

BUILDING A FUTURE CAREER AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF  
THE CAREER CONSTRUCTION AND EXPLORATION PROCESSES OF NCAA  
DIVISION I STUDENT-ATHLETES

By

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This research is dedicated to my family, friends, and committee who tirelessly offered their support and guidance during this doctoral war of attrition.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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Researchers and practitioners within the context of higher education are charged with the responsibility of providing comprehensive support programs and facilitating multifaceted growth of student-athletes as they develop and prepare for a meaningful life and career roles after sport. This research places an emphasis on understanding the career construction and exploration processes of student-athletes and highlights their abilities to facilitate a readiness, healthy awareness, and shift in personal and professional perspectives during their sport career transition. This interdisciplinary approach to evaluating student-athletes' sport career transitions utilizes both career development and vocational psychology literature in order to emphasize the impact of vocational and identity exploration during the career construction process.

Despite the growth of career transition research and career assistance initiatives for collegiate student-athletes, little empirical evidence is available for student affairs professionals on how to build and evaluate career development programs that address the specific needs of student-athletes. The purpose of this mixed method dissertation was to (1) validate the Future Career Autobiography (FCA; Rehfuss, 2009) for use among the population of NCAA Division I student-athletes, and to (2) identify the potential relationship, or lack thereof, between career

exploration activities of student-athletes and the construction of their future life and occupational narratives.

A sample of 197 NCAA Division I student-athletes participated in the first qualitative phase of this study, and 89 student-athletes from the first phase participated in the second quantitative phase. Phase one findings demonstrated that the FCA is a valid narrative tool for use within the population of collegiate student-athletes. The FCA's utility was also expanded by providing inductively constructed athlete specific themes, both Sport Career Transition and Occupational Desire themes, which provided additional insight into the career construction process of collegiate student-athletes. Phase two results indicated that there was little to no relationship between career exploration activities of student-athletes and the construction of their FCAs. These findings provide a theoretical approach to utilizing new narrative and experimental tools that have the capacity to help career development professionals evaluate the efficiency of their programming in the context of sport and higher education.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Many collegiate student-athletes embrace the end of their sport career when their athletic eligibility comes to an end. That being said, what is next for the 480,000 student-athletes attending National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions that do not pursue a professional athletic career (NCAA, 2018)? Student-athletes are challenged by the commercialized system of intercollegiate athletics, particularly at the Division I level, to develop as highly competitive and successful athletes on the field while simultaneously preparing to transition into a diverse workforce (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Lapchick, 2006). An intense commitment to their sport and potential lack of engagement in academics and additional hobbies may thwart the personal and professional development of student-athletes as they prepare for life after sport (Brown et al., 2000; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988). Within the context of higher education, researchers and practitioners are charged with the initiative to provide comprehensive support programs and facilitate the multifaceted growth of student-athletes (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Keup, 2007; Navarro, 2012) as they develop and prepare for a meaningful life and career roles after sport.

Exploring career alternatives and investing in non-athletic activities are essential steps in the process of career planning (McQuown Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010), so it is natural for student-athletes to be further behind in career development when compared to other college students (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Martens & Lee, 1998). It is plausible to assume student-athletes might not have the time or energy to engage in career exploration activities when considering the obligations and time commitment tied to their student-athlete role (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). Student-athletes have also been shown to have more anxiety regarding career exploration when

they have a stronger athletic identity (Grove et al., 1997), which make them less likely to take a proactive approach to career development (Sandstedt et al., 2004). Deficiencies and delays in career development, particularly delays until after sport retirement (Parham, 1993), can cause student-athletes to struggle while preparing for their vocational future and career field once they graduate from college (Martens & Lee, 1998; Murphy et al., 1996; Wendling et al., 2018).

Student-athletes' preparation for the transition to the career field has become increasingly popular in athlete development literature over the last decade (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Murdock et al., 2016; Navarro, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015, 2016; Navarro & McCormick, 2017; Poux & Fry, 2015; Sauer et al., 2013; Tyrance et al., 2013; Wendling & Sagas, 2020). Researchers, leaders in higher education, athletic administrators, and the NCAA have arrived at the same conclusion that student-athletes, like other distinct groups of students, need holistic and tailored support to enhance their success in and out of athletics (Murdock, 2010; Murdock et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2019). Amidst this identified need for support, there is a lack of curricular guidance (Navarro, 2012) and limited data-informed suggestions of how intercollegiate athletic departments can better prepare student-athletes for their life after athletic retirement, specifically through meaningful personal and career development initiatives (Navarro, 2015b; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

NCAA Division I athletic departments have an obligation to provide career development programs that support all student-athletes, especially the 97% who are “going pro” in something other than sport (NCAA, 2011). Student affairs professionals, who are responsible for supporting that large conglomerate of student-athletes, often lack curricular guidance (Navarro, 2012) and are unaware of specific research-centric curricular and pedagogical methods that are most efficient when working with student-athletes (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Student affairs

professionals must be equipped to prepare student-athletes for a meaningful career and diverse workforce outside of sport even though student-athletes often struggle to gain experiences of experience civic engagement with individuals outside of athletic team or their athlete-identity group (Gayles et al., 2012), are susceptible to a variety of external institutional challenges (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Goddard, 2004; Renick, 1974), and struggle with navigating internal psychological barriers (Adler & Adler, 1987; Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Lapchick, 2006; Miller & Keer, 2003). Student affairs professionals need to be armed with empirical research related to career exploration and construction patterns of student-athletes to properly counsel them through those barriers as they enter a competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century job market and volatile economy (NCAA, 2011).

Collegiate student-athletes can experience a variety of different personal and professional developmental challenges when they retire from their sport that the general student population might not experience. A common theme in student-athlete literature is the negative impact athletic obligations, like time and energy, can have on career development (Adler & Adler, 1987; Clontz, 2019; Martens & Lee, 1998; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Sandstedt et al., 2004; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Retirement from a collegiate sport career may not always come with developmental challenges, but there are substantiated traces of student-athletes experiencing career development difficulties during their transition to life after sport (Burns et al., 2013; Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Haslerig & Navarro, 2016; Henderson, 2013; Jordan & Denson, 1990; Navarro, 2015; Navarro & McCormick, 2017; Park et al., 2013; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988; Stambulova, 2010; Stambulova et al., 2009; Stankovich, 1998; Tekavc et al., 2015; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Multiple sport career transition studies have identified how specifically career exploration can influence the transition process for student-



athletes as they enter the career field (Burns et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2000; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Martens & Lee, 1998; Meeker et al., 2000; Sandstedt et al., 2004; Smallman & Sowa, 1996; Stankovich, 1998; Storch & Ohlson, 2009).

Career exploration has the ability to both expand and clarify career possibilities (Flum & Blustein, 2000), and recent empirical efforts have been made to examine and define the construct of career exploration during young adult years (Wendling, 2019). It is predicted that college-bound youth will partake in more diverse and broad career exploration, and work or career-bound youth will engage in more specific and in-depth career exploration (Flum & Blustein, 2000). External institutional barriers and internal psychological struggles (e.g., depression, anxiety, loss of identity) can also potentially inhibit collegiate student-athletes from partaking in necessary in-depth career exploration, which is a key proponent in ensuring a successful career and life transition out of sport (Beamon, 2012; Lavalley et al., 2000; Parham, 1993; Park et al., 2013; Sparks, 1998; Wendling, 2019). A lack of career exploration, an abundance of internal psychological struggles, limited identity development, and the belief that most of their personal and professional skillsets are linked to sports can make it difficult for elite athletes to construct a new career identity during transition from athletics (Alder & Alder, 1989; Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Wendling, 2019).

The long, gradual transition out of an athletic career is a complex process, and the challenges that accompany career exploration and development warrant further empirical investigation to properly support the growth of personal and career identity (Wendling, 2019). A comprehensive review of elite athletes' sport career transitions revealed that searching for new careers or interest (e.g., career exploration), is the only known effective and empirically supported career development coping skill that can improve the transition process (Park et al.,

2013). However, there has been little consideration of how career exploration might influence the process of career development, specifically career construction, for student-athletes transitioning into the workforce.

Career development and exploration literature highlight that college is a crucial period of time for forming a sense of career identity, and student-athlete career development services have yet to take advantage of a career development metatheory, Career Construction Theory (CCT; Savickas, 2005) as a theoretical lens and means for fostering self-exploration and construction of career identities (Navarro et al., 2019). Career construction is defined as a dynamic process in which individuals build their careers and guide life choices through life themes and experiences (Savickas, 2002). CCT is a modern perspective of Super's (1957) vocational development theory and provides a 21st century approach to the evolutionary and dynamic process of career development (Savickas, 2005). Career construction is contextualized in this research as an individual process of "exploring career opportunities, making informed career decisions, and designing potential career trajectories based on life experiences" (Navarro et al., 2019, p. 7). Simply put, career construction is the process of utilizing information gained from life experiences coupled with exploring, choosing, and preparing for the career field.

The intent of student-athlete career development programming is to enrich the career construction process, so the personal perspective and voice of student-athletes is important when facilitating the development of curricula and the evaluative tools used to measure the efficacy of programming. There is an evident gap in student-athlete development literature that empirically addresses what impacts student-athletes as they investigate, select, and plan for their future careers (Navarro, 2012). The intent of this dissertation is to respond to this need and inform future curricular development through exploring the career construction perspectives of student-

athletes and identify if specific career exploration opportunities are influential in their individualized career construction process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are two aims in this research: (1) to validate the Future Career Autobiography (FCA; Rehfuss, 2009) for use among the population of NCAA Division I student-athletes, and to (2) identify the potential relationship, or lack thereof, between career exploration activities of student-athletes and the construction of their future life and occupational narratives. Applying the FCA to the population of NCAA Division I student-athletes has yet to be explored in student-athlete development research. The FCA is a qualitative instrument theoretically founded in CCT (Savickas, 2005) that is used to capture change or stability in life and occupational narratives across time due to career development interventions. Savickas' (2005) CCT and its holistic perspective of career construction is sparingly used the context of Division I athletics (Navarro, 2012). Given the near absence of empirical efforts, this research will further validate the FCA as a narrative tool for use in the student-athlete population, and expand the FCA through inductively constructing athlete specific "sport career transition" (SCT) themes which account for unique student-athlete career preparation and construction experiences.

The second aim of this research is to establish a relationship, if any, between specific career exploration activities of student-athletes and their narrative life and occupational expressions found within their FCAs. Utilizing the operationalized construct of career exploration in-depth from the Career Identity Development Inventory (CIDI; Wendling, 2019) afforded this research the opportunity to statistically examine the relationship, or lack thereof, between student-athletes' career exploration with the development of the narrative themes in their FCAs. This student-athlete centered approach deepens the investigation of how specific types of career exploration may cause narrative quality (e.g., word count and utilized themes) of

student-athletes' FCAs to differ. This method enables this research to inform student affairs professionals about the specific types of career exploration (i.e., network, achieved, self) that should and should not be emphasized in their programming if they wish to bolster the progression of their student-athletes' career construction. Thus, the practical implications of this research include the ability to provide career development professionals with information on how to build and improve the efficacy of their career assistance programs, specifically based in career exploration and construction, for NCAA Division I student-athletes.

### **Significance of the Study**

Further validation of the CIDI and expansion of the FCA for the student-athlete population could advance the future direction of scholars in student-athlete and career development with regards to career exploration and construction. The transition to life and a new career role after collegiate athletics requires student-athletes to construct an ideal future life and occupation outside of sports. Investigating the career construction and exploration processes of student-athletes and analyzing how specific types of career exploration relate to their future narrative development could provide beneficial insights for researchers and practitioners. The sparse amount of research focused on CCT in the context of NCAA Division I athletics creates an opportunity for this dissertation to theoretically and practically contribute to the field of student-athlete and career development.

This research could theoretically advance career development literature by expanding the lens of CCT and identifying distinct aspects of the career construction process specifically experienced by student-athletes. As previously addressed, student-athletes in the context of higher education may face numerous external institutional barriers and internal psychological challenges, which cause them to struggle constructing career paths (Fountain & Finley, 2009). This research could deepen the understanding of how student-athletes explore career

opportunities, make informed career decisions, and design their potential career trajectories based on life desires and sport career transition experiences. Another important theoretical contribution of this research is the expansion of the FCA as a narrative tool through the development and application of Sport Career Transition themes, which highlight the underlying career construction processes of collegiate student-athletes.

Exploring different patterns of career construction and analyzing how specific types of career exploration relate to future narrative development can provide beneficial insights for practitioners. This research could inform practice by detecting student-athletes' career construction differences on several career exploration variables in order to better understand what type of career development programming could be most beneficial in helping student-athletes adjust to the career field after sport. This research will identify the most beneficial forms of career exploration to include in career development curricula for student-athletes, and possibly help practitioners distinguish between adaptive and maladaptive narrative themes through expanding the FCA as a narrative tool for student-athletes.

Student-athlete development literature calls for an individualized approach to career construction curricula in order to better understand what influences student-athletes as they explore, choose, and prepare for their professional career after sport (Navarro et al., 2019). Understanding specific life experiences and exploratory behaviors that influence the process, or lack thereof, of career construction could help shape future initiatives of career development programs. This research intends to inform practice by emphasizing the importance of preventing student-athletes from developing habits void of career exploration and construction, which could lead to lack of narrative growth and expression during their transition to life after sports.

## Research Questions

In accordance to the vernacular utilized by Rehfuss (2009) in his original development of the FCA, the narrative terms “constructed” and “fulfilled” will be introduced in the following research questions. “Constructed” refers to the amount of words individuals produced in their FCA, and the term “fulfilled” refers to the amount and specific types of themes identified in their FCA (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012). For the purpose of this research, the construct of career exploration is comprised of only three specific types of in-depth exploration: network, self, and advanced (Wendling, 2019). “Overall exploration” in the research questions below addresses the three types of in-depth career exploration collectively.

The first phase of this dissertation addressed the following research question:

- Research Question 1: Is the FCA a valid instrument to assess student-athletes in the context of NCAA Division I sports? That is, do student-athletes portray the same thematic constructs in their FCAs as demonstrated in previous literature and/or do they introduce any athlete-specific themes in their narratives?

The following mixed methods research questions were addressed in the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data sets:

- Research Question 2: Do student-athletes with high levels of overall career exploration portray more constructed and fulfilled FCAs?
- Research Question 2a: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce significantly more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?
- Research Question 2b: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?
- Research Question 2c: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal a more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?
- Research Question 2d: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?

## **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter 2 examines the literature that explains the history and impact of career development and exploration on the transition process for elite athletes to life after sport. The five theoretical approaches of analyzing career transitions are reviewed, and an emphasis is placed on the theoretical perspectives of career adjustment and identity development transitions. Focusing on career adjustment and identity development allows this research to address the impact of external institutional and social barriers along with internal personal and psychological adjustments made by elite athlete as they transition to life after sport. Student-athletes' potential struggle to construct their desired career after retirement from sport is further explored through the theoretical underpinnings of career construction as used in the FCA (Rehfuss, 2009) and career exploration as defined in the CIDI (Wendling, 2019).

An important argument will be made in Chapter 2 for the use of curricula in higher education that is based on career exploration and construction, which could potentially facilitate the sport career transition process of student-athletes who often struggle to properly cope and adapt to a new career outside of sport (Chow, 2001; Muscat, 2010; Stronach & Adiar, 2010; Swain, 1991). It is later suggested that future researchers and practitioners of student-athlete and career development would benefit from applying a career construction framework to improve the transition process for collegiate student-athletes and empirically evaluate career development programming.

Chapter 3 provides a methodological overview of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design utilized in this research, the theoretical framework and reasoning behind using FCA and CIDI as exploratory instrumentation with the population of collegiate student-athletes, and an outline of the data collection and analysis procedures. Research questions are also highlighted before outlining the qualitative and quantitative methodologies for this research

plans to further validate the CIDI and expand the FCA with the specific population of student-athletes.

Chapter 4 addresses the qualitative methodology employed in phase one of the research. Chapter 4 focuses on the participants, the narrative data collection process, trustworthiness, researcher positionality, and the qualitative data analysis process. Chapter 5 presents the qualitative findings from the student-athletes' narratives and further validates the FCA by and highlighting each previously identified Quality of Life and Occupational Desire theme. New Sport Career Transition themes are also identified and analyzed to provide additional insight into the student-athlete career construction process.

Chapter 6 describes the quantitative methodology utilized and phase two of the research. Chapter 6 addresses the data collection and analysis methods before addressing the quantitative results and each corresponding research question in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 presents the mixed findings from both qualitative and quantitative studies and provides implications for student-athlete development programming and curricula. Recommendations for future research, potential limitations, and a series of implications for practice are also provided.



## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Origins of Career Development Theory**

Career development originated in primarily Western countries during the mid-to-late 1800s. Rapid social and economic development emerged during urbanization, industrialization, and immigration (Young & Domene, 2018). These societal changes brought on rising social and economic inequality, which called for achieving socially-just employment outcomes for potentially disenfranchised individuals. Carolyn Chisholm was the first documented individual to address these inequalities in the 1840s by providing career placement services for immigrant women arriving in Australia from England (Young & Domene, 2018). Her career assistance was a catalyst for the formation of the term vocational guidance within the newly cultivated field soon to be coined, career development. Chisholm's work made vocational guidance a standard force of civic and moral conduct (Brewer, 1918) which drove the development of individuals and society.

The commencement of the field of career development started with social reformer, Frank Parsons. He founded the Vocation Bureau in Boston in 1908 and wrote one of the earliest theoretical pieces in vocational guidance, *Choosing a Vocation* (Parsons, 1909). Parsons was a spark for a myriad of theories that proposed explanations of career development constructs like “personal traits, developmental stages over time, the career decisions-making process, the career learning process, and contextual influences on career development” (Young & Domene, 2018, p. 23). The sociohistorical context of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is reflected in the discipline's foundational theories of career development, and although thorough, these foundational theories are not entirely comprehensive in addressing the constructs and dynamic processes of career development in today's quickly evolving society. The 21<sup>st</sup> century brought rapid economic and

social change, and career scholars wondered how they could position the field to help a wildly diverse, complex, and newly shaped world. Innovative theories began to surface that could accommodate the contemporary world, and the multifaceted phenomena of career development began to project that work and life were now inseparable.

### **The Evolution and Categorization of Career Development Theory**

Career development is concerned with how individuals position themselves into the continually changing context of their lives, and how they navigate the interaction and progression of their personal and professional roles. The conceptualization of career development has mimicked physical sciences and borrowed perspectives from life-span psychology (Savickas, 1997; Super, 1994) and social learning theory (Krumboltz, 1979), but it has been refined through the lens of vocational psychology.

One of the earliest theoretical contributors to career development was Frank Parsons, who pioneered career assessment and counseling by providing vocational guidance to young, poor, and disadvantaged individuals through the use of a tripartite model. This model is the foundation of present-day career development theories and encompasses the following:

“a clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations, and other qualities; a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; the true reasoning on the relation of these two groups of facts” (Parsons, 1909, p. 5).

This tripartite model encouraged individuals to match their self-knowledge to an understanding of the work world in order to arrive at a career decision. This process of matching reinforced the person-environment fit approach that has made a lasting impact on career development.

A brief collaboration between Parsons and Hugo Munsterberg, the founder of applied psychology and the first theory of vocation, marked the beginning of career development and its association with the discipline of psychology (Young & Domene, 2018). Psychological career

theory has made substantial contribution to career development through the veins of vocational and organizational psychology, but other fields including anthropology, economics, education, political science, and sociology (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) have also helped strengthen the understanding of career development.

The rapid expansion of vocational psychology and proliferation of career theories drove career development scholars towards an attempt of categorizing them. Patton and McMahon (2014) suggested that theories could be categorized into four distinct fractions: theories of content, theories of process, theories of content and process, and theories of wider explanations. The best-known theory of content is that of John Holland (1959), who created the RIASEC model of vocational choice based on personality (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional) and person-environment fit. He developed the Self-Directed Search (SDS), which is one the world's most predominant career assessments. It categorizes individuals into one of the six personality types and matches them to specific occupations. He believed that individuals seek out work environments that are congruent with their personality type, and that the stronger the match between individual's personality type and their work environment, the more successful they will be. This matching paradigm faces several limitations due to its assumption that the environment and individual are steady and fixed, rationality drives decisions, the best decision-making style is based in logical reasoning, only one best decision is available, career development occurs in a structured step-by-step process, and that indecision is unfavorable and decidedness is desirable (Pryor & Bright, 2011). In reality, individuals rarely have access to all available information about themselves and their environment before they make decisions that are logical and or rational.

