redshirt freshman year can be another avenue to prepare athletes for their next steps, easing their perception of the transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Third, and in line with increased transparency—and Transition Theory—are increased internal and institutional support for redshirt athletes. Transparency works in step with intimacy. Participants noted feelings of isolation during their redshirt freshman year, specifically with relationships with coaches and non-redshirt teammates. Greater interaction across these groups may help redshirt athletes begin to feel a part of the team and culture, more quickly. In turn, this could lead to stronger belonging and desires for team intimacy. In fact, Aidan noted after his redshirt year, coaches

implemented Scout Bowl Thursdays, where redshirts played a full scrimmage and received feedback from other teammates and coaches. During the last 30 minutes of Thursday practices, the redshirts would have the field to themselves to scrimmage while their non-redshirt teammates and staff cheered from the sidelines. Aidan felt this was a great way to foster team intimacy beyond the redshirts as the Scout Bowl involved the entire football program. Implementing these implications serves as a starting point for coaches and college sport practitioners to center athletes' development during the transitional redshirt freshman year.

While this study's practical implications are centered on the role of coaches, we acknowledge the broader host of resources and services generally provided by athletic departments—including athlete enhancement, wellness, and academic support staff—that are critical to athlete development (Gayles et al., 2018; Kiefer et al., 2021). These units are well-positioned to offer proactive programming, identity development workshops, and academic integration initiatives. However, it is important to note that the athletes in our sample rarely identified or reflected on those roles. Instead, they consistently described coaches as the most influential figures in their redshirt experience. Given this, we argue that coaches can serve as gatekeepers to many of the department's developmental opportunities (Harry & Weight, 2021; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Whether explicitly or implicitly, coaches shape the culture, routines, and priorities that athletes are expected to follow—including how they engage or do not engage with non-sport development offerings.

Thus, while other professionals may have the expertise to support athletes in exploring academic and social identities, it is often the coach's endorsement, encouragement, or lack thereof that determines whether athletes feel empowered to participate in such initiatives. For example, coaches set the tone for whether athletes attend optional developmental events, seek out non-sport mentorship, or embrace interdisciplinary learning. So, coaches do not have to create or lead all identity development programming, but they do have the capacity—and arguably the responsibility—to integrate, support, and normalize engagement with those existing campus and department resources. Future collaborations between coaching staffs and athlete development professionals should be encouraged to bridge this gap. Such partnerships could lead to more intentional and developmentally sound support for redshirt athletes.

Limitations And Future Research

While this study discusses important considerations on the psychosocial and transition experience that is the redshirt process, it is not without limitations. First, this study investigated the experiences of Division II redshirt freshmen football athletes who made it through this year. This is a unique and small sample, and thus, expanding this work to other athlete subgroups (e.g., divisions, sports, athletes who did not make it through the redshirt freshman year, etc.) is warranted. Even within Division II football, future research on the redshirt experience is necessary, specifically with those from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds. In addition,

participants' redshirt freshman year took place during COVID-19 and thus, redshirt experiences could differ in subsequent years.

Another limitation and area for future exploration is an increased discussion about the academic and social advantages and disadvantages of the redshirt freshman year and beyond. Little was mentioned by the athletes about academics or social life outside of sports and football. While this provided us with athletes' true perceptions of the redshirt year being more athletically focused and their athletic identity development, future studies with redshirt athletes should center these topics to explore how different strategies and supports during the redshirt freshman year can actually accomplish the goals of holistic athlete development (Matteo, 2023; Medley, 2018).

Our findings also hinted the potential of athlete role engulfment for the participants (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Erikson, 1950). Future studies should consider this phenomenon and seek greater detail to distinguish when an athlete transitions from having a strong athletic identity to full athlete role engulfment, specifically during the redshirt freshman year. Lastly, more consideration should be given to understanding the innerworkings of team level of intimacy, specifically within redshirt and non-redshirt athletes, as well as key factors that bolster or hinder team culture development.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the experience of Division II redshirt freshman football players through the novel theoretical combination of Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory and Erikson's (1950) Stages of Psychosocial Development. Findings suggested athletes come into the redshirt freshman year with feelings of both uniqueness and distinction cultivated during high school. These perceptions fueled their determination in the redshirt year and beyond as they wanted to prove their athletic prowess to themselves and others. However, throughout the redshirt freshman year and after, athletes expressed feelings of isolation as they lacked an on-field presence and opportunities for meaningful interactions with non-redshirts. Isolation then led participants to desire individual successes over team intimacy. Implications offer not only theoretical advancements for the field in understanding the unique transition and developmental opportunity that is the redshirt year, but also practical improvements to cultivate true holistic athlete development in the redshirt process.