There was a shift in the 1950s away from the person-environment fit towards theory of process and lifespan career development. This movement was proposed by Donald Super, and his broader perspective of career development across a lifespan was the first to take into account the contextual location of career development and its inseparable relationship to life roles over time. His five-stages of self-concept (crystallization, specification, implementation, stabilization, and consolidation) have specific tasks and roles that individuals address and complete over time, and he depicts personal and contextual factors as influencers of career development. Lifespan perspectives of career development are unable to reply to the shifting world of work where stability in employment has generally declined and a globalizing labor market has pushed individuals to seek meaning and balance of priorities in and through work (Pryor & Bright, 2011).

Theories of content and process were later addressed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by Roe (1957) and Krumboltz (1979). Roe was the forerunner on studying the relationship between occupational behavior, personality, and career choice from a parent-child perspective. She was the first scholar to inspire Holland (1959) as she developed an occupational classification system that acknowledged a broad array of variables that could influence career development. Krumboltz (1979) created the social learning theory of career decision making (SLTCDM), which stated that direct and indirect experiences help individuals learn about themselves, their personal preferences, and the world of work. These experiences help them make decisions and take actions in career development based on their learning. This theory acknowledges four groups of factors that strongly influence the career development and decision-making process: genetic endowment and special abilities, environmental conditions and events, learning experiences, and task approach skills (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Contemporary theories of wider explanations emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century during a period of rapid change in an increasingly complex and diverse society. Scholars began to call for collaborative considerations about the future direction of career theory and psychology (Savickas & Lent, 1994; Savickas, 2000). New interdisciplinary theories began to emerge with a desire to understand a holistic, comprehensive view of an individual's experience (social cognitive career theory; Lent et al., 1994) through a constructivist lens to highlight language, context, and social interactions.

Mark Savickas embodied this contemporary, constructivist, and developmental lens through his creation of career construction theory (CCT). Savickas was interested in how individuals were guided by personally constructed meaning in their lives, or life themes, in order to make career choices. He also wondered how individuals created meaningful careers by imposing their life themes on what they do during work. He proposed that identification of these life themes helped individuals seek out and engage in work activities that allowed them to live out those life themes and make intentional career choices through heightened self-awareness.

### **Career Construction Theory: A Modern Approach to Career Development Theory**

Vocational psychology houses two main perspectives of an “individual differences” view of occupations, and an “individual development” view of careers (Savickas, 2000). Frank Parsons (1909) pioneered the first movement of vocational psychology and “individual differences” by introducing how stable traits or personality types could be systematically matched based on abilities and interest to specific occupations. Donald Super (1953) was interested in “individual development” and the themes that unfolded in an individual's work life narrative. He wanted to know how a person-centered method of developed self-concept shaped the career process throughout a life course. Both the differential and developmental perspectives of vocational behavior focus on how individuals fit into different occupations at a particular

point in their lives, but the developmental perspective is additionally concerned with how people fit work into their lives.

Savickas adhered to Super's conviction that work can be observed and understood as the implementation of self-concept. CCT is predicated on three foundational components of vocational behavior: vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes. Savickas (2005) described an individual's career trajectory as being informed by personal meaning, past memories, present experiences, and future career and life aspirations. Savickas assumed a theoretical lens of social constructionism while also drawing on McAdams (1995) work on identity and individual differences to express the three core components of CCT: self as an actor through vocational personality, an agent in adaptability, and an author in developing life themes.

### **Self as an Actor: Vocational Personality and Individual Differences**

Personalities are informed by individuals through interaction with their families and further developed by integration within their communities and educational systems. The first component of CCT, self as an actor, explains how individuals create their vocational personality "type" and solidify their individual difference within a social context (Savickas, 2013).

Vocational personality is defined as "an individual's career related abilities, needs, values, and interest" (Savickas, 2005, p. 47). Individual differences in vocational personality are used in CCT to augment the person-environment fit model, RIASEC, which was originally developed by Holland (1997) for the purpose of matching people to occupations. Although decontextualized and abstract, RIASEC is useful for vocational best-fit assessments for both the person and the environment by identifying available skills, interest, values, and abilities necessary for successfully enacting work roles (Savickas, 2005).

The person-environment fit model (Holland, 1997; Lofquist & Dawis, 1991) was the catalyst for Savickas (2005) to shift developmental focus toward a subjective, personal,

implementation of vocational personality. Person-environment fit theory suggests that reoccurrence of an individual's social behavior is due to personality structure, which is governed by traits. Traits were originally used to assign individuals to work roles in group dynamics as they were viewed as entities that could ascribe a level of potential resources to a group (Hogan & Holland, 2003). This objective perspective on personality and vocational traits neglects subjective experiences of individuals, and it dismisses an appreciation of behavior from the individual's point of view.

### **Self as an Agent: Career Adaptability and Developmental Differences**

The second component of CCT, self as an agent, explains how individuals become self-regulating as they pursue goals and adapt to vocational tasks, transitions, and traumas (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Today's society no longer provides a stable and orderly environment for work, and its turbulent structure forces individuals to interact with and respond to a large array of external factors during the process of personal and career development (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The shift from a factory-based industrial society towards a technological knowledge-based society prompted the need for individuals to become adaptable. Career adaptability focuses on how individuals cope with development tasks and learn necessary skills to navigate social and structural context factors (Savickas, 2005), which could potentially influence their career aspirations and expectations (Taylor et al., 2018). Career adaptability manifests when individuals are concerned about their future as a working professional, have growing personal control over their vocational future, display curiosity through exploration of other possible future selves and experiences, and actively strengthen their confidence to pursue their aspirations (Savickas, 2005).

Career concern about vocational future is the most vital dimension of career adaptability, and it displays a planful attitude and future orientation through remembering vocational past,

considering the vocational present, and anticipating the vocational future (Savickas, 2005). Depleted career concern is called career indifference, which reflects “planlessness” and pessimism when thinking about the future. Career control over vocational future means that individuals feel autonomous in their decision making and believe that they are responsible for constructing their career through practicing attitudes of assertiveness and decisiveness while engage in vocational development tasks (Savickas et al., 2009). Career indecision is a lack of career control and is displayed through an inability to choose or practice decisive attitudes. Career curiosity is an attitude of inquisitiveness and desire to engage in career exploration to discover the best fit between self and the work world (Savickas, 2005). Unrealism, or an inaccurate representation about the world and self-image, are often a product of insufficient career exploration and curiosity. Career confidence addresses feelings of self-efficacy and anticipatory success concerning one’s ability to effectively overcome obstacles and execute tasks needed to make educational and vocational decisions (Savickas, 2005). Career inhibition thwarts one’s achievement of career goals when career confidence is lacking.

Individuals develop and progress along the four dimensions of career adaptability at different rates, and they can regress in their development when they do not engage in activities to strengthen those psychological resources. Delays in the development of career adaptability resources can cause problems in the solidification of career preferences and specifying occupational choices (Savickas et al., 2009). Comparing development among the four career adaptability dimensions allows career practitioners to assess and identify difficulties in their clients’ vocational decision-making, and it provides personalized strategies for their clients in addressing career readiness and available resources.



## **Self as an Author: Life Themes and Dynamic Development**

The third component of CCT, self as author, is described as integrating actions and agency into building an individualized identity supported by life themes (Savickas, 2013). Life themes, the narrative component of CCT, address the why of career and vocational behavior. The dynamic structure of careers is unveiled through uniquely contextualized stories, which “tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow” (Savickas, 2005, p. 58). CCT utilizes life themes and self-concept to complement the objective perspective of vocational personality and adaptability. Life themes address an individual’s subjective view of themselves, their surrounding world, and how they elicit meaning from both. Career stories, which are a culmination of life themes, fully contextualize the self in a time, place, and role while expressing the uniqueness of the context for that individual person. Creating career stories help individuals make an active attempt of shaping their future. Sharing career stories reinforces current goals and motivates individuals to take action. These personal conceptions and feelings of self, work, and life uncover purpose, which is the woven fabric of life themes controlling behavior, explaining reoccurring social behavior, maintaining coherence of identity, and aiding in anticipation of future action (Savickas, 2005; 2010).

Savickas and colleagues (2009) believe that individuals are able to communicate their self-understanding through expressing their vocational preferences, entering a specific occupation, and preserving in a stabilized occupation. Work, in this instance, is an imperative context for the ongoing process of dynamic, human development. It provides individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, the opportunity to convey themselves in a meaningful way and make an impact on their surrounding community. Career scholars and practitioners have taken interest in the continuously changing and unpredictable environment of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and they have directed their attention toward understanding how individuals move

through and handle the career development process while simultaneously transitions from one profession to the next.

### **Shift Happens: Career Development and Transitions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Human experience fluctuates between stability, slowed change, and blatant change (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The 21<sup>st</sup> century has experienced a rate of change accelerating much faster than previous centuries, and technological advances, globalization, and the rise of foreign economic powers are a constant reminder that work practices and careers are subject to continuous and unpredictable change. Humans struggle with uncertainty and change when they do not have total control, and this is particularly true during inherently complex life transitions in a world that is far from simple, certain, or predictable.

According to the human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981), transition has been classified as “an event or non-event, which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5). Transitions frequently are accompanied by major life changes and stressors that place individuals under pressure to adjust. Three factors will determine how an individual adjusts to a transition: a) their positive or negative perception of the transition, b) the differences between the pre- and post-transition environment, and the c) demographic characteristics of the individual (Schlossberg, 1981).

Individuals face a variety of transitions in their life including educational transitions and professional career transitions. Career transition has been defined as “the period during which an individual is either changing roles (taking on different objective role) or changing orientation to a role already held (altering subjective state)” (Louis, 1980, p. 330). Organizational entry, turnover, retirement, job loss, and transition from corporate employee to entrepreneur or retirement are all examples of studied career transitions (Sullivan & Ariss, 2019). Current

research addresses that people are making more professional transitions between occupations, businesses, geographical regions, and labor markets (Sullivan & Ariss, 2019), and postmodern worker's behaviors lead them to simultaneously transition across multiple boundaries (O'Neil & Jepsen, 2019).

Transition and change are related to movement or shift (Pryor & Bright, 2011), and it has been argued that movement and change are the defining quality of human life and interaction (Savickas, 2002; 2005). There is an abundance of empirical evidence of shifts happening in career trajectories (Pryor & Bright, 2011) and how it may even positively contribute to job satisfaction (Jepsen & Choudhuri, 2001). Movement and shift have been relatively neglected in the field of career development as theories have focused on "career as a fit" (Parsons, 1909; Holland, 1997). Career development models and interventions should focus on an individual's ability to shift and be adaptable in life-long learning and life transitions (Savickas et al., 2009). Career development should be seen as a lifespan phenomenon (Savickas, 2005; Patton and McMahon, 2014) involving an ongoing process of decision-making and transitions. The path of career development is constantly evolving in forward, backward, multidirectional, and multi-levelled movements. This calls upon career researchers and practitioners to utilize the development framework of CCT (Savickas, 2005) in order to foster career adaptability, encourage imaginative thinking, and promote the exploration of possible future selves (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019; Savickas et al., 2009; Oyserman et al., 2006).

### **Career Transition Perspectives and Empirical Support for Career Construction**

Five theoretical approaches of career transitions frame current empirical research: career stages, decision-making, adjustment, relational, and identity perspectives (Sullivan & Ariss, 2019). The career stages perspective is built on the idea that career transitions can be observed as predictable events as individuals move from one instance of development to another throughout

their career (Sullivan & Crocitto, 2007). An example of this can be seen in Super's (1957) life stage model as individuals move in a sequence through exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. The decision-making perspective is concerned with determining what factors influence an individual's process of decision making when they are given career transition opportunities. An example of this can be observed in studying individuals' decisions to retire or tracking an organization's turnover (Stanley et al., 2017). The adjustment perspective acknowledges how people adapt to career transition in non-discrete stages over time.

Personal characteristics (Schlossberg, 1981), adaptation strategies (Ashford & Taylor, 1990), and organization tactics of ensuring person-environment fit (Wanous, 1992) are all examples of empirical interest in career transition adjustment. The relational perspective is derived from the idea that career transitions are socially embedded and how work and non-work domains influence decisions, engagement, and adjustment to career transitions (Motulsky, 2010). The identity perspective focuses on the idea that an individual's evolving narrative of self-exploration, feelings, and actions can trigger a career transition (McAdams, 1995). Career transitions also have the ability to trigger changes in identity (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016), and some researchers have acknowledged this shift as an "identity customization process" as they shape their identity to fit work (Pratt et al., 2006). For the purpose of keeping this literature review concise, the career adjustment and identity theoretical perspective will be the main interests of empirical advancement of current day career development. Theoretical career development models have shifted to emphasize that a rapidly changing environment requires individuals to be flexible, life-long, and adaptable learners (Savickas et al., 2009).

There has been an abundance of empirical work regarding human adaptation to career transitions. The adjustment perspective of career transition literature suggest that individuals will

proactively change their role to better match themselves or alter their identities and values to better match their situation (Nicholson, 1984; Sullivan & Ariss, 2019). Savickas' (2005) CCT is a lifespan approach that details how individuals continuously adapt to obtain subjective (e.g., satisfaction) and objective (e.g., salary) career success. Career adaptability, which is a core psychological construct of CCT, is the conglomerate of competencies an individual utilizes to manage changes and transitions in the environment of work (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Adaptability resources of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence can be seen as a form of human capital and can accumulate over time with gained experiences, knowledge, and education (Sullivan & Ariss, 2019). Personal factors (Schlossberg, 1981), adaptation strategies (Ashford & Taylor, 1990), organizational tactics (Allen, 2006), and continuous adaptation (Savickas, 2005) have all been researched in an effort to reduce turnover and enhance employee adjustment during career transitions. There is a gap in current career transition literature regarding adjustment to lateral or downward transitions (Sullivan & Ariss, 2019). Career transition literature could also benefit from a better understanding of how the relationship between adaptability resources and career transitions vary amongst disenfranchised and understudied populations.

Current career theorist and practitioners have recognized that careers are no longer seen as a meta-narrative of predictable stages, but they are approached as individual, working scripts of self-concept and identity (Sullivan & Ariss, 2019). This has sparked 21<sup>st</sup> century career counseling to focus on a dynamic approach to the process of imaginative thinking and exploration of possible future selves (Oyserman et al., 2006). The identity perspective of career transition research has recognized that individuals will construct and test different "alternative selves" by learning from past and present experiences and receiving input from others (Ibarra,

2004). A three-phase model by Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014) has gained traction in identity transformation and career transition research by exploring how individuals detach from an old sense of self, address and solve inherent transition uncertainties, and invent a new sense of self during the transition process. There is a lack of understanding amongst researchers of how the career transition process can be influenced due to interplay among varying identities (Sullivan & Ariss, 2019), and a more comprehensive understanding of career development could be cultivated by examining self-concept as the dynamic interaction between multiple identities and the surrounding environment.

Envisioning the future is a pivotal piece of self-concept (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976), and many young adults struggle with current needs, responsibilities, and significant changes in the world of work conflicting with their ideal occupations (Eggerwein et al., 2004). The current climate of career transition and development has encouraged counselors to direct their client’s focus towards the future by promoting frequent exploration (Baillie, 1993; Rinehart, 2005), expectation of change (Coupland, 2015; Samuel et al., 2015; Stambulova, 2017; Stambulova et al., 2009), partaking in the act of futuring and day dreaming (Guichard, 2005; Lens et al., 2012; Maw, 1982; Oyserman et al., 2006; Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012; Ronkainen & Rybam 2019) and life-designing (Di Fabio, 2016; Hartung, & Taber, 2008; Lavalley, 2005; Ryba et al., 2015; Savickas, 2010; Savickas et al., 2009; Sools et al., 2015). An emphasis on future orientation and adaptability can facilitate a readiness, healthy awareness, and shift in perspective regarding career and non-career related transition issues.

Career development researchers and practitioners have directed their attention towards forms of narrative inquiry as a primary factor in conceptualizing a career. A narrative has the ability to crystalize and enhance an individual’s holistic story through their shared qualitative

and subjective engagement with their career. The goal of a narrative is to gain insight into the personal and social stories derived from life experiences and prioritized by individuals. An individual's narrative has the power to influence their lifespan development (Evered, 1977; Maw, 1982; Rehfuss, 2009), and reflect their core constructs, values, and self-concepts. Narrative inquiry, coupled with the theoretical perspective of adaptation and identity formation during career transition, could particularly be useful in the population of elite-level athletes. Athletes transition from various seasons and phases throughout their lives in either a predictable or unpredictable manner, and these transitions are often accompanied by a powerful shift in self-identity and redirection of energy and self-exploration (Chow, 2001).

### **The Nature of Sport Career Transitions for Elite Athletes**

Very few careers stop providing opportunities by the age of 25, that is unless you are an elite or professional athlete. There are two types of transitions athletes will face throughout their athletic career: normative transitions and non-normative transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Normative transitions, which are normally predictable and anticipated, occur when athletes exit one stage of a developmental process and enter the next (Schlossberg, 1981). An example of a normative transitions for an athlete would be transitioning from junior varsity to varsity, or from amateur to professional status (Knights et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 1981). Non-normative transitions are usually a result of important events that are unpredictable, unanticipated, involuntary, and do not occur according to a set plan or schedule (Schlossberg, 1994; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Athletes experience non-normative transitions when they have a career-ending injury or unexpectedly get cut from a team. Non-normative transitions also happen in the form of "non-events" (Schlossberg, 1981), which are transitions that are expected or hoped for and do not happen. A non-event for an athlete would be when they cannot participate in a major sporting event, like the Olympic Games, even after they prepare for the

event for years (Knights et al., 2016). Athletes will inevitably face both types of transitions throughout their career, which are also entangled with the context in which they occur.

The developmental nature of an athletic career can be seen through predictable, normative transitions between stages (Stambulova, 1994; 2012): “beginning of sport specialization, transition to intensive training in chosen sport, transition to high-achievement in sports and adult sports, transition from amateur sports to professional sport, transition from culmination to the end of the sport career, and end of sport career” (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004, p. 510). Athletes also face nonathletic transitions during the developmental stages and lifecycle of their athletic career. This interactive nature of normative and non-normative transitions encourages a holistic, developmental approach to career transitions for athletes. For example, on the vocational level, only 3% of college athletes will enter the transition from amateur sports to professional sports in the United States (Leonard, 1996; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Due to such a low percentage of athletes transitioning to the next development stage in their sport career, a large majority of athletes will have to enter the work force. An intense focus on their sport career inhibits some athletes from spending time and resources on career exploration and development. Athletes can experience “occupational delay” (Naul, 1994) at the beginning of their professional occupation outside of sport, and they could also potentially experience lack of relevant professional skills and the network necessary for vocational success (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) when their sport career ends.

Retirement from elite-level sport can be a prolonged, traumatic, and difficult experience for athletes (Stronach & Adair, 2010; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001). Research has identified that elite athletes can experience severe financial hardships, miss connection and camaraderie with a team, undergo suppressed life satisfaction and self-esteem, display increased symptoms of depression



and pathological behaviors, and experience anxiety about career decision making (Butt & Molnar, 2009; Lavalley et al., 1995; Stronach & Adair, 2010). Current career transition research struggles to move away from negative ramifications of retirement from sport or focus on athletes flourishing through career transitions out of sport (Knights et al., 2016). Some athletes do report healthy and positive experiences during their transition due to proactive transition planning (Coakley, 1983; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007).

There is a mutual agreement among researchers that proactive planning has the capability to make the retirement out of elite sport more comfortable, manageable, and successful (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988; Stronach & Adair, 2010). An abundance of research on career transition has addressed the importance of well-being of athletes during their athletic careers (Knights et al., 2016), but future career transition research could benefit from investigating how athlete support systems can positively affect the quality of transition to post-sport life and careers. Researchers and practitioners should address how proactive career transition planning in the form of personal and career development interventions can make the transition process out of elite sport more manageable and enjoyable for athletes.

### **Personal and Career Development as a Means to Navigate Sport Career Transitions**

A systematic review of athletes' career transitions out of sport (Park et al., 2013) identified six empirical studies from 1968 until the end of 2010 that addressed career and personal life skill development. All six studies indicated positive associations between personal and career development and improved quality of sport career transitions for elite athletes. For example, former professional athletes experienced transition difficulties and delayed identity shifts while in non-sporting situations (Muscat, 2010), and elite athletes attributed their thwarted personal development and narrow life choices post-sport due to the limitation of personal exploration during their sport career (Chow, 2001; Stronach & Adair, 2010; Swain, 1991).

Researchers have identified that the personal and life skill development have the ability to influence identity development and successful transitions of elite athletes (Kane, 1991; Muscat, 2010). Kane (1991) studied the experience of elite athletes and their significant others after they retired from professional sports, and he found that these normative transitions have the ability to negatively affect the identity of both the athlete and their significant other, and that the stressors of finding a new career after sport can negatively impact their commitment of marriage. Results of the study indicated that factors of control and social support must be dealt with at levels of self and career before a successful retirement from sport can be achieved. Muscat (2010) investigated non-normative transitions of career-ending injuries and the patterns of identity change in elite athletes. She identified that athletes experienced either ineffective or smooth transitions after a career-ending injury due to variables of internal resources, cognitive coping style, relational connections, and continuity with sport. She also found that athletes' autonomy, confidence and healthy relationships with coaches and teammates were associated with smooth transitions into retirement from sport.

Researchers have also unveiled a positive association between educational involvement, career planning and successful post-sport life adjustment in elite athletes (Chow, 2001; Lantz, 1995). Lantz's (1995) conceptual model characterized student-athletes' readiness to retire from sport due to four constructs: athletic identity, role conflict, future planning, and achievement satisfaction. He also identified that class rank (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) had a significant main effect on demonstrating higher levels of career development. Chow (2001) examined the transitional experience of elite female athletes who were going through the process of athletic retirement. Her research indicated that it is imperative that elite athletes have new career options before the transition process occurs, and that transitioning athletes need to have

support from both their institutional and formal networks in order to maintain feelings of self-worth during transition.

The process of career transition along with the necessary implementation of career development interventions have also been a focus of researchers to ensure a successful sport career transition for elite athletes (Stronach & Adair, 2010; Swain, 1991). Swain (1991) found that career transition from sport was a process, not simply a discrete event, that started directly after athletes became engaged in their sport career. This research was helpful in furthering the understanding of the career transitional process while also considering the context of the experience and how meaning changes over time for each athlete. Stronach and Adair (2010) expanded on this research by promoting educational and career exploration outside of sport as early as possible in the career transition process.

The empirical culmination of this sport-specific, career transition research makes it of no surprise that there is a significant relationship between struggling athletes transitioning out of their sport career and their inability to properly cope and adapt to a new career outside of sport. Future career development researchers and practitioners would benefit from applying a career construction framework to improve and evaluate the transition process of elite athletes. A lifespan approach to narrative identity and career adaptability, which are constructs of CCT (Savickas, 2005), could be used to explore how elite athletes associate their career role with their personal identity and how they become active agents in constructing their post-sport careers.

Savickas' (2005) CCT situates a holistic interpretation and representation of how individual explore, choose, and prepare for roles in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context. Members of the modern-day workforce often struggle delineating between their personal and career role identity (Savickas, 2002; Navarro, 2015a), which calls for a new approach to career development where

individuals are active agents in constructing their career. Career development programming should reflect that individuals are dynamically changing, adapting to their environments, and developing as they create their life and career trajectories (Savickas, 2002).

Empirical research grounded in CCT in the context of sport has previously addressed the negative correlation between the passage of Title IX and the percentage of women in administrative leadership positions (Taylor et al., 2018), implications and recommendations for student-athlete affairs practitioners who engage with students during their process of career exploration and major choice (Navarro, 2015), factors facilitating the decline in female assistant and associate athletic directors (Hancock & Hums, 2016), understanding dual career pathways of transnational athletes (Ryba et al., 2015), and how career counseling requirements need to be updated to establish a positive future perspective to strengthen athletes' career adaptability and resiliency in the face of adversities (Rokaninen & Ryba, 2019). Growth of CCT could help extend career development theory further through specific considerations of the word career, and whose career development is account for in the context of sport. For example, focusing on the specific career transition needs of student-athlete learners in the context of sport and higher education could expand career development theory to a potentially disenfranchised population.

### **Career Development of Student-Athletes in Division I Intercollegiate Athletics**

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic departments have surfaced during the 1900s and 21<sup>st</sup> century as multimillion-dollar operations rooted within higher education institutions (Navarro et al., 2019). The highly commercialized Division I athletic system, in particular, has required student-athletes to develop as highly competitive, winning athletes on the field while simultaneously preparing to transition into society and the work force upon graduation (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Those same student-athletes are also responsible

for driving some of the highest grossing spectator sporting events through the NCAA, which is a non-profit organization that grosses around \$11 billion every year.

Student-athletes' preparation for life after sport has become increasingly popular in student affairs literature over the last 20 years (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Croissant, 2001; Harrison et al., 2009; Miller & Kerr, 2003). There is a pressing need to better understand and support collegiate student-athletes considering nearly half a million student-athletes competed on more than 19,000 teams in the NCAA during the 2017-18 academic year (NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Database, 2018). Student-athletes' "amateur" and "educational" status should not overshadow the importance of developing their translatable vocational identity and career adaptability through their current sport careers.

College is a critical span of time for students to construct career paths and plan for life after graduation by intentionally exploring, investing, and preparing for the career field (Navarro, 2014). They also need to build an enhanced sense of personal identity through engaging with their support systems and campus communities (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Navarro, 2014). Student-athletes at Division I institutions have been found to spend well over 40 hours per week immersed in athletic related activities (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009), which immediately puts them at a disadvantage during their process of career construction in comparison to their nonathlete peers. The heightened academic and athletic tensions for student-athletes within presents an opportunity for student affairs researchers to explore what student-athlete experience over their personal and sport career lifespan and identify what is most influential during their process of their career exploration, preparation, and choice (Navarro, 2014).

Undergraduate students go through an immense amount of psychosocial and personal development while adjusting to the new environment of college and simultaneously sustaining

their personal identities (Keup, 2007). This “ultimate reality check” (Keup, 2007), which often occurs during crucial life transitions, can shape students’ personal identities and potentially the outcome of their lives after graduation (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). Purposeful college experiences facilitated by student affairs professionals have the ability to positively shape students’ life after graduation (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009), but research is sparse in understanding the unique needs and experiences of collegiate student-athletes as they explore career alternatives, partake in life-design planning, and prepare for their transition out of collegiate sport (Navarro, 2014).

External challenges of academic clustering and power dynamics between coaches and athletes (Renick, 1974; Fountain & Finley, 2009), internal challenges of role conflict and purposeful engagement in higher education experiences (Adler & Adler, 1987; Lapchick, 2006; Miller & Keer, 2003; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009), and transition programming (Goddard, 2004) can impact student-athletes' abilities to explore, choose, and prepare for meaningful careers during their time in college (Navarro, 2014). These external and internal barriers for student-athletes elicit a need for additional support as they prepare for their transition out of college sport and into the real world or work. Transitioning into adulthood is viewed as a difficult, transformational (Brown et al., 2000) and foundational period of identity development for anyone.

To combat these barriers and transition challenges in the young adult population, the NCAA has recognized their responsibility of employing an initiative to support the 97% of their student-athletes who are “going pro” in something other than sport. A specific mandate passed in 1991 by the NCAA required athletic departments to support student-athletes personally and professionally as they prepared for their outside of their sport careers (NCAA, 2011). In 2010,

the NCAA recognized and publicized the importance of providing holistic career construction initiatives for student-athletes by merging all student-welfare programs (CHAMPS/Life Skills) into the Student-Athlete Affairs division (NCAA, 2011). This merger and restructuring of the Student-Athlete Affairs division has caused athletics practitioners to shift their approaches to preparing student-athletes for their post-sport career and life. Due to this shift, there is a visible need to further understand the student-athlete population and what resources and support they require as they transition to life after college and sport (Navarro, 2014). Academic affairs and athlete development professionals need to be equipped with empirical research related to career exploration and construction patterns of student-athletes to properly counsel them as they enter a competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century job market and volatile economy (NCAA, 2011).

### **Facilitating Identity and Career Development Through Career Exploration**

As previously mentioned, transitioning into adulthood and the professional world of work is viewed as a transformational and foundational period of identity development (Brown et al., 2000). Making identity formation related decisions is based on two individualized dimensions of exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1966). Exploration refers to when individuals are actively considering identity alternatives during periods of crisis. Engaging with various and meaningful identity alternatives through trying new activities and active questioning allows individuals to sort through potential life plans and identities of interest. Commitment signifies that individuals have selected one or more identity alternatives while exercising a degree of effort and engagement with those identities in their daily lives. Direction and purpose solidify an individual's commitment, which is illustrated through a "stable set of goals, values, and beliefs" (Kunnen & Metz, 2015, p. 117).

Exploration and commitment are central processes to identity functioning and statuses (Marcia 1996). Identity formation and concerns are addressed through exploration and

commitment in various domains such as work, political beliefs, religious views, and sex role expression. According to Marcia (1996), there are four modes of identity resolutions that are derived from specific levels (present or absent) of exploration and commitment. Each of Marcia's four identity statuses of achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion represent different coping styles when faced with identity crises experienced during life transitions (Marcia, 1996).

Highly engaged and committed individuals are labeled as achieved as they have actively explored and considered options within identity concerns and made a firm commitment to an explored option. Previous experiences and periods of identity crises help achieved individuals remain flexible and employ stable commitments while not being easily swayed by external pressures (Wendling, 2019).

The presence of commitment but absence of exploration leads to the status of foreclosure as individuals are firmly committed to their first seriously considered option. This identity concern option is usually advocated for by close friends, role models, relatives, or authority figures, which causes a foreclosed individuals' satisfaction and happiness to be fragile under their compliance and conformity to societal and mainstream norms and expectations (Wendling, 2019). Driven by approval from others coupled with a lack of autonomy makes foreclosed individuals vulnerable to any changes and challenges they may face in the future. A rigid, fragile identity structure facilitates rejection or defensive behavior when faced with disconfirming information, shame, or guilt (Wendling, 2019).

In contrast, the presence of exploration but absence of commitment in various life domains leads to the identity status of moratorium. Considering various identity alternatives coupled with an absence of meaningful commitments can lead to an identity crisis and inability



to make decisions about goals, values, and beliefs in numerous life domains (Wendling, 2019). A lack of direction can potentially lead to perpetual rumination and an inability to successfully make decisions about identity options (Wendling, 2019).

The absence of both firm commitments and desire to explore identity options leads to the status of diffusion. Lack of internal self-definition and ineffective exploration may lead diffused individuals to be prone to making decisions based on external pressures and expectations to address identity domain concerns (Wendling, 2019). Feelings of emptiness and isolation are hidden behind diffused individuals' abilities to be flexible and adaptable to their external context. External pressures and expectations drive them to be superficially well-adjusted and live a life lacking meaning, purpose, and happiness.

High degrees of commitment can be seen in both achievement and foreclosure identity statuses, but these statuses differ in the extent individuals explored before making commitment to identity options. Achieved individuals are viewed as having more "constructed" identities and foreclosed individuals have more "conferred" identities (Marcia, 1993, p. 7). Moratorium and diffused individuals both engage in low degrees of commitment but, but individuals in moratorium actively participate in systematic identity exploration in comparison to diffused individuals. Individuals in moratorium have more direction in the exploration efforts than diffused individuals (Kroger & Marica, 2011) while diffused individuals are influenced and guided by external pressures. Diffused individuals are more likely to progress into the status of foreclosed while individuals in moratorium can progress into the achievement status when deciding to engage in commitment.

The progressive, normative course of identity change in young adults, like collegiate student-athletes, could be observed though initially diffused individuals having no commitments

or desire to explore identity options. These individuals could progressively begin to make commitments that are justified through figures of authority with little exploration of their own (foreclosed), or they could continually explore identity options as opposed to prematurely making a commitment (moratorium). The ultimate goal of identity growth is to reach the status of achieved through meaningful commitments and active engagement with identity exploration (Marcia, 1976). Marcia's assumption of the almost linear evolution of identity statuses does not pay credit to the underlying progressive and regressive shifts during the process of identity development (Kunnen & Metz, 2015).

An effort to better describe the process of identity development can be seen in extended models of Marcia's identity status paradigm (e.g., three-factor identity model; Crocetti et al., 2008). These extended models frame commitment and exploration as identity work processes facilitating identity development as opposed to commitment being the outcome of the exploration process. For the purpose of keeping this literature review concise and relevant to the current study, the process of exploration will be the focus of the remaining review.

Human exploratory behavior has been classified into three dimensions: diversive versus specific, extrinsic versus intrinsic, and inspective versus inquisitive (Berlyne, 1960). Crocetti and colleagues (2008) addressed specific (in-depth) exploration in their extended three-factor identity model, which is comprised of three dimensions: commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsidering of commitment. Individuals engage in in-depth exploration through evaluation, reflection, and maintenance of previously chosen commitments while also gathering additional information on those commitments through supplementary information and informal conversations with others (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015). During in-depth exploration, individuals match their personal standards to identity commitments through deep exploration and re-

evaluation of existing commitments (Kunnen & Metz, 2015). Individuals closely monitor and strengthen existing commitments during in-depth exploration, or they will alter their existing commitments if they are found unsatisfactory (Waterman, 2015).

Identity formation is fruitful with apprehension and concern especially when making an occupational choice. Wendling (2019) contributed to identity status literature and understanding the identity development processes, particularly in the identity dimension of career, through the creation of the Career Identity Development Inventory (CIDI). An incorporation of vocational psychology literature based on career exploration allowed her CIDI to address seven dimensions of career identity. Wendling (2019) proposed four dimensions of exploration - past career exploration in-breadth, current career exploration in-breadth, career exploration in-depth, and career identity confusion – and three dimensions of commitment – career commitments as labels, career commitments quality, and career commitments knowledge.

The process of exploration, which lies on a continuum of exploration in-breadth (diversive exploration) to exploration in-depth (specific exploration), has been emphasized by vocational psychology scholars as the foundation of identity work (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Porfeli & Skorikov, 2010). Exploration is also a commonly used and studied mechanism in career development literature (Parsons, 1909; Patton & Poreli, 2007; Super, 1957), and has been previously studied as a predictor of career development indicators such as job satisfaction (Stumpf & Hartman, 1984), vocational identity and development (Blustein et al., 1989; Vondracek & Skorikov, 1997), and career decision making (Blustein, 1989). Although these indicators are theoretically predicted to have moderate to strong associations with career development, empirical research has exposed these relationships to be weak to modest at best (Patton & Poreli, 2007) due to mainly cross-sectional data and designs.

Career exploration helps individuals pursue meaningful careers through knowing one's self, their current work context, and how both can cooperate to achieve desired personal and professional outcomes (Jordaan, 1963). Actively engaging in career exploration means individuals (a) determine who they are and what they need, (b) what work can satisfy and what jobs are appealing, and (c) how they can interact and exchange what they can offer with work in exchange for what they want and need (Porfeli & Skorikov, 2010). Jordaan (1963) created ten career exploration "dimensions," with the self-to-environment career exploration dimensions gaining a significant amount of empirical traction (Flum & Blustein, 2000; Stumpf et al., 1983; Robitschek & Woodson, 2006).

Two major sources of career exploration are the environment and self (Jiang et al., 2019), and exploring the world of work and oneself in-breadth and in-depth make it necessary to integrate both identity status paradigm and career development literature in understanding the process of identity development (Flum & Blustein, 2000). An empirical demonstration of this notation can be seen through an individual's decision-making process while choosing a career they will pursue after graduating from college (Hirschi & Läge, 2007).

Exploration in-breadth and in-depth have gained recognition in both the career exploration and identity development literature (Porfeli & Skorikov, 2010). The range of career interests, partialities, and prospects narrows as children process from in-breadth to in-depth career exploration during adolescence and young adulthood (Gati & Asher, 2001; Super, 1994). In-breadth career exploration happens early in the developmental course of career choice and is the process of focusing on stimulating careers while learning broadly about the self and the world of work. This process usually yields more glamorous career aspirations that are highly visible in entertainment media, desirable, and less aligned with personal characteristics. In-depth

career exploration is the process of simultaneously learning about the self and the world of work in order to achieve a clearer understanding of available and realistic careers that are aligned with specific skills, talents, values, and interest of the self. In-depth exploration can yield less visible and glamorous career options that are more closely aligned with personal and contextual characteristics and constraints (Wendling, 2019).

The behavioral component of career exploration is frequently neglected by existing identity status measurements due to their primary focus on cognitive functioning of career exploration (Wendling, 2019). Waterman's (2015) critique of current identity status measures addresses the absence of and need for a measurement of commitment-related activity, which would address the behavioral aspect of exploration in-depth. Wendling (2019) addressed this gap by creating activity-related items of both exploration in-depth and in-breadth to reflect behavioral components of the exploration. Activity-related items of exploration in-breadth would be associated with "activity directed toward gathering of information" (Marcia et al., 1993, p. 162), and items related to exploration in-depth would be associated with "activity directed toward implementing the chosen identity element" (Marcia et al., 1993, p. 164). Wendling (2019) illustrated activity-related items by integrating exploratory activities/behaviors, cognitions, and exploration of environment and self (p. 90) that differ by broad (in-breadth) and deeply focused (in-depth) initiatives. Only career exploration in-depth is addressed for the purpose of keeping review relevant.

Career exploration in-depth measures the extent to which individuals have actively engaged in activities founded on their desired career of choice so that they will be able to acquire a refined and more specific understanding of their career commitments (Wendling, 2019). Individuals will also ensure that those commitments align with their core values, beliefs, and

goals through purposeful reflection of current emotional and mental understanding coupled with past experiences. This process of implementing those commitments allows individuals to collect meaningful information about the self and the world of work while simultaneously building a professional network and gaining relevant work experience (Wendling, 2019).

Wending (2019) empirically identified four factors related to exploration in-depth in her development of the Career Identity Development Inventory (CIDI): preliminary career exploration in-depth, career self-exploration in-depth, network exploration in-depth, and advanced career exploration in-depth (p. 114). Preliminary career exploration in-depth is concerned with individuals collecting information about current employment trends, opportunities, required qualifications, organizations and companies, the average salary of people working in the field, and the steps needed to take in order to reach career goals. Network exploration in-depth addresses if individuals have initiated conversations, conducted information interviews, sought advice from working professionals in a field of interest, and performed job shadows with those professionals. Advanced career exploration in-depth is when individuals spend time engaging in practical work experiences, training, and education or seek employment to development relevant career skills. Career self-exploration in-depth is shown through retrospective action of individuals as they think about what they value in a career, about how their chosen career aligns with their previous experiences and current interest and personality, and how their strengths and abilities could be best used in their career of interest.

There is a need for career development practitioners to assess student-athletes' identity work and career development processes over time (Meeus, 1996) to better understand the growth of their personal and professional development. Categorization of student-athletes into four identity statuses discredits the unique variations of both identity exploration and commitment,

and monitoring changes in dimensions of exploration and commitment could be helpful in assessing the progression of career and identity development over time (Crocetti et al., 2008). Student-athletes who are confident and foster self-direction, view their personal and contextual circumstances as favorable, and feel a pressure to pursue a career may participate in high levels of career exploration (Taveira & Moreno, 2003).

Research has suggested that the process of career exploration ends sooner for student-athletes in comparison to their nonathlete counterparts (Navarro, 2014). The complicated nature of career exploration and identity development for Division I student-athletes could further be investigated through narrative inquiry as they recap exploring identity and career alternatives, adapting to life experiences, and navigating between personal and systemic driven tensions of academic and athletic roles (Navarro, 2014). Student affairs practitioners have started to recognize that a student-athlete's life story is an extension of their unique context and culture, which are historically embedded in a particular time and place (Navarro, 2019). A specific type of intervention for student-athletes that has started to gain traction in sport career transitions is called life-designing (Pelia-Shuster, 2016; Savickas et al., 2009).

### **Extending Life-Design Interventions to Student-Athlete Career Transitions**

Career specialists in higher education settings help student-athletes build self-knowledge, gain an understanding about different career fields, and develop insight into how they “fit” into the professional world of work. The transition for young adults out of higher education and into professional working roles calls for career specialists to utilize an individualized paradigm of life-design. Career trajectories are no longer stable, job transitions are more frequent in the globalizing society (Savickas et al., 2009), and student-athletes must be flexible while creating opportunities for themselves and defining their own career trajectories. Life-design interventions will help student-athletes achieve a higher level of confidence, adaptability, and self-knowledge

while they engage in lifelong preparation for future career transitions and possibilities (Savickas, 2013).