References

- Beamon, K. (2012). "I'm a baller": Athletic identity foreclosure among African American former student-athletes. *Journal of African American Studies*, 16(2), 195–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-012-9211-8>
- Brewer, B. W., & Petitpas, A. J. (2017). Athletic identity foreclosure. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 16, 118–122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.05.004>

- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or Achilles heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24(2), 237–254. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t15488-000>
- Comeaux, E., & Harrison, C. K. (2011). A conceptual model of academic success for student–athletes. *Educational Researcher*, 40(5), 235-245. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11415260>
- Côté, J., Baker, J., & Abernethy, B. (2007). Practice and play in the development of sport expertise. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 184–202). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and research design : choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. W. W. Norton & Co.
- Foster, S. J. L., & Huml, M. R. (2017). The relationship between athletic identity and academic major chosen by student-athletes. *International Journal of Exercise Science*, 10(6), 915–925. <https://doi.org/10.70252/ijeg1609>
- Gayles, J., & Baker, A. R. (2015). Opportunities and challenges for first-year student-athletes transitioning from high school to college. *New Directions For Student Leadership*, 147, 43–51. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20142>
- Gayles, J. G., Crandall, R., & Morin, S. (2018). Student-athletes' sense of belonging: Background characteristics, student involvement, and campus climate. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 9(1), 23-38. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2152-7857/CGP/v09i01/23-38>
- Gibson, M., & Tally, K. (2019). Division II redshirting explained by coaches and student-athletes. *The Reflector*. <https://reflector.uindy.edu/2018/12/12/division-ii-redshirting-explained-by-coaches-and-student-athletes/>
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N.K., & Anderson, M.L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory*. Springer.
- Harry, M., & Weight, E. (2021). Post-collegiate athlete transitions and the influence of a coach. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 15(3), 219-244. [10.1080/19357397.2021.1916338](https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2021.1916338)
- Harrison, L., Sailes, G., Rotich, W. K., & Bimper, A. Y. (2011). Living the dream or awakening from the nightmare: Race and athletic identity. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 14(1), 91– 103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.531982>
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e504862008-001>
- Ingram, A. K., & Huffman, L. T. (2017). To admit, or not to admit? An exploratory study of graduation rates of “special-admit” student-athletes within the “Power 5” conferences. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 11(3), 193–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2017.1346749>
- Jayakumar, U. M., & Comeaux, E. (2016). The cultural cover-up of college athletics: How organizational culture perpetuates an unrealistic and idealized balancing

- act. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 87(4), 488-515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2016.11777411>
- Kiefer, H. R., Petrie, T. A., & Walls, R. (2021): The transition from collegiate sport: An analysis of the current retirement planning practices of NCAA institutions, *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 17(1), 66-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2021.2013101>
- Kloetzer, H. & Taylor, E. (2023). "People don't acknowledge this process enough": An in-depth investigation into transition from sport programs for college athletes. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*. 16, 530-556.
- Lally, P. (2007). Identity and athletic retirement: A prospective study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 8(1), 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2006.03.003>
- Lally, P. S., & Kerr, G. A. (2005). The career planning, athletic identity, and student role identity of intercollegiate student athletes. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 76(3), 275–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2005.10599299>
- Lamont-Mills, A., & Christensen, S. A. (2006). Athletic identity and its relationship to sport participation levels. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 9(6), 472–478. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2006.04.004>
- Matteo, J. Q. (2023). *The division I redshirt-freshman year: Benefits and pitfalls for Black football players* [Capstone Project]. University of Virginia.
- Medley, C. D. (2018). *Identities in transition: How the redshirt year affects the social, emotional, academic, and athletic (SEAA) development of college student athletes*. [PhD Dissertation]. California State University, Sacramento.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association Demographics Database. (2022). NCAA. <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2018/12/13/ncaa-demographics-database.aspx>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II Manual. (2023-2024). NCAA. <https://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/D224.pdf>
- Oldham, L. C. (2022). *Exploration of intercollegiate student-athletes' athletic identity*. [Master's Thesis]. West Virginia University.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. SAGE.
- Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido, F. M., & Quaye, S. J. (2016). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. Jossey-Bass.
- Raedeke, T. D., & Smith, A. L. (2001). Development and preliminary validation of an athlete burnout measure. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 23(4), 281-306. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.23.4.281>
- Ragelienė, T. (2016) Links of adolescents identity development and relationship with peers: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Academic Adolescent Psychiatry*, 25(2), 97-105.

- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9(2), 2-18.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (2005). *Counseling adults in transition*. Springer.
- Steele, A. R., van Rens, F. E., & Ashley, R. A. (2020). A systematic literature review on the academic and athletic identities of student-athletes. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 13(1), 69-92. <https://doi.org/10.17161/jis.v13i1.13502>
- Stokowski, S., Paule-Koba, A. L., & Kaunert, C. (2019). Former college athletes' perceptions of adapting to transition. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 12, 403-426.
- Walker, T. (2024). Redshirting: Everything you need to know & athletes' personal experiences. *2aDays*. <https://www.2adays.com/blog/redshirt-everything-you-need-to-know-athletes-personal-experiences/>
- Weight, E. A., & Huml, M. R. (2016). Education through athletics: An examination of academic courses designed for NCAA athletes. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 9(2), 352-378. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jis.2015-0051>
- Weight, E. A., Lewis, M., & Harry, M. (2020). Self-efficacy belief and the influential coach: An examination of collegiate athletes. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, 2(3), 198-216. <https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.02.03.04>