Careers and career paths are seen objectively by society, but subjectively constructed careers guide and sustain an individual's vocational behavior during life transitions (Savickas, 2005). Career construction counseling helps individuals tell a subjective "identity narrative about self and work" (Savickas, 2013, p. 168) through work-life stories and sharing transition concerns. This narrative helps individuals make meaning of their transition, regulate their emotions, and understand necessary next steps in working towards their most satisfying life (Savickas, 2013). Very few researchers have explored how collegiate student-athletes narrate their sporting career transitions, but several career development researchers have started to employ the paradigm of life-design in elite athletics (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019; Ryba et al., 2015) in hopes of improving the quality of end-of-sport-career transitions.

Many amateur athletes at the collegiate level consider sport to be a large fraction of their life story due to the substantial amount of time and effort dedicated to their pursuit of an elite athletic career (Ryba et al., 2015). Career researchers and counselors have recognized the risks associated with student-athletes' affinity to prioritize their athletic development over other portions of their life, and how primarily focusing on elite sport career progression can thwart student-athletes' holistic development. Career researchers and counselors are now promoting the importance of student-athletes having the opportunity to practice life-designing through sharing life stories (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Ryba et al., 2015), projecting future career trajectories through "dream day" narratives (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019), and narrating the social and cognitive aspects of the life-design process while navigating the cultural context of an elite athletic career (Ryba et al., 2015).



Researchers have shown that life-design interventions can potentially increase athletes' engagement with future career opportunities before they experience transition difficulties when leaving their sport career (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Ryba et al., 2015). Research also recognizes that student-athlete involvement in support programs for personal and career development is important to achieve increased quality of career transitions (Navarro, 2015), but how can career researchers and practitioners make sure career transition interventions and programs are theoretically founded and as efficient as possible? It is evident that career development and support programs situated in career construction and life-design are beneficial for student-athletes transitioning out of higher education (e.g., Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Ryba et al., 2015; Navarro, 2014, 2015), but there is still a noticeable void in understanding the specific career exploration needs of student-athletes and if career development programs provided by higher education are providing relevant and influential topics during those periods of career transition.

### **Supporting Student-Athlete Transitions Through Career Exploration and Construction**

There is limited empirical evidence of career scholars extending CCT to support the population of student-athletes as they transition out of their collegiate sport career (Navarro, 2015). As a theoretical framework, CCT has been used as an exploratory guide to better understand experiences of women in NCAA Division I conference commissioner positions (Taylor et al., 2018), investigate undergraduate major choices and career aspirations of senior student-athletes (Navarro, 2014; 2015), identify factors that may possibly influence women's career development within intercollegiate athletics (Hancock & Hums, 2016), and explore how narrating future stories help construct positive athletic identity and sustain motivation in elite youth athletes (Rokaninen & Ryba, 2019).

Collegiate student-athletes could further benefit from the application of CCT and career development initiatives (Pelia-Shuster, 2016) because they are exposed to an environment in higher education that inherently promotes career exploration and personal development. Student-athletes entering their end-of-sport-career transition need career development programs that provide additional support during this particularly critical phase in their life (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981), approach career development as an evolutionary process (Navarro, 2015; Savickas et al., 2019), and consider the needs and interest of a diverse population. Thus far, career development programs have been evaluated on their ability to facilitate career decision-making efficacy (Reese & Miller, 2006), match an individual to an occupation due to their intrinsic interest, strengths, and weaknesses (Holland, 1959), and build self-efficacy or confidence (Paulson & Betz, 2006). Athlete development practitioners working in 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education should build and facilitate career development programs for student-athletes with these tenets and the evolutionary process of career construction (Savickas, 2005) in mind.

The NCAA and several intercollegiate members offer resources for student-athletes who are about to transition out of their sport career. For example, The NCAA provides the resource, *After the Game: The Former Student-Athlete Experience*, which promotes and facilitates holistic development along with lifelong connection to sport (Navarro et al., 2019) during transition. Clemson University offers transition workshops for seniors, which addresses professional (resume, cover letters, networking) and personal (athletic identity and identity foreclosure) development. The varsity football team at the University of California, Berkeley, invites former student-athletes back to campus to network with current football student-athletes so they can learn more about the workforce. The University of Florida now offers course credits to student-

athletes for participating in a sport career transition course that addressing concepts of identity exploration and formation, liminality, self-reflection, and career exploration.

A more thorough understanding of career exploration and development needs of student-athletes will encourage higher education transition programs to become more intentional with their provided courses, interventions, and curricula. An emphasis on specific career exploration constructs within curricula and interventions could facilitate data-driven assessments of transition programs and their outcomes, which are imperative to garner investments and funding from people in positions of administration in higher education. Demonstrating that student-athlete participation in these programs will derive successful transition outcomes could further our understanding of their process of career exploration, engagement, and development of their career trajectories.

## CHAPTER 3 MIXED METHODOLOGY

### **Purpose Statement**

This Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) study was designed to investigate the career construction processes and exploration experiences of Division I collegiate student-athletes. A qualitative exploration of collegiate student-athletes' career construction processes guided the first phase of this research. During this phase a narrative inquiry, the FCA (Rehfuss, 2009), was utilized to elicit the collection of qualitative data. This qualitative study's findings informed the expansion and validation of the FCA by extending it to the student-athlete population and creating specific Sport Career Transition themes used for analysis.

The second phase of this research was a quantitative design that explored student-athletes' career exploration experiences in-depth, and its relationship, if any, with career construction. In this second phase, an analysis of the "career construction" process was based on the FCA thematic findings generated from the initial qualitative phase of the study. Data from both qualitative and quantitative phases were mixed in the analysis and discussion of this study to provide a more comprehensive description of student-athletes' (a) career construction and development experiences, and (b) current thoughts, actions, and suggestions regarding career development for student-athlete development professionals.

### **Research Questions**

As noted in Chapter 1, this study advances several research questions to meet the aims of the study. The questions are as follows:

- Research Question 1: Is the FCA a valid instrument to assess the career construction process of student-athletes in the context of NCAA Division I sports? That is, do student-athletes portray the same thematic constructs in their FCAs as other populations

previously demonstrated in literature (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012), and/or do they introduce any athlete-specific themes in their narratives?

The following mixed methods research questions were addressed in the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data sets:

- Research Question 2: Do student-athletes with high levels of overall career exploration portray more constructed and fulfilled FCAs?
- Research Question 2a: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce significantly more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?
- Research Question 2b: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?
- Research Question 2c: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal a more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?
- Research Question 2d: Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?

### **Methodological Overview**

Chapter 3 addresses the mixed methodology utilized in this research. This document emulates the order in which the study was conducted and presents independent methodology chapters for each of the qualitative and quantitative methods used. Chapter 3 has two parts: mixed methods literature and mixed methods data collection and analysis procedures. Part I provides an overview of mixed methods designs, motivations for conducting mixed methods research, and the philosophical foundation of mixed methods research. Part II describes the data collection and analysis procedures used in this research.

### **Part I: Review of Mixed Methods Literature**

#### **Definition of Mixed Methods Research**

Mixed methods research has consistently evolved since the 1980s to address the complexity of research questions that cannot be addressed alone through words in a qualitative sense and numbers in a quantitative sense (Crewswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This study is guided

by one of the most current definitions of mixed methods research as employed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017):

In mixed methods, the researcher (a) collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data rigorously in response to each questions and hypotheses; (b) integrates the two forms of data and their results; (c) organizes these procedures into specific research designs that provide the logic and procedures for conducting the study; and (d) frames these procedures within theory and philosophy (p. 5).

### **Reason for Doing Mixed Methods Research**

Why would a researcher bear the hassle of developing novel research techniques and combining methods albeit the rich quantitative and qualitative research traditions that already exist within each paradigm? A predominant strength of conducting mixed methods research as opposed to two separate quantitative and qualitative studies is that mixing methods and creating new research techniques can produce complementary strengths and independent weaknesses of paradigms (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) have identified several circumstances for when a mixed methods design would be most fitting for addressing a research inquiry: (a) when there is a need for both quantitative and qualitative approaches (e.g., triangulation design), (b) when the study needs to be enhanced with a second source of data (e.g., embedded design), (c) when the quantitative results need to be explained (e.g. explanatory design), and (d) when there is a needed to first and foremost explore a phenomenon qualitatively (exploratory design). This research used an exploratory design, which will be later addressed in the second part of Chapter 3.

### **Historical Foundations of Mixed Methods Research**

Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) emphasize the importance of discussing the philosophical foundation (e.g., pragmatism) at the beginning of mixed methods studies. The relatively new emergence of mixed methods research warrants a brief overview of its historical development and philosophical underpinnings, which guide the processes of data collection and

analysis. This section will briefly address historical and philosophical overviews in five sections: (a) shifting from positivism, interpretivism, to pragmatism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, (b) the formative period of mixed-methods research (1959-1979), (c) paradigm debates between positivist and constructivist during the 1980s and 1990s, (d) mixed methods procedural development period during the 1990s, and (e) the current trajectory of mix methods research.

### **Positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism**

Logical positivism, which was a dominant scientific philosophy of the late nineteenth century (Onwuegbuzie, 2000), is a researcher's ability to use statistical procedures to explain and predict a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). A positivist researcher's agenda is objectively verifying their systematic data collection and analysis procedures while separating themselves from the reality of the observed phenomenon. Positivists also believe that due to the social phenomenon existing independently of their personal values, generalizations can be made to their population of interest regardless of time or context. Social scientists of the twentieth century became apprehensive and began to question if their scientific method was appropriate to fully understand social phenomenon. These social scientists claimed the position of "interpretivist" and argued that no objective reality existed in studying social phenomena due to reality being a product of the human mind (Creswell, 2009). An absence of objective realities in social sciences pushed the feasibility of generalizations towards physical sciences where variables existed independent of human beings.

Post-positivist researchers in the 1950s and 1960s emphasized the idea that social sciences house multiple realities and that values of investigators have the ability to influence their research. "Pragmatists" emerged during this time and advocated for mixing qualitative and quantitative methodologies and combining strengths of both paradigms in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Pragmatists hold the belief that an objective reality may exist, but humans are not capable of the objectivity that is required to realize that reality. They believe that phenomena can be addressed using a magnitude of lenses and that the constructivist nature of qualitative research and reductive nature of quantitative research methods should not be mutually exclusive (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

### **Formative period (1959-1979)**

Social science scholars of the 1950s became more responsive to mixing methods in order to triangulate data (Creswell, 2009). These researchers emphasized the idea of utilizing several quantitative methods with various strengths and weaknesses in order to explore a phenomena of interest with a comprehensive lens (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The latter part of the formative period, which was the 1960s and 1970s, is when researchers began combining qualitative and quantitative techniques like interviews and surveys (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

### **Paradigm debate period (1985-1997)**

A conversation among researchers continued from the mid 1980s to mid 1990s regarding the notion if qualitative and quantitative data could be combined (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Previous researchers assumed the position that these two approaches are incompatible due to their different worldviews (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Pragmatic researchers encouraged social scientists to move beyond the paradigm debate and challenged the idea that the two paradigms of qualitative and quantitative research were incompatible (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

### **Procedural development period (1989-2000)**

A variety of procedures for conducting mixed methods studies surfaced in the 1980s and 1990s (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The classification system of mixed methods began with simultaneous and sequential triangulation (Creswell, 1994). In simultaneous design, qualitative



and quantitative data is collected independently but at the same time, and the findings complement one another during interpretation. Sequential studies are when a researcher engages in either a qualitative phase first and then a separate quantitative phase of the study second, or the other way around (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This classification system later expanded into six basic mixed methods designs: explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, convergent parallel, embedded, transformative, and multiphase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

### **Advocacy for mixed methods as a separate approach (2003-present)**

A surge of mixed methods studies in the twenty-first century has encouraged mixed methods researchers to advocate for their position as a relevant, third approach alongside qualitative and quantitative designs (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Johnson & Onweugbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Several mixed methods studies within the past year that have explored student-athlete development, particularly the collegiate student-athlete population, have discussed their pragmatic worldview (Clark & Clark, 2019; Ingrell et al., 2019) while a majority of others (Anderson et al., 2020; Berg & Warner, 2019; Bird et al., 2020; Jackman et al., 2019; Sanderson & Cassilo, 2019) did not address pragmatism as guiding their mixed-method research.

## **Part II: Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Mixed Methods Design**

This research used a mixed method design that closely resembles an exploratory sequential mixed method design as classified by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017). There was an initial need in this research to explore the career construction process of NCAA Division I collegiate student-athletes, so an exploratory sequential design was most appropriate to address the phenomena of interest. Exploratory designs are often employed when “measures or

instruments are not available, the variables are unknown, or there is no guiding framework or theory” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 75). The intent of this design is to qualitatively explore a phenomenon and utilize the analysis to help develop the quantitative method that will be used in the subsequent phase.

This research process had two phases; qualitative “phase one” and quantitative “phase two” (Figure 3-1). Phase one of this research has two stages. The purpose of stage one was to collect narrative data and explore the career construction process of student-athletes. Within stage one, I collected and analyzed narrative data after administering a modified Future Career Autobiography (FCA; Rehfuss, 2009) to a sample of NCAA Division I collegiate student-athletes. The purpose of stage two was to validate and expand the FCA as a narrative tool that can be used for collegiate student-athletes. In stage two, I further validated and developed the FCA by deductively coding previously identified Quality of Life and Occupational Desire themes (Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012) and inductively generated “Sport Career Transition” themes that were specific to the student-athlete population.

The quantitative phase (phase 2) of this research had one stage, which was labeled “stage three” (Figure 3-1). The purpose of this stage was to (a) test and validate the updated FCA as a narrative tool for the student-athlete population and (b) determine if any relationships could be identified between FCA themes and career exploration activities as measured by the Career Identity Development Inventory (CIDI; Wendling, 2019).

## **Mixed Methods Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

### **Population**

Many mixed method designs utilize the same participants from the initial qualitative phase of the study in the subsequent quantitative phase. This is not necessary in exploratory designs due to the desire to generalize results to a larger population (Creswell & Plano Clark,

2017), but this study included the same participants from the first qualitative phase in the second quantitative phase. The decision to use the same sample of participants in both phases of this research was partially made due to extenuating circumstances of a global pandemic, COVID-19, influencing athletic department and student-athlete response rates and the potential to achieve significant numbers of responses from student-athletes. Future researchers that wish to replicate this study would benefit from recruiting more and diverse participants for the second quantitative phase.

### **Procedure**

Sequential data collection designs, whether explanatory or exploratory, have three stages (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). For example, in an exploratory design, stage one consists of collecting qualitative data, stage two is when the data is analyzed, and stage three is when choices are made on how the data will be utilized to sway the second stage of quantitative data collection and analysis. It is important for researchers to which components of the qualitative results will be most beneficial in the development of the quantitative tool used in the third stage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Chapter 4 provides a description of the qualitative findings and how the new FCA “Sport Career Transition” themes were created.

### **Timing**

The order of the data collection process is referred to as timing (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Timing can occur either concurrently (one-phase) or sequentially (two-phase). When both types of qualitative and quantitative data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted at roughly the same time it is considered concurrent (Creswell, 2009). Sequential data collection is when one source of data is collected and analyzed before the second data source (Creswell, 2009). For example, in this research I gathered and interpreted data during the qualitative phase that aided in

the construction of an updated FCA narrative instrument, which was used in the second quantitative phase of the study.

### **Weighting**

The emphasis placed on the two forms of collected data is called weighting, or priority decision (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Precedence can be assigned to one form of data over the other, or both qualitative and quantitative forms can play equally important roles in the study. The goals of the study, research questions, use of specific research procedures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), researcher resources, and the projected audience (Creswell, 2009) all influence the weighting of data in a study.

### **Mixing**

Researchers should deliberate how they want to mix the two types of qualitative and quantitative data. Without mixing data, the research can simply be a “collection of multiple methods” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 830). Researchers can merge, embed, or connect both kinds of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). For example, I connected the newly generated FCA data and themes from my qualitative phase to the content analysis and use of the CIDI in the quantitative phase. I linked the data during the analysis between the qualitative and quantitative phases, and I also combined the data at the interpretations stage during my discussion.

### **Inference quality and legitimation**

A separate set of terminology specifically designed for mixed methods was suggested for dealing with the use of validity and generalizability: inference quality (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003) and inference transferability or legitimation (Creswell, 2009). Mixed methods researchers believe that inference quality, or the ability to make strong conclusions or inferences, is the strongest advantage of mixed methods designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Inference quality

is used by mixed methods researchers to describe “the accuracy for which [they] have drawn both inductively and deductively derived conclusions from a study” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 36), which might be closely tied to what quantitative researchers indicate to as validity (Creswell, 2009). Inference quality also includes the constructs of design quality and interpretive rigor (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Design quality can be evaluated through similar measures of quantitative methods like triangulation of sources and data, and qualitative methods similar to interval validity checks. Interpretive rigor is similar to the way qualitative researchers establish credibility through member checks and establishing biases. Inference transferability (Creswell, 2009) address what transferability of qualitative research and generalization or external validity of quantitative research.

A decision to implement mixed methods terminology in this study would be spurred by a concern of advocacy for mixed methods as an independent “third stream” method as opposed to practically applying this vernacular to this research. A review of literature makes it difficult to determine by what standards each of these constructs are measured. Therefore, validity and triangulation are assessed and reported, and procedures employed to cover reliability and validity of the qualitative and quantitative methods used in this study.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 3 describes mixed methodology and its historical and philosophical development in order to provide an overview of this dissertation’s methodological structure. Chapter 4 specifically addresses the qualitative methodology and Chapter 5 presents the qualitative findings. Chapter 6 addresses the quantitative methodology used and how the qualitative findings led to the creation of the updated FCA. Chapter 7 provides the quantitative analysis and findings. Chapter 8 presents the mixed findings through discussion and provides implications for student-athlete development along with recommendations for future research.

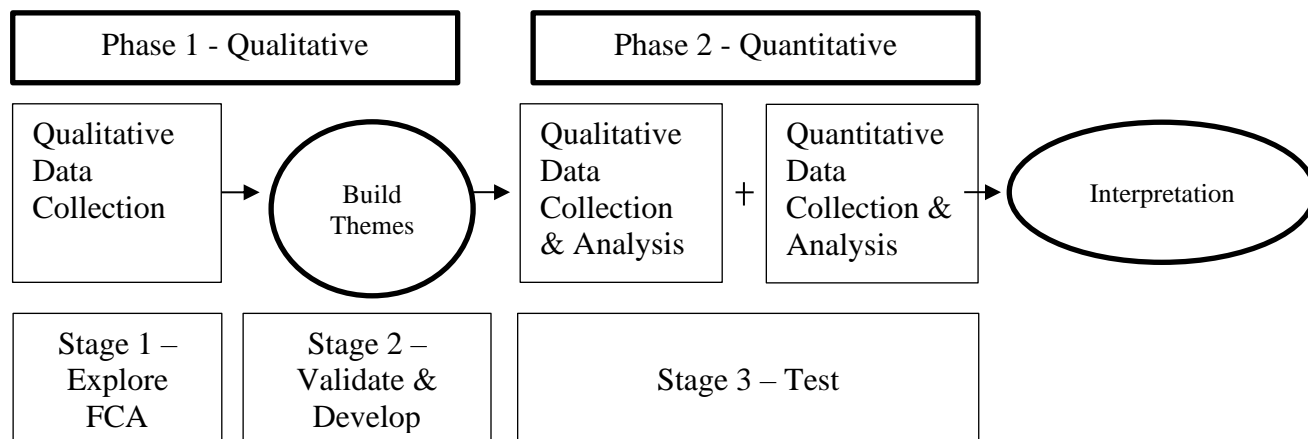


Figure 3-1. The exploratory sequential mixed methods design

## CHAPTER 4 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

### **Methodological Overview**

Chapter 4 addresses the qualitative methodology utilized in this mixed methods research. The first part of Chapter 4, Research Design, describes (a) narrative study, (b) procedures, (c) participants, (d) data collection, (e) trustworthiness, (f) positionality statement, and (g) personal background. The second part of Chapter 4, Qualitative Analysis, describes (a) data preparation, (b) coding, and (c) thematic development.

### **Part I: Research Design**

#### **Narrative Design**

Qualitative methodologies are used to explore “why” or “how” a phenomenon occurs, to construct a theory, or depict the nature of an individual’s lived experience (Fetters et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers are driven by constructivist or participatory (Mertens, 2003) perspectives of knowledge, and aim to utilize and analyze multiple contextual factors, words, and informant views to construct a holistic understanding of a complex phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). This research utilizes a specific type of qualitative inquiry called a narrative.

Narratives (Creswell, 2007; Pavlenko, 2002) “convey the meaning of chronologically ordered events” (Elliot, 2005, p. 3) in hopes of understanding and enhancing the power of an individual’s story. Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) define narratives as stories, or “discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, and this offers insights about the world and/or peoples’ experiences of it” (p. xvi). Hardy (1968) stated that “we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (p. 5). Narratives are powerfully

shaped by the relationship between the storyteller and their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Narratives have three key features of being chronological, meaningful, and inherently social as they are created for particular audiences (Elliot, 2005). The temporal dimension helps researchers address the relationship between the surrounding social context and an individual's lived experiences. Narrative researchers also stress the importance of attempting to understand the meaning of experiences and associated behaviors from an individual's perspective as they are situated within a specific social context (Creswell, 2009; Elliot, 2005). Narrative studies move away from a positivism approach of objective observations and focus more on the qualitative and subjective engagement of the individual (Savickas, 2005; White & Epston, 1990).

Career theorist and practitioners have embraced narratives in order to paint a holistic understanding of an individual's vocation and career (Mayo, 2001; McAdams, 1995; Savickas, 1995, 1997, 2005). Savickas (1997, 2000, 2005) and fellow career development researchers (Bujold, 2004; Collin & Young, 1992) have developed theories, counseling techniques, and career interventions that emphasize narratives as a primary force used for conceptualizing career (Rehfuss, 2009). The goal of a narrative intervention is to help alter an individual's story, because "to change one's identity, one must change one's story" (Rehfuss, 2009, p. 82).

The Future Career Autobiography (FCA; Rehfuss, 2009) was the first noted attempt of career theorists to provide an instrument to measure narrative change, or lack thereof, in occupational narratives over time. Thus far, the FCA has been utilized with populations that consisted of undergraduate students (Rehfuss, 2009), Italian female entrepreneurs (Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012), high school students (Storlie et al., 2019), African American undergraduate



students (Storlie et al., 2018), young African refugees (Abkhezr et al., 2020), Greek college students (Argyropoulou et al., 2020) and doctorate students (Dabik-Podgorna et al., 2018).

This particular research utilized an adjusted FCA prompt (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012) written specifically for the population of NCAA Division I collegiate student-athletes, which has yet to be done. The qualitative phase attempted to explore the current and future career thoughts, actions, and experiences of collegiate student-athletes through their short narratives in order to provide insight into their behaviors associated with occupational and personal development.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question of this study posited the following: Is the FCA a valid instrument to assess student-athletes in the context of the NCAA? That is, do student-athletes portray the same thematic constructs in their FCAs as demonstrated in previous literature and/or do they introduce any athlete-specific “Sport Career Transition” themes in their narratives?

### **Procedures**

The goal of this qualitative phase was to achieve an in-depth understanding of student-athletes’ career construction and life transition processes in the distinct context of NCAA Division I athletics. This initial stage of research was done through exploration of narrative data drawn from an adjusted FCA prompt (Rehfuss 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012). This phase was necessary in order to generate FCA themes, specific to student-athletes, and understand their unique perspectives on career construction and development in the context of high education.

### **Participants**

The participants in this qualitative phase were considered a criterion sample, which is a form of purposeful sampling that involves identifying and selecting individuals that are experienced or knowledgeable of the phenomena of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Qualitative sampling methods, like criterion sampling, are employed by researchers when their goal is to achieve a depth of understanding while placing an emphasis on saturation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Criterion sampling closely aligns with random probability sampling: individuals are drawn from organizations or systems embedded in the phenomena of interest, and participants are selected based on the assumption that they have additional knowledge or experiences with the phenomenon (Patton, 1990).

The criterion of importance in this research was that participants needed to be current and or active student-athletes attending NCAA Division I universities in the United States. In order to reach these particular student-athletes, I purposefully contacted student-athlete development professionals from athletic departments of 345 different NCAA Division I universities. I asked for the professionals' assistance in recruiting student-athlete to participate in this research through an email solicitation which can be found in Appendix A of this document. The email solicitation sent to professionals yielded a 3.8% response rate of agreement, with only 13 professionals agreeing to share this research with their student-athletes.

A questionnaire was created in order for student-athlete development professionals to easily share the adjusted FCA prompt with their student-athletes. This questionnaire was created using Qualtrics online survey data design and collection software and can be found in Appendix B of this document. Professionals were informed that the questionnaire, if they wish to share it with their student-athletes, asks participants to construct a future career autobiography of where they hope to be in life and what they help to be doing occupationally once they retire from their sport career. A consent form was electronically read, signed, and recorded for all participants prior to data collection for this study. Participants were notified in the initial email solicitation that they had the opportunity to win a \$15 gift card by participating in this study.

A total of 249 student-athletes responded to the questionnaire, but only 79% of the questionnaires were finished in their entirety and useable for this research. The final sample in this phase had a total of 197 participants, which encompassed both male ( $n = 45$ ) and female ( $n = 152$ ) student-athletes within the age range of 18 to 23 years of age. The University of Florida's Internal Review Board requires that participants be at least 18 years of age. Ethnicity did not play a role in the selection of participants, but the sample consisted of participants that identified as White or Caucasian ( $n = 178$ ), Black or African American ( $n = 4$ ), Asian ( $n = 4$ ), Hispanic or Latino ( $n = 8$ ), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ( $n = 1$ ), and other ( $n = 2$ ). Current academic standing also did not play a role in the selection of participants, but the sample consisted of freshman ( $n = 44$ ), sophomores ( $n = 51$ ), juniors ( $n = 46$ ), seniors ( $n = 42$ ), and graduate students ( $n = 14$ ). A total of 8% ( $n = 16$ ) of the participants believed that it was "very likely" that they were going to play professionally, 12% ( $n = 25$ ) believed it was "likely" that they were going to play professionally, and 80% ( $n = 156$ ) believed it was "not likely" that they were going to play their sport professionally.

Collectively, the 197 student-athletes represented 31 different sports including 14 men's and 17 women's teams. Male participants represented 14 sports including Men's Baseball ( $n = 7$ ), Men's Basketball ( $n = 1$ ), Men's Cross Country ( $n = 6$ ), Men's Track and Field ( $n = 2$ ), Men's Fencing ( $n = 3$ ), Men's Football ( $n = 6$ ), Men's Golf ( $n = 2$ ), Men's Gymnastics ( $n = 1$ ), Men's Ice Hockey ( $n = 1$ ), Men's Soccer ( $n = 6$ ), Men's Swimming and Diving ( $n = 3$ ), Men's Tennis ( $n = 2$ ), Men's Volleyball ( $n = 1$ ), and Men's Water Polo ( $n = 1$ ). Women's participants represented 17 sports including Women's Basketball ( $n = 8$ ), Women's Cross Country ( $n = 16$ ), Women's Track and Field ( $n = 5$ ), Women's Fencing ( $n = 3$ ), Women's Field Hockey ( $n = 2$ ), Women's Golf ( $n = 7$ ), Women's Gymnastics ( $n = 2$ ), Women's Ice Hockey ( $n = 2$ ), Women's

Rifle ( $n = 3$ ), Women's Rowing ( $n = 28$ ), Women's Soccer ( $n = 22$ ), Women's Softball ( $n = 16$ ), Women's Swimming and Diving ( $n = 13$ ), Women's Tennis ( $n = 6$ ), Women's Volleyball ( $n = 10$ ), Women's Water Polo ( $n = 1$ ).

### **Data collection**

Data was collected through distribution of a Qualtrics questionnaire that was comprised of several demographic questions and an adjusted FCA open-ended narrative prompt. The first part of the questionnaire contained demographic questions including name, email address, age, racial/ethnic background, name of the university in which they attend, gender, NCAA Division I sport in which they participate, roster position, current year of eligibility both athletically and academically, and expectation of playing professionally. The second part of the study contained an adjusted, open-ended FCA prompt (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012). Participations were allotted 10 minutes to type their answer to the prompt. A "countdown" clock was displayed for the participants as soon as they started to respond to their FCA prompt, and they were informed that at the end of their 10 minutes they would be automatically moved to the end of the Qualtrics questionnaire.

Student-athletes were able to identify the likelihood that they believed they were going to play their sport professionally on a Likert Scale of very likely (1), likely (2), to not likely (3). If participants believed it was likely or very likely that they were going to play professionally, they were given an adjusted FCA prompt that read, "Please write a paragraph or two about where you hope to be in life and what you hope to be doing for work once you retire from your professional sport career." If participants believed it was not likely that they were going to play professionally, they were given a prompt that read, "Please write a paragraph or two about where you hope to be in life and what you hope to be doing for work once you retire from your collegiate sport career."

All 197 participants' FCAs were analyzed due to the short duration of the narratives. Saturation of previously identified FCA Quality of Life and Occupation Desire themes (Reh fuss, 2009; Reh fuss & Di Fabio, 2012) was reached and all data was considered before new "Sport Career Transition" themes were developed. This initial exploration of the FCAs was used to (a) validate and expand the FCA to the population of Division I student-athletes and (b) identify if Division I student-athletes introduce any athlete-specific Sport Career Transition themes in their FCAs.

### **Trustworthiness**

Reliability and validity are means of establishing the rigor of a research method and providing evidence and credibility for researching findings (Davies & Dodd, 2002). Qualitative research cannot produce absolute truths (Hammersley, 1995), but it focuses on validation and the subjective understanding that is involved between the reader and researcher (Angen, 2000). The context of participants uniquely influences the results of the study, which makes it difficult for qualitative researchers to generalize their results (Schofield, 1993). Because qualitative researchers do not utilize established valid and reliable metrics, they need to prove trustworthiness of their study, which is comprised of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

### **Credibility**

Quantitative researchers emphasize internal validity as a key criterion for their research to guarantee that their study measures what it is intended to (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative researchers' equivalent concept is credibility, which addresses the question, "how congruent are the findings with reality?" (Johnson, 1997; Merriam, 1998). Ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors of a qualitative study when establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I made several provisions to ensure I accurately recorded the career construction process of participants and adopted a well-established qualitative research method that has been successfully utilized in previous FCA validation research (Di Fabio, 2012; Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012; Storlie et al., 2018, 2019). To avoid any type of researcher or confirmation bias, I made sure to consider all obtained data, bracket any biases that may stem from my personal experiences, and to continually reevaluate data throughout the entire analysis process (Suter, 2012). I also collaborated with a second career development researcher through analyst triangulation (Morse et al., 2002), which gave me a more complete and robust understanding of the narrative data. The goal of analyst triangulation is to understand multiple ways to see the data and not to simply just reach a consensus (Creswell, 1998). This approach helped me reduce any potential biases through separate independent analysis of the same qualitative data and identifying if there are any blind spots in my analysis process.

Frequent debriefing sessions with my advisor and doctorate peers helped elicit peer scrutiny and feedback (Patton, 1999). Their fresh perspective encouraged conversation, challenge, and debate about my research assumptions, and helped me refine my methods and research design. I also shared my results with a student-athlete development professional, who would be one of the intended users of these findings, to solicit their reactions to the “face validity” of my results (Patton, 1999). Further, as the “major instrument of data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1990) my background, qualifications, and experience within student-athlete and career development strengthened the credibility of this research.

### **Transferability**

Quantitative researchers are often concerned with external validity, which is their ability to demonstrate that their results can be applied to the wider population and other contexts (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers are generally interested in a small number of

individuals in particular environments, so it is difficult to demonstrate that study results and conclusions are applicable to other populations and situations (Patton, 1999). Although qualitative researchers focus on a small group of people, it is important to remember those individuals are an example within a larger group (Denscombe, 2014; Lincoln & Denzi, 2000). It was ensured that this study's discussion provided sufficient contextual information about NCAA Division I athletics and had a thick description of sport career transitions for collegiate student-athletes to help readers make the "transfer" of these results to other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Boundaries of the study are addressed in the discussion section by providing, "the number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based, any restrictions in type of people who contributed data, the data collection methods that were employed, and the time period over which data was collected" (Patton, 1999, p. 70).

Similar studies implementing the same methodology should be conducted in different contexts or division of NCAA athletics in order to assess the extent to which findings could be transferable and true of people in other settings. If time permits, I would conduct the same study with a sample of students across NCAA Division I, II, and III levels. This could also create a more inclusive, overall picture of the sport career transition and construction process of collegiate student-athletes. This research provides a baseline understanding (Gross, 1999) with which the results of subsequent studies could be compared.

### **Dependability**

Quantitative researchers are also concerned with reliability as they want to show that similar results would be obtained if their work was to be repeated in the same context with the same methods and participants (Patton, 1999). The continually changing nature of a phenomena make the same provisions problematic for qualitative researchers (Fidel, 1993) as they attempt to establish the dependability of their results. There is a notable tie between credibility and

dependability, and a thorough evidence of efforts to ensure credibility emphasizes the dependability of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research took the initiative to enhance the dependability of this study by reporting the design process in detail to help future researchers repeat the same work (Patton, 1999). This in-depth coverage of the design allows readers to develop an understanding of the methods and assess the extent to which proper research protocol was followed.

### **Confirmability**

Social science research often utilizes instruments that are based on human skill and perception, which makes it difficult to ensure real objectivity of a study (Patton, 1999). Researcher bias is inevitable (Patton, 1999), and extra effort must be invested to ensure that research findings are the result of the participants' experiences and not the characteristics, perceptions, and biases of the research. In this research, analyst triangulation protected this study against researcher biases (Patton, 1999), and researchers admitted their own predispositions (Huberman & Miles, 2002) and beliefs behind the decisions made and methods adopted in the positions statement. A data-oriented "audit trail" (Patton, 1999) in Appendix D was also provided for readers to trace the course of research, step-by-step, showing how data analyzed during the course of the study.

### **Positionality Statement and Personal Background**

This research asserts a pragmatic approach to knowledge as a mixed methods study (Creswell, 2003). A pragmatic lens proclaims that there can be multiple truths, and that truth is "what works" (Howe, 1988). A pragmatic worldview is associated with this study (Creswell, 2014) due to the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods forming the foundation of this research.



I am aware that my personal background, identities, experiences, values, biases, and assumptions make it impossible for me to form a completely unbiased opinion during the data analysis process. I am also aware that I lack the understanding of what it is like to be a Division I student-athlete and how they experience career construction and development differently. I am a white, female researcher and practitioner that previously played Division III athletics and is currently works with Division I student-athletes. My personal and professional development, current occupation, and future research interest all align within the context of collegiate athletics, so it is not possible for me to form an unbiased perspective on how the data should be understood and analyzed.

As the researcher, I was responsible for contacting student-athlete development professionals at Division I universities in the United States and sending them an electronic correspondence containing both the research protocol and a Qualtrics questionnaire. I gave the development professionals the questionnaire and research protocol, and they had the option of sharing the information with their student-athlete. I did not directly observe participants or any phenomena of interest in this study, and my data was derived from the collection of participants' shared career narratives and career exploration experiences. I received UF's Internal Review Board (IRB) approval that my research design was ethical and unbiased before I proceeded sharing information with student-athlete development professionals.

I was a collegiate student-athlete at the Division III level, and I have studied athlete-development, particularly career development, the last three years as a doctoral student at the University of Florida. I was a co-instructor of a sport career transition class in the Department of Sport Management, which is geared towards introducing student-athletes to fundamentals of the sport career transition process and common difficulties they will experience while adjusting to

life after sport. I have also had the opportunity to volunteer as a member of the University of Florida University Athletic Association's student-athlete development department to help senior student-athletes create career development and life transition plans for when they graduate from UF. I am currently an Assistant Coordinator of Student-Athlete Enhancement at UF where I work with student-athletes on career and personal development.

The student-athletes I personally work with in the student-athlete development department or the sport career transition class did not participate in this research. I had no personal or professional relationship with any of the participants in this study to ensure that there is no supervisor or instructor power dynamics influencing their answers or willingness or participate in the study. I screened all of the data before analysis to ensure that there were no student-athletes participating in the study that I have supported or instructed. I also ensured that I was particularly mindful in not allowing my past experience as a student athlete and my current experience working in student athlete development will not present a bias in my results.

## **Part II: Qualitative Data Collection and Thematic Analysis**

### **Boundary Conditions**

Boundary conditions of this research were included in order to address the transferability component of qualitative research trustworthiness. Boundaries of the study include “the number of organizations taking part in this study and where they are based, any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data, the data collection methods that were employed, and the time period over which data was collected” (Patton, 1999, p. 70). Thirteen of the 343 Division I Universities that were contacted agreed to participate in this research, but only nine universities shared the Qualtrics questionnaire with their student-athletes. A majority of the respondents were drawn from Division I schools in the Midwest, and several others were from the South East, South West, and North West regions of the United States. The first correspondence to elicit

school's participation in this research was sent on April 10<sup>th</sup>, a second follow-up correspondence was sent to schools that agreed to participate on April 23<sup>rd</sup> if student-athletes from that university had yet to respond to the questionnaire.

### **Data Preparation**

The main tenets that apply to qualitative data analysis are “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). Data preparation consisted of downloading all FCAs from the Qualtrics questionnaire into an excel document and transferring each FCA from the excel document to a word document. Once the FCAs were transferred to the Word document, I read through the transcripts for preliminary exploration of the data while simultaneously obtaining the word count.

### **Coding**

After collecting and preparing all data sources I began the process of open coding, which Merriam (2009) describes as “making notations next to bits of data that strike you as particularly relevant for answering your research questions” (p. 178). I read and reread a total of 197 FCAs and coded relevant data sources in the narratives (Morse et al., 2002). This process of coding captured words or phrases that addressed my first research question. I was interested in identifying words or phrases that highlighted the specific context of sport when speaking about future personal and career aspirations. The codes generated for those FCAs can be found in Appendix C.

### **Thematic Development**

Thematic development, according to Charmaz (2006), allows for separating, sorting, and synthesizing large amounts of data (codes) into identifiable themes. Developing themes can also

be described as the process of “going back over your marginal notes and codes and trying to group those comments and notes that seem to go together” (Merriam, 2009, p. 179).

The narrative content of the FCAs was examined directly on a word document when exported from Qualtrics. Previously validated FCA Quality of Life and Occupational Desire themes (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio) were deductively coded and highlighted in specific colors before any new themes were developed. New student-athlete Sport Career Transition themes were then inductively coded through categorizing frequently identified codes that highlighted personal and career motives, values, and directions (Rehfuss, 2009) specific to the context of sport.

I began the process of theme development by reading through the narrative content of each FCA and grouping similar codes into groups (Merriam, 2009). I cut and pasted text from all similar codes into separate Word documents. Once all of the codes from the FCAs were categorized into Word documents, I labeled each document according to its themes. Four new Sport Career Transition themes inductively emerged from the data through comparison and grouping of all codes: continued connection, transition acknowledgement and acceptance, transferable life skills, and difficulty detaching. All themes were placed into one of the categories for all FCAs: (a) Quality of Life (achievement, security, experiential, relationship), (b) Occupational Desire (positive, negative, uncertainty), and (c) Sport Career Transition (continued connection, transition acknowledgement and acceptance, transferable life skills, developmental cost).

A second researcher from the Sport Management Department at the University of Florida was recruited to help validate the new Sport Career Transition themes. The researcher, who had expertise in career development, was asked to independently analyze FCAs and code any sport

specific themes that emerged. Cohen's Kappa ( $\kappa$ ) was used to assess interrater reliability, or the amount of the agreement in thematic assignment, between myself and the second coder that can be expected from random chance (Kvålseth, 1989).

The total sample of 197 FCAs was stratified into two groups of "high" and "low" based on the mean amount of words calculated in each FCA, which was 73 words. Participants were randomly sorted in each of their assigned groups. A systematic randomized sampling approach was used within each of the two groups to obtain an even group of males ( $n = 12$ ) and females ( $n = 12$ ) in the above 73 words group, and an even group of males ( $n = 8$ ) and females ( $n = 8$ ) in the below 73 words group. A total number of 40 FCAs were coded by both researchers.

A Cohen's Kappa value of .91 was reached, which determined that the interrater reliability was high enough for me to continue coding FCAs on my own. In other words, approximately 91% of the data that we categorized in new Occupational Desire and Sport Career Transition themes were placed into the same mutually exclusive theme. Cases of disagreement between myself and the second researcher were discussed through conversation and clarification. In cases of disagreement, my final codes were used.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 describes the qualitative methodology used in this mixed methods research. Chapter 5 addresses the qualitative findings from the FCAs of each theme and their subthemes further validating the FCA as a tool that can be utilized in the student-athlete population. Chapter 6 addresses the quantitative methodology used and how the qualitative findings led to the validation and development of the updated FCA. Chapter 7 provides the quantitative analysis and findings. Chapter 8 presents the mixed findings through discussion and provides implications for student-athlete development along with recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 5 QUALITATIVE RESULTS

### Overview

Chapter 5 highlights findings from the qualitative phase of this study and addresses research question 1. The first part of Chapter 5 discusses the applicability of the FCA as a valid, or trustworthy (Smith & McGannon, 2018), narrative tool for use within the population of collegiate student-athletes. Emergent narrative trends among the participants are discussed with respect to previously validated Quality of Life (QL) and Occupational Desire (OD) FCA themes. The second part of Chapter 5 addresses the newly created Sport Career Transition (SCT) themes and discusses those emergent themes with respect to student-athletes' continued connection to sports, transition acknowledgement and acceptance, transferable life skills, and developmental costs of sport participation.

The first research question asked, "Is the FCA a valid instrument to assess the career construction process of student-athletes in the context of NCAA Division I sports?" That is, do collegiate student-athletes portray the same thematic constructs in their FCAs as other populations previously demonstrated in the literature (Reh fuss, 2009; Reh fuss & Di Fabio, 2012), and/or do they introduce any athlete-specific themes in their narratives?

#### **Part I: Trustworthiness of the FCA as a Narrative Tool for Collegiate Student-Athletes**

The goal of this qualitative phase was to achieve an in-depth understanding of student-athletes' career construction and life transition processes in the distinct context of NCAA Division I athletics. This initial stage of exploring narrative data drawn from an adjusted FCA prompt helped (a) validate and expand the FCA to the population of Division I student-athletes and (b) identify if Division I student-athletes introduce any athlete-specific Sport Career Transition themes in their FCAs. A thematic analysis of 197 FCAs allowed for deductively

identifying previously validated OD and QL themes (Rehfuss 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio) and inductively generating FCA themes specific to student-athletes. Saturation of previously identified FCA QL and OD themes (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012) was reached and all data was considered before new SCT themes were developed.

The analysis of the FCAs was consistent with the original standards (Rehfuss, 2009) of exploring statements about future career and personal plans. All useable obtained data was considered for analysis and reevaluated several times throughout the analysis process, and analyst triangulation with a second career development researcher provided multiple perspectives and a more robust understanding of the narrative data (Morse et al., 2002). After collecting and exploring data, generated codes allowed for identifying words or phrases that highlighted QL, OD, and sport specific context when speaking about future personal and career aspirations. Sorting and synthesizing those codes into themes (Charmaz, 2006) allowed for identification of previously validated QL and OD themes and development of new SCT themes.

All previously validated QL and OD FCA themes (Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012) were also identified in this sample of student-athletes (Table 5-1), and one additional OD theme of occupational uncertainty was created. Each of the eleven themes (four QL, three OD, and four SCT) were color-coded (e.g., achievement QL: green, positive OD: grey, continued connection SCT: yellow, etc.) when identified in each FCA paragraph. An example of how an FCA was color-coded during thematic analysis is shown in Table 5-2. The pseudonym given to this participant was “Student-Athlete A.” Six themes (transferable life skills, continued connection, achievement, experiential, occupational uncertainty, and positive occupational desire) and two subthemes of continued connection (coaching and mentoring, difficulty detaching) were found in Student-Athlete A’s FCA paragraph. Transferable life skills (SCT) was coded in purple,

continued connection (SCT) was coded in light yellow, achievement (QL) was coded in bright green, experiential (QL) was coded in bright yellow, occupational uncertainty (OD) was coded in orange, and positive occupational desire (OD) was coded in gray. There was no trace of negative occupational desires (OD) or security (QL) related concerns. These themes reflected Student-Athlete A's confidence in their transferrable life skills garnered through sport participation, strong desire to stay connected to their sport through coaching or supporting their community, potential difficulty detaching from their sport after their transition, and interest in the specific professional career of data analytics that can make a meaningful impact on others.

This sample of student-athletes highly favored the QL themes (Table 5-1) with 99% mentioning one or more of the four themes at least once in their FCA. The most popular QL theme mentioned was achievement with 91% of participants mentioning the theme at least once. OD desire themes were mentioned at least once by 42% of the participants. Positive occupational desires were the most frequently mentioned with 30% of participants mentioning the theme at least once. SCT themes were mentioned at least once by 76% of the participants. Continued connection was mentioned by 47% by participants, which was followed by 43% of participants mentioning transition acknowledged and acceptance. Negative occupational desires (OD) was mentioned the least amount of times with only 5% of participants including it in their FCA, and developmental cost (SCT) followed suit with only 7% of participants including it in their FCA.

## **Part II: Emergent Occupational Desire and Sport Career Transition Themes**

It is important to speculate that new FCA "themes" can emerge for different groups of participants that originate from various contextual and cultural backgrounds. It is also imperative to not assume that previously identified QL and OD themes reflect all possible future narrative themes and fulfillment. The differences between participants in previous FCA studies and this research warrants the consideration that new FCA themes can emerge. For example, the new



SCT themes (continued connection, transition acknowledgment and acceptance, transferable life skills, developmental costs) and subthemes (continued connection: coaching and mentoring, fulfilling recreational and competitive drive, difficulty detaching, investing in health and wellness, pursuing a professional athletic career, and vocational pursuits in the sport industry) identified in the 197 FCAs captured unique themes associated with the career exploration and construction experiences of collegiate student-athletes. A new OD theme, occupational uncertainty, was also identified and not previously established in Reh fuss' (2009) original work. Several examples of each theme are provided below and in Table 5-3.

Not all of the original codes were represented in the updated list of FCA themes. Only items that were most represented in the qualitative data were selected as themes so that the updated FCA themes (a) represented the most salient constructs from the qualitative data, and (b) the FCA, as a tool, remained easily usable by academics and practitioners interested in measuring and tracking the career construction process of student-athletes.

### **Occupational Uncertainty**

It is not uncommon for young adults to be confronted with occupational uncertainty when assuming a future orientation and thinking about what career they want to pursue. It is possible future career outcomes can be influenced by a lack of clear occupational aspirations (Staff et al., 2010), so it is important that career professionals can identify student-athletes that need additional assistance before they graduate from college and transition from the sport career. Several participants shared apprehension and uncertainty in their future vocational desires: "I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life," "I am not sure exactly what I want to be doing once I am completely done playing soccer," "It is extremely hard to tell where I will be looking that far down the road," and "Career-wise I am not entirely sure what I would like to do yet."

## **Continued Connection**

A majority of participants indicated that they wanted to stay connect to their sport after collegiate or professional athletic retirement. A shared aspiration to stay connected to athletics was often coupled with one of six common subthemes: coaching and mentoring, fulfilling recreational and competitive drive, difficulty detaching, investing in health and wellness, pursuing a professional sport career, and vocational pursuits in the sport industry.

### **Coaching and mentoring**

One of the most popular subthemes in continued connection was coaching and mentoring. A large majority of participants stated that they would love to coach their sport and work with athletes: “At some point I would like to coach my kids in their sports and maybe coach at the high school level too at some point,” “I would love to be a college basketball coach,” “My goal is to make it to the collegiate level as a female coach,” “My biggest goal I would say is to work my way up the baseball world as a coach,” “Going to medical school sounds intriguing, as does physical therapy or being a soccer coach,” and “I would love to mainly work with athletes.”

A strong desire was demonstrated to give back to their sport and community through coaching and mentoring: “I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life,” “I believe in the next 8-10 years cheerleading will be in the Olympics and I would like to have some part in that or at least be able to mentor younger athletes,” and “To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation.”

### **Fulfilling recreational and competitive drive**

Continued engagement in athletic competition was of high priority for many participants. Interest was indicated in recreational sports and activities: “I do plan to continue fencing recreationally for the rest of my life,” “I love playing sports with friends and family and don’t think that will ever change,” “I want to continue playing tennis in a league after I graduate,” and “I am ready to go back to how the sport should be played and ready to join a league for after work.” Dedicating time and resources into training and competitions was important to fulfill their competitive drive after athletic retirement: “I hope to continue competing as long as I can,” “I would like to be living a comfortable enough life so that I can still dedicate a large portion of my time to training and competing,” and “I will most likely be doing some triathlons or marathons/half-marathons for fun but also fulfill my competitive drive.”

### **Difficulty detaching**

Participants often focused on how retiring from their sport career would strengthen their bond or association to athletics but through various other avenues. Several narratives mentioned how participants loved their sport experience, that they want to be around athletics as much as possible, and that they would always consider themselves an athlete: “I love running and will always be a runner,” “I would like to be heavily involved in rowing even after I graduate from university,” “I want to be around athletics as much as possible,” and “I feel like I will still be connected to the sports world which has played a huge role in my life ever since I can remember.” The word “retirement” challenged participants to express who they wanted to be personally or professional in the future when they did not have their athletic career. Their identities were wrapped around sport: “I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit,” “I feel like I should stop playing, but I’ve never not played a sport,” and “Running is a way of life not just sport I did.”

### **Investing in health and wellness**

The desire to continue exercising and staying physically active was a commonly addressed interest. Many participants mentioned how it was important for them to not only be active, but to do so throughout their lifetime: “I hope to continue to be active and healthy throughout my life,” “I am blessed that I can take my sport with me throughout my whole life,” and “I am hoping to transition to further distances once I start aging, such as the half marathon and marathon.”

Participants also mentioned their motivation to engage in group fitness classes, other hobby sports, and cross training classes as frequently as possible: “I plan on continuing to run but not in serious competition,” “I will for sure be doing more cross-training as I love to bike and swim,” “I will do athletic classes and group fitness activities,” “I plan to continue to be active in my everyday life by working out and/or doing yoga,” and “I hope to remain very athletic and active by pursuing other hobby sports.”

### **Pursuing a professional athletic career**

Several participants addressed that playing professionally may sound unrealistic or narrow focused, but that they had ambitions to continue playing at a professional level after their college graduation: “I would like to try out for the national team at some point in the next two years and see where I make it when it comes to European Championships and world Championships,” “If I could be a really successful professional golfer, I would like to do that for the rest of my life,” “I plan to remain an athlete but take a couple years to transition to a different sport,” “Plan A is to be a professional soccer player,” “I know that I would have the ability to play professionally after soccer and if that happens,” “I plan to be a professional golfer for as long as I can to help pay for medical school,” and “I may decide to take a year off from grad school to train for the 2024 Olympics.”

### **Vocational pursuits in the sport industry**

It was expressed several times by participants that they had aspirations of working in professional sport industries and organizations: “I would like to work at the D1 collegiate level and then at the professional setting,” “My end goal is to become a sports agent,” and “I hope to be employed with any sports brand working in the marketing or advertising field.” If participants could not continue their athletic career professionally, they believed their next best option was to enter the sports industry: “I hope to stay involved in athletics working with either a professional or collegiate athletic organization,” and “I hope to work with athletes or perform research relevant to nutrition and health correlations.”

### **Transition Acknowledgement and Acceptance**

Explicitly acknowledging or accepting retirement from a sport career was mentioned numerous times throughout the narrative data. It is common for individuals to move from acknowledgement to acceptance. Participants that acknowledge their retirement from sport address and validate their current situation, and participants that accept their transition are more willing or at peace with their athletic retirement.

### **Acknowledgement**

Participants expressed acknowledgement in their narratives when they addressed the fact that they knew their athletic career was coming to an end: “It’s a tough decision to make because I want to keep playing, but I don’t see my sport in my future,” “I do not plan on playing my sport after college as I would need to play for 3 more years before the next Olympics,” “When I officially retire from Track and Field at the University of Memphis,” and “Once I graduate I will most likely retire from rowing.”

## **Acceptance**

Acceptance of athletic retirement was expressed when participants indicated that they were at peace with their transition: “I saw myself in a different light outside of soccer for the first time and I was ok with that,” “Sports is a big part of my life right now but I know it is going to end eventually and that there are more important things than becoming an athletic superstar,” “I have many aspirations in life and many goals I wish to accomplish many of those are outside of football,” and “I do not want to move on professionally because I am ready to get on with my life.”

## **Transferable Life Skills**

Transferable skills are abilities that are helpful and relevant across many domains of life both personally and professionally. Many participants approached retirement from their sport as an opportunity to practice and display the life skills they learned through their athletic experience. Sports played a major role in teaching participants invaluable work ethic, communication skills, and investing in a physically healthy lifestyle: “I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college,” “Being a college athlete I have great time management,” and “Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more.” Recognizing that a lack of professional experience is not necessarily a barrier to a job coupled with the ability to identify developed transferable skills are essential for student-athletes as they look to build a professional career outside of sport.

## **Developmental Cost**

Several participants addressed the developmental costs associated with being a collegiate student-athlete. Sports were viewed by some participants as a barrier to their personal and professional growth. Academic success and impacted GPAs were of concern: “I'm not sure how

accurate this is going to be because I feel like my sport is preventing me from getting good grades,” “My academics are impacted from the sport,” and “If it's preventing me from doing well academically, I feel like I should stop playing, but I've never not played a sport.”

Engagement in college athletics also came at cost of mental health and wellness: “College teams destroy confidence in athletes by playing all of these mind games and not being transparent with teammates by giving each teammate different reasons,” “I've never worked so hard to be the strongest, fastest, a great role model for my teammates, and have been so undermined as a player,” and “I believe there should be a lot less politics in the sport and athletes should play every match if they are in the strongest and fastest on the team.” Developmental cost of athletics reached beyond academics and mental health for some participants as they questioned their current participation in their sport: “I additionally hope to get a job in a new city or a job that requires travelling as with my sport I have only been able to see a very small portion of the world as I have dedicated a lot of my time to it,” and “I'm not sure if I should continue to play because it can have an impact on the rest of my life.”

Table 5-1. FCA theme count

FCA Theme	Total Count	% of SA that Displayed Theme	% of Overall Themes Identified
Quality of Life (QL)	820	99%	62%
Achievement	540	91%	41%
Security	51	19%	4%
Relationship	126	34%	10%
Experiential	105	32%	8%
Occupational Desire (OD)	152	42%	12%
Positive	97	30%	7%
Negative	9	5%	1%
Uncertainty	46	16%	3%
Sport Career Transition (SCT)	343	76%	26%
Continued Connection	180	47%	14%
Transition Acknowledgement and Acceptance	100	43%	8%
Transferable Life Skills	44	10%	3%
Developmental Cost	19	7%	1%

Notes: N = 197



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FCA Paragraph

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I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college. I am working towards a career in data analytics, but I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life. My ultimate aim is to be happy and healthy while pursuing a job that will allow me to make a meaningful impact on others. Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit. I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life. To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation.

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Word Count: 171

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Figure 5-1: Color-coded FCA narrative from “Student-Athlete A”

Table 5-2. Examples of new Occupational Desire and Sport Career Transition themes

Theme	Narrative Example
Occupational Uncertainty (OD)	“I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life,” “I am not sure exactly what I want to be doing once I am completely done playing soccer,” “It is extremely hard to tell where I will be looking that far down the road,” “Career-wise I am not entirely sure what I would like to do yet.”
Continued Connection (SCT)	“I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life,” “I want to continue playing tennis in a league after I graduate,” “I would like to be heavily involved in rowing even after I graduate from university.”
Transition Acknowledgement and Acceptance (SCT)	“It's a tough decision to make because I want to keep playing, but I don't see my sport in my future,” “I do not plan on playing my sport after college as I would need to play for 3 more years before the next Olympics,” “I saw myself in a different light outside of soccer for the first time and I was ok with that.”
Transferable Life Skills (SCT)	“I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college,” “Being a college athlete I have great time management,” and “Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more.”
Developmental Cost (SCT)	“If it's preventing me from doing well academically, I feel like I should stop playing, but I've never not played a sport,” “College teams destroy confidence in athletes by playing all of these mind games and not being transparent with teammates by giving each teammate different reasons,” “I've never worked so hard to be the strongest, fastest, a great role model for my teammates, and have been so undermined as a player.”

## CHAPTER 6 QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

### **Methodological Overview**

Chapter 6 addresses the quantitative methodology used in this mixed methods research. Chapter 6 is divided into two parts. Part I describes the quantitative data collection process and procedures including (a) research design, (b) population and sampling, (c) questionnaire distribution, (d) questionnaire development, (e) validity and reliability, and (f) delimitations. Part II addresses quantitative analysis by including (a) response rate, (b) instrument reliability, (c) overall career exploration and word count, (d) overall career exploration and thematic constructs, (e) specific types of career exploration and word count, and (f) specific types of career exploration and thematic constructs.

### **Part I: Quantitative Data Collection Procedures**

#### **Research Design**

The goal of this quantitative phase was to focus on the relationship between career exploration and construction of life and occupational narratives of student-athletes. By combining a modified Future Career Autobiography (FCA; Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012) and specific constructs of the Career Identity Development Inventory (CIDI; Wendling, 2019), this research hoped to gain insight into how student-athletes' career exploration activities may or may not influence their career development and construction.

This quantitative research phase consisted of the collection and analysis of new data, and the analysis of previously collected data from phase one. The previously collected data was from the modified FCA prompt in phase one of this research. A content analysis of that data was conducted in this phase to provide a quantitative count of each Quality of Life (QL), Occupational Desire (OD), and newly established Sport Career Transition (SCT) themes. The

new quantitative data for this phase was drawn from a questionnaire that addressed the career exploration in-depth portion of the CIDI (Wendling, 2019). The research questions addressed in Chapter 6 can be found in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population (Groves et al., 2004) for this research consisted of purposefully selected NCAA Division I student-athletes in the United States. The sampling frame (Groves et al., 2004) consisted of NCAA student-athletes that indicated they were current or active members of Division I institutions ( $N = 89$ ). All individuals in this sampling frame were originally contacted by student-athlete development professionals via email to participate in the first qualitative phase of this research. All of the participants in this quantitative phase indicated in the previous qualitative phase that they would be willing to partake in this follow-up study.

The sample consisted of 17% ( $n = 15$ ) males of 83% ( $n = 74$ ) females, and the participants were between the ages of 18 and 23 years old. Ethnicity did not play a role in the selection of student-athlete participants, but the racial composition of the sample was 75% White or Caucasian ( $n = 67$ ), 4% Black or African American ( $n = 4$ ), 1% Asian ( $n = 1$ ), 6% Hispanic or Latino ( $n = 5$ ), and 14% other ( $n = 12$ ). Academic standing also did not play a role in the selection of participants, but the academic standings of the sample was 16% freshman ( $n = 14$ ), 28% sophomore ( $n = 25$ ), 24% juniors ( $n = 21$ ), 27% seniors ( $n = 24$ ), and 5% graduate students ( $n = 6$ ). A total of 10% ( $n = 9$ ) of the participants believed that it was “very likely” that they were going to play professionally, 9% ( $n = 8$ ) believed it was “likely” that they were going to play professionally, and 81% ( $n = 72$ ) believed it was “not likely” that they were going to play their sport professionally.

Collectively, the 89 student-athletes represented 21 different sports including 7 men’s and 14 women’s teams. Male participants represented 8 sports including Men’s Baseball ( $n = 1$ ),

Men's Cross Country ( $n = 5$ ), Men's Track and Field ( $n = 2$ ), Men's Golf ( $n = 2$ ), Men's Gymnastics ( $n = 1$ ), Men's Soccer ( $n = 2$ ), and Men's Water Polo ( $n = 1$ ). Women's participants represented 14 sports including Women's Basketball ( $n = 4$ ), Women's Cross Country ( $n = 5$ ), Women's Track and Field ( $n = 4$ ), Women's Fencing ( $n = 1$ ), Women's Field Hockey ( $n = 2$ ), Women's Golf ( $n = 3$ ), Women's Ice Hockey ( $n = 4$ ), Women's Rowing ( $n = 13$ ), Women's Soccer ( $n = 7$ ), Women's Softball ( $n = 7$ ), Women's Swimming and Diving ( $n = 10$ ), Women's Tennis ( $n = 4$ ), Women's Volleyball ( $n = 6$ ), Women's Water Polo ( $n = 1$ ).

### **Data Collection Methods**

The primary technique of collecting data for this research were two self-developed Qualtrics questionnaires. The first questionnaire from the qualitative phase of this research contained a modified version of the Future Career Autobiography (FCA; Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012). The previously collected FCA data was readdressed and analyzed in this quantitative phase through a content analysis. The newly developed Sport Career Transition and Occupational Desire themes were included in this content analysis to further develop and expand the FCA for use within student-athlete populations. The second questionnaire in this quantitative phase had various career exploration constructs from the CIDI (Wendling, 2019) and was collected at a later date.

### **Questionnaire distribution**

All participants were emailed at the beginning of June that (a) completed the first phase of this research, (b) provided a complete response to the FCA prompt, and (c) indicated they would be willing to participate in the second phase of this study. This email invitation provided a link to the second Qualtrics questionnaire and was sent about one month after participants completed the questionnaire from the first phase of the research. A second follow up email was sent one week later to individuals who had yet to take the survey. The initial email solicitation

can be found in Appendix E. Participants were notified in the initial email solicitation that they had the opportunity to win a \$15 gift card by participating in this study.

### **Questionnaire development**

The questions in this Qualtrics questionnaire were compiled from the CIDI (Wendling, 2019). The first part of the questionnaire contained two questions including name and preferred email in case individuals were randomly selected to receive an Amazon gift card for their participation. The second portion of the questionnaire contained twelve recently validated career exploration questions from the CIDI that measured current career exploration in-breadth and advanced, network, and self-career exploration in-depth (Wendling, 2019). This portion of the questionnaire had twelve Likert-type questions. These questions were prefaced with the prompt “Within the past year, I have been...” and were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). There were four questions of in-depth network career exploration (e.g., Initiating conversations with professionals who are employed in positions similar to what I decided to do for my career), four questions of in-depth advanced career exploration (e.g., Acquiring practical experience in my desired career), and four questions of in-depth self-exploration (e.g., Reflecting on how my chosen career aligns with my past experiences). This questionnaire was created using Qualtrics online survey data design and collection software and can be found in Appendix F of this document.

### **Validity and Reliability of Modified of Future Career Autobiography**

The FCA was originally developed by Rehfuss (2009) as a means of identifying and measuring alterations made by individuals in their occupation and life narratives over time due to narrative and constructivist career interventions (Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012). The FCA was designed as a pre and post tool that could be used before and after career counseling interventions. This pre and post measurement creates an initial and subsequent FCA that can be

quantitatively scored to identify changes, expansions, or clarification of an individual's narrative (Reh fuss, 2009).

Reh fuss and Di Fabio (2012) conducted an experimental study to support the reliability and validate the accuracy of the FCA. Their research validated the FCA as a tool to assess, identify, and delineate change over time in life and occupational narratives after partaking in constructivist career interventions. Reh fuss & Di Fabio (2012) were also able to confirm that (a) change in word count can be used to highlight narrative change and (b) constructivist counseling interventions may elicit thematic movement in personal and occupational narratives.

The first questionnaire in this research with the modified FCA prompt was tested for content (are questions asking about the right things?), cognitive (do respondents understand the questions being asked?), and usability (can respondents easily complete the questionnaire?) standards through "subject matter experts" (Groves et al., 2004, p. 241) and a pilot sample. Three subject matter experts ( $n = 3$ ) on career identity and career exploration reviewed the questionnaire. Two experts were members of the dissertation committee and the third was a student-athlete development professional. All experts were familiar with student-athlete career development literature and measuring constructs. Experts recommended adjusting the FCA prompt (e.g., including "professional sport career" in the prompt for student-athletes that plan to play professionally after college) and adding NCAA GOALS questions to obtain additional demographic information that could contribute to the quality of data analysis.

A non-random pilot sample of knowledgeable respondents were surveyed to test the questionnaire and provide feedback about its clarity. This sample consisted of doctorate students at the University of Florida ( $n = 4$ ), University of Florida student-athletes ( $n = 25$ ) and non-experts ( $n = 15$ ). All participants ( $n = 44$ ) were asked the following questions (Fink, 2003): (a)

Are the instructions clearly written? (b) Are any questions confusing to answer? (c) Do you have any suggestions for improvements of the questionnaire? All participants indicated that the instructions were clearly written and that questions were easy to answer. Several respondents identified formatting and grammatical errors.

### **Career Identity Development Inventory**

The career exploration in-depth questions derived from the CIDI used in this questionnaire have been recently identified as valid and reliable (Wendling, 2019). Career exploration in-depth measures the extent to which individuals have actively engaged in activities founded on their desired career of choice so that they will be able to acquire a refined and more specific understanding of their career commitments (Wendling, 2019). Wendling (2019) empirically identified four factors related to exploration in-depth in her development of the CIDI: preliminary career exploration in-depth, career self-exploration in depth, network exploration in-depth, and advanced career exploration in-depth. Only career self-exploration in depth, network exploration in-depth, and advanced career exploration in-depth were addressed in this research.

Network exploration in-depth addresses if individuals have initiated conversations, conducted information interviews, sought advice from working professionals in a field of interest, and performed job shadows with those professionals. An example Likert-type question that addresses network career exploration is as follows: “Within the last year, I have been seeking advice from professionals working in my field of interest.” Advanced career exploration in-depth is when individuals spend time engaging in practical work experiences, training, and education or seek employment to development relevant career skills. An example Likert-type question that addresses advanced career exploration is as follows: “Within the last year, I have been engaging in the kind of training, education, and/or experiences I need to have for the kind



of work I decided to pursue.” Career self-exploration in-depth is shown through retrospective action of individuals as they think about what they value in a career, about how their chosen career aligns with their previous experiences and current interest and personality, and how their strengths and abilities could be best used in their career of interest. An example Likert-type question that addresses career self-exploration is as follows: “Within the last year, I have been contemplating what I value most in my desired career.”

The second questionnaire, which had the career exploration in-depth construct of the CIDI, was also tested for content, cognitive, and usability standards by utilizing a “subject matter expert” (Groves et al., 2004, p. 241) and a pilot sample. One subject matter expert on career identity reviewed the questionnaire. This expert was a member of the dissertation committee. This expert recommended adjusting the CIDI prompt (e.g., changing “over the last twelve months” to “over last year”).

A non-random pilot sample of knowledgeable respondents were also surveyed to test the questionnaire and provide feedback about its clarity. This sample consisted of doctorate students at the University of Florida ( $n = 5$ ), University of Florida student-athletes ( $n = 5$ ) and non-experts ( $n = 5$ ). All participants ( $n = 15$ ) were asked the following questions (Fink, 2003): (a) Are the instructions clearly written? (b) Are any questions confusing to answer? (c) Do you have any suggestions for improvements of the questionnaire? All participants indicated that the instructions were clearly written, that questions were easy to answer, and that there were no suggested improvements for the questionnaire.

### **Delimitations**

This second questionnaire containing CIDI constructs was sent only to the student-athletes who participated in the first phase of this research and indicated that they would be interested in participating in the second phase of this study. This frame did not fully represent

NCAA Division I student-athletes who (a) were not given the opportunity to participate in the first phase of the research due to their director of student-athlete development not responding or agreeing to participate in this research, and (b) student-athletes who did not have a listed email address or access to a computer. Additionally, this questionnaire was not intended to measure all possible constructs and variables associated with the CIDI and career exploration. It was intended to only measure chosen constructs associated with in-depth career exploration (Wendling, 2019).

## **Part II: Quantitative Analysis**

The FCA data from the first qualitative phase of this research was downloaded from Qualtrics and uploaded into a word document in order to conduct a content analysis. The CIDI data from the second quantitative phase was downloaded from Qualtrics and uploaded into an Excel document. Quantitative numerical counts of FCA Quality of Life, Occupational Desires, and Sport Career Transition themes were added to the excel document with CIDI output. Both the FCA and CIDI quantitative data were uploaded into SPSS and subjected to statistical tests of frequencies and descriptives, t-tests, and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVAs). The goal of these statistical tests was to identify if career exploration variables had any relationship with student-athletes' abilities to create fuller and more constructed future career narratives.

### **Response Rate**

The sampling frame consisted of NCAA Division I student-athletes who participated in the first phase of this research and indicated their interest in participating in the second phase ( $N = 176$ ). Only 71% of the student-athletes from the original study were willing to participate in the follow-up study. An email solicitation, which can be found in Appendix E, was sent to the 176 student-athletes who were willing to partake in the follow-up study. There was a response rate of 60% ( $n = 105$ ), but only 51% ( $n = 89$ ) of those responses were finished in their entirety

and useable for this research. With only 60% of the population responding and 51% of the responses being usable for this research, readers are encouraged to interpret the results of this research with a moderate level of non-response bias in mind.

### **Instrument Reliability**

Internal consistency, which is the degree to which items that make up a scale are all measuring the same underlying attribute (Pallant, 2013) was measured through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha is measured on a scale of 0-1, with higher values indicating greater reliability. A minimum level of .7 is recommended (DeVellis, 2012). In this research, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for self, network, and advanced career exploration in-depth. All factors of the CIDI used in this research reported satisfactory internal consistency (Table 6-1).

### **Overall Career Exploration and Narrative Construction**

Participants were asked to address their current career exploration activities (Table 6-1; Wendling, 2019). To create an overall exploration in-depth score, the mean scores of the three independent constructs of career exploration (advanced, network, self) were summed and split into a low group (participants with a sum score of 3 to 11.99) and high group (participants with a sum score of 12 or greater). One t-test was conducted to address research question 2a and determine the relationship, or lack thereof, between overall levels of career exploration and word count of FCAs. These t-tests allowed for a comparison of high and low overall levels of career exploration in-depth and participants' ability to produce a more constructed (operationalized as word count) future career narrative.

### **Overall Career Exploration and Narrative Fulfillment**

An overall career exploration in-depth score of 1 to 11.99 was coded as "low" and a score of 12.00 or greater was coded as "high." Thematic constructs were identified through a content analysis of FCA data. Previously identified and validated QL, OD (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di

Fabio, 2012), and SCT themes were deductively coded. The content analysis gave numeric counts of the four QL themes (achievement, relationship, security, experiential), three OD themes (positive, negative, uncertainty), and four SCT themes (continued connection, transition acknowledgment and acceptance, transferable life skills, developmental costs). One MANOVA was conducted to address research question 2b and determine if overall levels of career exploration in-depth influenced how fulfilled (operationalized as theme count) student-athletes' future career narratives will be.

### **Specific Types of Career Exploration and Narrative Construction**

Participants' career exploration activities within the past year were categorized by the CIDI construct of exploration in-depth, which is comprised of advanced, self, and network career exploration (Wendling, 2019). To create a score for each construct of career exploration in-depth, scores of the four items for each construct were averaged and split into two categories. The categories that I created for the purposes of this study were a "high" exploration group and "low" exploration group. Specifically, mean scores of 1 to 3.99 were coded as "low" as these participants' scores ranged between a score of 1.0 (Strongly Disagree) but below 4.0 (Agree). Participants with a mean score above 4.0 (Agree) were assigned into the "high" group for purposes of analysis.

Three t-test were conducted to address research question 2c and determine the relationship, or lack thereof, between each type of career exploration in-depth (advanced, self, network) and word count of FCAs. These t-tests allowed for the comparison of high and low levels of specific types of career exploration in-depth and participants' abilities to produce a more constructed (operationalized as word count) future career narrative.

### **Specific Types of Career Exploration and Narrative Fulfillment**

As suggested, each career exploration in-depth construct (advanced, self, network) received its own average score and split into high and low. Thematic constructs of the four QL themes, three OD themes, and four SCT themes were also previously identified through a content analysis of FCA data. Three MANOVAs were conducted to address research question 2d and identify if specific types of career exploration (advanced, self, and network) helped student-athletes create a more fulfilled (operationalized as themes) future career narrative. These findings helped me identify if student-athlete development professionals should emphasize specific types of career exploration activities to ensure student-athletes are developing more constructed and fulfilled future career narratives.

### **Research Permission and Ethical Considerations**

All participants in this study were informed of the purpose of this research and exactly how their responses were going to be analyzed and used. Participants had the ability to withdraw from the study at any point if they no longer wanted to participate. The privacy of the participants was ensured at all times, and any documentation was securely held by password protection in the University of Florida's Laboratory for Athlete Development Research (LADR) database. Before contact with any campus student-athletes was made, all documents including the informed consent and survey forms were presented upon request to the student-athlete development or enhancement professional associated with the specific Division I university.

There was no potential for physical risk or harm for participants, however, participants could experience discomfort or negative emotions when answering survey questions. There was also no deceit associated with this study. Under the University of Florida's Internal Review Board's (IRB) policies, participants have the right to skip any questions that make them feel uncomfortable or withdraw from the study at any time. These options for participants were stated

in the information consent document along with contact information of the researcher and university faculty advisor supervising the study. The aim of this research was to benefit both the researcher and the participants through data collection and identifying the impact of career exploration on the development of FCAs. This process could potentially provide participants with the benefits of increased self-awareness, positively impacting narrative development, personal assessment, and reflection among others.

### **Summary**

Chapter 6 describes the quantitative methodology used in this dissertation. Chapter 7 presents the quantitative analysis and findings. Chapter 8 presents the mixed findings through discussion and provides implications for student-athlete development along with recommendations for future research.

Table 6-1. Depth-based career exploration constructs and Cronbach's alpha coefficients

Factors and items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient ( $\alpha$ ):
Network exploration in-depth	.803
Conducting informational interviews with professionals working in my field of interest	
Job shadowing professionals employed in my field of interest	
Initiating conversations with professionals who are employed in positions similar to what I decided to do for my career	
Seeking advice from professionals working in my field of interest	
Career self-exploration in-depth	.789
Reflecting on how my chosen career aligns with my past experiences	
Contemplating what I value most in my desired career	
Contemplating how the work I want to do is congruent with my interests and personality	
Reflecting on how my strengths and abilities could be best used in my desired career	
Advanced career exploration in-depth	.842
Acquiring practical experience in my desired career	
Gaining employment to develop relevant skills for the career I decided to pursue	
Spending time engaged in activities related to my desired career	
Engaging in the kind of training, education, and/or experience(s) I need to have for the kind of work I decided to pursue	

## CHAPTER 7 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

### **Research Question 2**

One focus of this research was to explore if student-athletes with higher levels of overall career exploration would portray a more constructed and fulfilled FCA. Narrative theory and career development literature suggests that individuals are able to build and achieve clearer personal and professional stories, or storied identities (McAdams, 1997), when they are able to address the what, why, how and who that contributed to their career interest and choices (Brott, 2005; Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012; Savickas, 2010). Narrative career theory and effective career interventions are focused on enhancing and understanding an individual's vocation and career (Savickas, 1995, 1997, 2005) with the goal of changing one's story (Rehfuss, 2009). Current theories and interventions do not supply instruments, specifically for the population of student-athletes, that address if career exploration is a viable tool for helping student-athletes construct fuller and more complete occupational and life narratives.

### **Overall Career Exploration and Narrative Construction**

Research question 2a asked, "Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce significantly more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?" To address this question, participants were asked to rate their career exploration experiences on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on 12 career exploration questions. These career exploration questions consisted of network ( $\alpha = .80$ ), self ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and advanced ( $\alpha = .84$ ) career exploration constructs, which were also summed to represent a variable measuring "overall career exploration." An overall career exploration score of 1 to 11.99 was coded as "low" ( $n = 48$ ) and a score of 12 or greater was coded as "high" ( $n = 41$ ). The average level of overall career exploration for the sample ( $N =$



89) was  $M = 11.3$  ( $SD = 2.05$ ) and the average word count was  $M = 86.11$  ( $SD = 67.12$ ). Low means did not reach agreement for the purpose of this study. An average of 4 (agreement) or greater was coded as high, and those means that did not reach at least 4 (agreement) or greater were labeled low for the purpose of this study.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare word count scores for individuals with high ( $n = 41$ ) and low levels ( $n = 48$ ) of overall career exploration. High and low levels of overall career exploration served as the independent variable, and word count was the dependent variable. There was no significant difference in word count scores for individuals with high levels of overall career exploration ( $M = 84.76$ ,  $SD = 9.35$ ) and low levels of career exploration ( $M = 87.27$ ,  $SD = 10.59$ ;  $t(87) = .18$ ,  $p = .86$ , two-tailed) (Table 7-1). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 2.52, 95% *CI*: -26.02 to 31.05) was extremely small (eta squared = .0004). This indicated that overall career exploration in-depth, or the act of engaging in more career exploration activities, did not influence an individual's ability to produce a more constructed FCA.

### **Overall Career Exploration and Narrative Fulfillment**

Research Question 2b asked, "Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?" High and low levels of overall career exploration served as the independent variables and the variables coded from the modified FCA were the dependent variables. These dependent variables included achievement (QL), security (QL), relationship (QL), experiential (QL), positive occupational desire (OD), negative occupational desire (OD), occupational uncertainty (OD), continued connection (SCT), transition acknowledgment and acceptance (SCT), transferable life skills (SCT), and developmental cost (SCT).

A one-way between groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to investigate the differences in levels of overall career exploration in narrative fulfillment. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of overall career exploration on the narrative fulfillment of their FCAs,  $F(11, 77) = 1.670, p = .09$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = .81$ ; partial eta squared = .19 (Table 7-2). Univariate analysis and descriptive statistics for each variable are depicted in Table 7-3.

### **Specific Types of Career Exploration and Narrative Construction**

Research question 2c asked, “Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?” Three independent samples t-test were conducted to compare the word count score for individuals with high and low levels of advanced, self, and network career exploration. The scores for each type of career exploration was averaged and split into scores of high and low. A score of 1 to 3.99 was coded as “low” for each construct and a score of 4.00 or greater was coded as “high.”

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the word count scores for individuals with high ( $n = 31$ ) and low ( $n = 58$ ) levels of network career exploration. There was no significant difference in scores for individuals with low levels of network career exploration ( $M = 86.74, SD = 69.30$ ) and high levels ( $M = 84.94, SD = 63.98; t(87) = .12, p = .91$ , two-tailed) (Table 7-1). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 1.81, 95% *CI*: -28.05 to 31.67) was extremely small (eta squared = .0002).

A second independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the word count scores for individuals with high ( $n = 49$ ) and low ( $n = 40$ ) levels of advanced career exploration. There was no significant difference in scores for individuals with low levels of advanced career exploration ( $M = 85.78, SD = 58.46$ ) and high levels ( $M = 86.39, SD = 74.06; t(87) = -.04, p = .97$ , two-

tailed) (Table 7-1). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference =  $-.61$ , 95% *CI*:  $-29.21$  to  $27.98$ ) was extremely small (eta squared =  $.00002$ ).

A third independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the word count scores for individuals with high ( $n = 73$ ) and low ( $n = 16$ ) levels of career self-exploration. There was a significant difference in scores for individuals with low levels of career self-exploration ( $M = 118.94$ ,  $SD = 120.92$ ) and high levels ( $M = 78.92$ ,  $SD = 46.59$ );  $t(87) = 2.201$ ,  $p = .03$ , two-tailed) (Table 7-1). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference =  $40.02$ , 95% *CI*:  $3.97$  to  $76.10$ ) was moderate (eta squared =  $.05$ ). This means that 5% of the variance in word count was explained by levels of career self-exploration and that levels of career self-exploration, or the act of engaging in more career self-exploration activities, influenced an individual's ability to produce a more constructed FCA.

### **Specific Types of Career Exploration and Narrative Fulfillment**

Research question 2d asked, "Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?" Three one-way between groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted to investigate the differences in levels of network, self, and advanced career exploration in narrative fulfillment. The scores for each type of career exploration was averaged and split into scores of high and low. A score of 1 to 3.99 was coded as "low" for each construct and a score of 4.00 or greater was coded as "high."

The first MANOVA was conducted to investigate the differences in levels of network career exploration in narrative fulfillment. High and low levels of network career exploration served as the independent variable and the eleven modified FCA themes, which were previously stated in research question 2b, were utilized as dependent variables. The multivariate results

indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of network career exploration on the narrative fulfillment of their FCAs,  $F(11, 77) = 1.07, p = .40$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = .87$ ; partial eta squared = .13 (Table 7-2). Means and standard deviations for all of the univariate comparisons for network career exploration are provided in Table 7-3.

A second MANOVA was conducted to investigate the differences in levels of advanced career exploration in narrative fulfillment. The same eleven dependent variables from the first MANOVA, which consisted of all FCA QL, OD, and SCT themes, were used. The independent variable was advanced career exploration. Results from the MANOVA indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of advanced career exploration on the narrative fulfillment of their FCAs,  $F(11, 77) = .82, p = .62$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = .90$ ; partial eta squared = .14 (Table 7-2). Means and standard deviations for all of the univariate comparisons for advanced career exploration are provided in Table 7-5.

A third MANOVA was conducted to investigate the differences in levels of career self-exploration in narrative fulfillment. The same eleven dependent variables from the first and second MANOVA, which consisted of all FCA QL, OD, and SCT themes. The independent variable was high and low career self-exploration. Results from the MANOVA indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of career self-exploration on the narrative fulfillment of their FCAs,  $F(11, 77) = 2.17, p = .03$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = .76$ ; partial eta squared = .24 (Table 7-2). Means and standard deviations for all of the univariate comparisons for career self-exploration are provided in Table 7-6.

Follow up univariate analysis of variances (ANOVA) for each of the dependent variables were analyzed next using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .005. Positive occupational desire

was the only variable that demonstrated a significant mean difference,  $F = (1, 87) = 11.46$ ,  $p = .001$ , partial eta squared = .12. An inspection of mean scores indicated that individuals with lower levels of career self-exploration had more mentions of positive occupational desires ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 2.056$ ) than individuals with higher levels of career self-exploration ( $M = .52$ ,  $SD = 1.002$ ) in their narrative.

### **Summary**

Results indicated that career self-exploration is the only type of depth-based career exploration that has a relationship to both student-athletes' narrative construction and fulfillment. A total of 5% of the variance in FCA word count was explained by levels of career self-exploration, which means that the act of engaging in career self-exploration activities can influence an individual's ability to produce a more constructed FCA. A total of 24% of the variance in narrative fulfillment was also explained by levels of career self-exploration, which supports that the act of engaging in career self-exploration activities can influence an individual's ability to produce a more constructed FCA. Individuals with high and low levels of career self-exploration differed only on the variable of positive occupational desires. Specifically, individuals with lower levels of career self-exploration had more mentions of positive occupational desires than individuals with higher levels of career self-exploration.

Table 7-1. Career exploration and narrative construction

Type of Career Exploration	Level of Career Exploration	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	df	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Partial Eta Squared
Overall	Low	48	87.27	73.36	87	.18	.86	.0004
	High	41	84.76	59.89				
Advanced	Low	40	85.78	58.46	87	-.04	.97	.00002
	High	49	86.39	74.10				
Self	Low	16	118.94	120.92	87	2.21	.03*	.05
	High	73	78.92	46.59				
Network	Low	58	86.74	69.30	87	.12	.91	.0002
	High	31	84.94	63.98				

Note: \*  $p < .05$

Table 7-2. MANOVA results for career exploration and narrative fulfillment

Type of Career Exploration	Level of Career Exploration	<i>n</i>	<i>F</i>	Wilk's $\Lambda$	Sig. (2-tailed)	Partial Eta Squared
Overall	Low	48	1.67	.81	.10	.19
	High	41				
Advanced	Low	40	1.13	.86	.35	.14
	High	49				
Self	Low	16	2.17	.76	.03*	.24
	High	73				
Network	Low	58	1.07	.87	.40	.13
	High	31				

Note: \*  $p < .05$

Table 7-3. Univariate results for overall career exploration and narrative fulfillment

FCA Theme	Overall Career Exploration	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
Quality of Life				
Achievement	Low	2.83	2.41	.84
	High	3.23	2.27	
Relationship	Low	.48	.90	3.39
	High	.90	1.26	
Security	Low	.35	.73	.79
	High	.22	.69	
Experiential	Low	.67	1.04	.16
	High	.76	1.04	
Occupational Desire				
Positive	Low	.59	1.31	.12
	High	.78	1.35	
Negative	Low	.02	.14	.521
	High	.05	.22	
Uncertainty	Low	.40	.89	4.98
	High	.07	.26	
Sport Career Transition				
Continued Connection	Low	1.19	1.45	1.19
	High	.85	1.42	
Transition Acknowledgement and Acceptance	Low	.67	.83	.94
	High	.51	.64	
Transferable Life Skills	Low	.25	1.00	1.70
	High	.59	1.41	
Developmental Cost	Low	.25	.86	2.72
	High	.02	.16	



Table 7-4. Univariate results for network exploration and narrative fulfillment

FCA Theme	Overall Career Exploration	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
Quality of Life				
Achievement	Low	2.76	2.27	2.52
	High	3.58	2.43	
Relationship	Low	.60	.99	.69
	High	.81	1.28	
Security	Low	.29	.68	.00
	High	.29	.78	
Experiential	Low	.72	1.06	.04
	High	.68	1.01	
Occupational Desire				
Positive	Low	.66	1.22	.54
	High	.87	1.50	
Negative	Low	.02	.13	1.38
	High	.06	.25	
Uncertainty	Low	.29	.80	.72
	High	.16	.45	
Sport Career Transition				
Continued Connection	Low	1.21	1.47	2.44
	High	.71	1.35	
Transition Acknowledgement and Acceptance	Low	.64	.77	.53
	High	.52	.72	
Transferable Life Skills	Low	.31	1.01	1.00
	High	.58	1.52	
Developmental Cost	Low	.21	.79	1.47
	High	.03	.18	

Table 7-5. Univariate results for advanced career exploration and narrative fulfillment

FCA Theme	Overall Career Exploration	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
Quality of Life				
Achievement	Low	3.08	2.15	.01
	High	3.02	2.52	
Relationship	Low	.43	.84	3.88
	High	.88	1.24	
Security	Low	.35	.74	.48
	High	.24	.69	
Experiential	Low	.72	1.09	.02
	High	.69	1.00	
Occupational Desire				
Positive	Low	.67	1.35	.13
	High	.78	1.31	
Negative	Low	.03	.16	.17
	High	.04	.20	
Uncertainty	Low	.38	.90	2.50
	High	.14	.46	
Sport Career Transition				
Continued Connection	Low	1.15	1.46	.47
	High	.94	1.44	
Transition Acknowledgement and Acceptance	Low	.68	.80	.82
	High	.53	.71	
Transferable Life Skills	Low	.18	.99	2.65
	High	.59	1.37	
Developmental Cost	Low	.23	.73	1.08
	High	.08	.57	

Table 7-6. Univariate results for career self-exploration and narrative fulfillment

FCA Theme	Overall Career Exploration	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
Quality of Life				
Achievement	Low	3.56	3.50	.95
	High	2.93	2.03	
Relationship	Low	.56	.97	.20
	High	.70	1.13	
Security	Low	.25	.68	.07
	High	.30	.72	
Experiential	Low	.75	1.13	.03
	High	.70	1.02	
Occupational Desire				
Positive	Low	1.69	2.06	11.46
	High	.52	1.00	
Negative	Low	.00	.00	.67
	High	.04	.20	
Uncertainty	Low	.50	1.16	2.63
	High	.19	.54	
Sport Career Transition				
Continued Connection	Low	1.06	1.44	.01
	High	1.03	1.45	
Transition Acknowledgement and Acceptance	Low	.50	.73	.31
	High	.62	.76	
Transferable Life Skills	Low	.37	1.09	.01
	High	.41	1.25	
Developmental Cost	Low	.50	1.37	6.13
	High	.07	.30	

## CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION

### Overview

The transition to personal and professional life after college sports can be improved by having a clear, constructed, and synthesized sense of self in the domain of work (Wendling, 2019). College is a crucial period of time for student-athletes to form this sense of career identity and prepare for a meaningful life and career after athletics. Career development professionals within higher education and intercollegiate athletics are responsible for providing comprehensive support programs, facilitating multifaceted growth, and ensuring that student-athletes do not have any developmental deficiencies or delays while preparing for their vocational future and career field. Although student-athletes have been identified as a distinct group of students who need tailored support (Murdock, 2010; Murdock et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2019), there is a lack of curricular guidance and limited data-informed suggestions (Navarro, 2012) of how intercollegiate athletic departments can better prepare student-athletes for their life after athletic retirement, specifically through meaningful career development initiatives (Navarro, 2015b; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). This analysis of the career construction and exploration processes of NCAA Division I student-athletes was therefore merited in order to provide practical insight and tactics for building effective tools used for the exploration, measurement, and identification of student-athletes' specific career development needs.

The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) was twofold: to validate the FCA (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012) for use among the population of NCAA Division I student-athletes, and to identify the potential relationship, or lack thereof, between career exploration activities of student-athletes and the construction of their future life and occupational narratives. The first phase of this study was a

qualitative exploration of student-athletes career construction processes. The FCA was utilized as a narrative tool to capture previously identified OD and QL themes (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Favio, 2012) in student-athletes' future life and occupation narratives. Identification of all previously validated OD and QL themes in this study's sample of student-athlete FCAs further validated the FCA as a narrative tool that could be utilized within the population of NCAA Division I student-athletes. The FCA was then expanded through inductively constructing athlete specific SCT themes, which accounted for unique student-athlete career preparation and construction experiences. Results generated from the qualitative phase furthered the development of the modified FCA as a deductive tool, which was later utilized to collect additional quantitative data from the same population of student-athletes in the second phase of this research.

The second phase of this study was a quantitative description of student-athletes' career construction and exploration processes. The CIDI (Wendling, 2019) was introduced in this quantitative phase in unison with the modified FCA to identify if specific depth-based career exploration opportunities are influential on student-athletes' individualized process of career construction. The quantitative results from the CIDI and content analysis of the FCAs provided the opportunity to statistically examine the relationship, or lack thereof, between student-athletes' career exploration in-depth with the development of the narrative themes in their FCAs. Results indicated career self-exploration was the only kind of depth-based career exploration activity that had a relationship to both the construction and fulfillment of student-athletes' life and occupational narratives. The findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases of this research are mixed in this discussion to provide a more complete picture of student-athletes' career construction and exploration processes and offer information and suggestions for career

development professionals on how to improve the efficacy of career assistance programs for student-athletes.

### **Phase I Qualitative Findings: Thematic Development of Modified FCA**

The first research question asked, “Is the FCA a valid instrument to assess the career construction process of student-athletes in the context of NCAA Division I sports?” That is, do collegiate student-athletes portray the same thematic constructs in their FCAs as other populations previously demonstrated in the literature (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012), and/or do they introduce any athlete-specific themes in their narratives?

#### **The FCA as a Valid Narrative Tool for Collegiate Student-Athletes**

The initial qualitative stage of this research explored the narrative data drawn from student-athletes’ responses to the modified FCA prompt. A thematic analysis of all 197 FCAs allowed for deductively identifying previously validated OD and QL themes (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012) before any new athlete specific themes were developed.

Both QL and OD themes were identified in this sample of student-athletes and represented 74% of the overall themes from the FCAs. A total of 99% of the student-athletes shared QL themes in their FCA narrative, which was 62% of the overall themes identified. QL themes reflect values of individuals through forms of achievement, relationships, security, and experiential opportunities. Achievement themes were mentioned by 91% of the student-athletes, relationship themes were mentioned by 34%, experiential themes were mentioned by 32%, and security themes were mentioned by 19%. OD themes were mentioned by a total of 42% of student-athletes, which was 12% of the overall themes identified. Positive OD themes were mentioned by 30% of student-athletes, occupational uncertainty was mentioned by 16%, and negative OD was mentioned by 5%. These QL and OD thematic results indicate that the FCA is a viable tool to utilize within the population of student-athletes, as a majority of student-athletes

portrayed the same thematic constructs that were identified and validated in previous literature (Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012).

Trustworthiness of this qualitative phase was ensured by several techniques that addressed credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. Credibility was ensured by analyst triangulation (Morse et al., 2002), frequent advisor debriefing meetings (Patton, 1999), considering all obtained data, bracketing any biases that stemmed from personal experiences, and continually reevaluating data throughout the entire analysis process (Suter, 2012). Transferability was addressed through providing a dense description of NCAA Division I athletics and sport career transitions of collegiate student-athletes in Chapter 2 literature review. Boundaries of the study were also addressed in Chapter 4 by providing “the number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based, any restrictions in type of people who contributed data, the data collection methods that were employed, and the time period over which data was collected” (Patton, 1999, p. 70). Providing boundary conditions should help readers “transfer” the results of this study to other situations within the context of collegiate athletics (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Dependability of this research was ensured through reporting the design process in detail to help future researchers repeat the same work (Patton, 1999). Confirmability was addressed through analyst triangulation (Patton, 1999), admittance of research predispositions and beliefs (Huberman & Miles, 2002), and a data-oriented “audit trail” (Patton, 1999).

### **Emergent Occupational Desire and Sport Career Transition Themes**

Rehfuss and Di Fabio (2012) have called on future researchers to develop more accurate and specific themes in life and occupational narratives in order to make the FCA a more refined qualitative tool. It is possible that original QL and OD themes do not represent all possible future narrative themes, and that different groups of participants can generate new FCA themes due to

different contextual and cultural backgrounds. This research expanded the FCA as a narrative tool by identifying one new OD theme and four new athlete-specific SCT themes. Occupational uncertainty was the newly developed OD theme, and SCT themes were comprised of the following four themes: continued connection, transition acknowledgment and acceptance, transferable life skills, and developmental cost.

New OD and SCT themes were inductively generated by constantly comparing qualitative codes and themes throughout phase one (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A second researcher help validate the new themes by independently analyzing the FCAs and coding any new or sport specific themes that emerged. Cohen's Kappa ( $\kappa$ ) was used to assess interrater reliability, or the amount of the agreement in thematic assignment (Kvålseth, 1989). A total number of 40 FACs were coded by both researchers and a Cohen's Kappa value of  $\kappa=.91$  was reached, which indicated adequate internal validity.

### **Occupational uncertainty**

Rehfuss (2009) and Di Fabio (2012) previously developed and validated positive and negative OD themes. Both Rehfuss and Di Fabio did not report that any of their participants displayed signs of occupational uncertainty in their career values or desires. Occupational uncertainty was a new, inductively generated theme that was shared by 16% of the student-athletes their narratives. Positive OD themes were shared by 30% of student-athletes and negative OD themes were shared by only 5%.

There is a need to study current day young adults who often show uncertainty in their occupational aspirations when transitioning to adulthood (Rindfuss et al., 1999; Rojewski & Kim, 2003) and a new career field (Kerckhoff, 1998). The life shift from school-to-work can be particularly unsystematic and unpredictable for young adults (Kerckhoff, 2003). The developmental ages from 18 to 25 years can be overshadowed by a general sense of ambiguity



while preparing for future life and career events (Arnett, 2006). Research has shown that vocational ambitions of youth directly affect their occupational accomplishments (Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Spenner & Featherman, 1978), and that higher vocational aspirations can lead to respected job prestige and long-term economic success into adulthood (Staff et al., 2010). The frequent career changes that highlight the transition from school to work can cultivate a general sense of indecision while preparing for future work roles (Arnett, 2006; Kerckhoff, 2002) and influence numerous future career outcomes (Staff et al., 2010).

The individualized and multifaceted transition for student-athletes from school to work places an emphasis on career development practices and how to best address their occupational uncertainty. Identifying phrases of occupational uncertainty like, “It is extremely hard to tell where I will be looking that far down the road,” or “I’m not entirely sure what I want to do in terms of a career,” will help career development professionals direct student-athletes toward meaningful exploration of life and occupational roles once their sport career is over. Noting narrative phrases like, “I still do not know exactly what I want to do,” or “I am not sure exactly what I want to be doing once I am completely done playing soccer,” can assist professionals as they guide student-athletes away from aimless career ambitions, which can often lead to prolonged or incomplete schooling and compromised long-term adult functioning (Staff et al., 2010).

Career development professionals can adjust their interventions and encourage role exploration to help individuals struggling with career uncertainty move toward a more specific and concise understanding of their vocational desires and interest. Encouraging role exploration for young adults with uncertain career aspirations can help encourage and warrant moral decisions about school, work, and intimate relationships (Arnett, 2006). Young adults of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century do have a considerably difficult time deciding what future occupation they wish to pursue (Savickas, 2005), but if ambiguous ambitions lead to investigation of different career roles then young adults can experience long-term career attainments (Arnett, 2006; Staff et al., 2010). Career professionals need to recognize when student-athletes are experiencing occupational uncertainty, remind student-athletes that uncertainty is not a bad thing, and that independent exploration in career roles can lead to additional experiences, job skills, and an expanded network of employer contacts. Career aspirations that are too narrowly defined can make it difficult to adjust to rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup> century employment conditions (Orange, 2007). It is possible that young adults may adapt more easily to the current decrease in job stability in the United States when occupational uncertainty is accompanied by career role exploration (Bernhardt et al., 1999). Therefore, it would be extremely beneficial if career professionals could utilize the FCA to identify individuals who display any occupational uncertainty in their narratives and encourage them to engage in purposeful career role exploration and strategically try new vocational fields and jobs (Staff et al., 2010).

### **Continued connection**

A total of 47% of the student-athletes indicated at least once in their narrative that they wanted to stay connected to sports. The aspiration of continued sport connection was coupled with one of six common subthemes: coaching and mentoring, fulfilling recreational and competitive drive, difficulty detaching, investing in health and wellness, pursuing a professional sport career, and vocational pursuits in the sport industry. It is possible that a participant's attachment and commitment to their sport after their athletic retirement could reflect motivational forces associated with enjoyment and finding valuable personal and professional opportunities in athletics (Scanlan et al., 2013). The sport career transition process does not force athletes to disengage from athletics, but as seen through continuity theory (Atchley, 1977; Lerch,

1981), it provides opportunities for continued career connection and commitment through alternative activities as athletes move from one stage of life to another (Greendorfer et al., 1985).

### **Coaching and mentoring**

A majority of continued connection themes were derived from participants mentioning their interest in coaching and or mentoring. It is common for both men and women to pursue coaching after their athletic retirement (Greendorfer et al., 1985). A career in coaching was seen by several participants as a valuable opportunity to give back to their sport and community, the next best career option if a professional playing career was not a possibility, and a chance to integrate their college major and education in their career.

Several student-athletes recognized the valuable opportunity to give back to their sport through coaching and mentoring: “To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation,” and “I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life.”

Some participants also recognized that if they could not play professionally then they wanted to pursue coaching: “If I cannot continue to play I want to stay around the game in coaching,” and “I think I will return to my sport of synchro through coaching or potentially small team start up.” Not being able to play their sport at a professional level meant participants wanted to find other avenues to stay connected and committed to their sport: “I have considered coaching because that would put me directly in sports.”

Multiple participants alluded to the personal investments they have made in their education and how they wanted to practice those learned skills and integrate that information into their coaching career: “I hope to be working with social workers in the sports field helping college athletes cope with mental health while they are still competing at the highest level.”

Participants also addressed how their current majors would contribute to their aptitude to coach successfully: “I’m majoring in psychology and would love to carry that into coaching.”

A lack of career exploration might lead athletes to career fields that are familiar to them and require little additional career investigation and research. It is also possible that a close relationship with coaches, which are a predominant source of support and guidance during their athletic career, could guide the career plans and interest of student-athletes (Leffler, 2012). Pursuing coaching as a professional career after athletic retirement could also be observed as a means for coping with the transition process (Menke & Germany, 2019). An intense focus on upholding an athletic identity might encourage student-athletes to avoid identity foreclosure by staying associated to competitive sport in a new career role that is still strongly integrated in athletics (Martens & Lee, 1998). Continuing their association to their sport allows student-athletes to be surrounded by a community of family, friends, and media that all support and continue to perpetuate their identification as an athlete (Horton & Mack, 2000).

### **Investing in health and wellness**

Long-term health issues among former college athletes have recently received increased attention among researchers (Reifsteck et al., 2016; Simon & Docherty, 2014). The maintenance of healthy lifestyles and behaviors of student-athletes after their athletic retirement is understudied (Reifsteck et al., 2013; Sorenson et al., 2015), and student-athletes have reported a substantial drop in activity and sedentary behaviors after their collegiate career. This puts student-athletes at a greater risk for developing health issues after athletic retirement (Reifsteck et al., 2013; Witkowski & Spangenburg, 2008). Collegiate student-athletes follow daily schedules of structured exercise with their teams, which can often be difficult to replicate in their exercise behavior after retirement from their sport. Sport participation can set a strong foundation for lifelong health and wellness, but additional guidance is needed for creating healthy habits,

routines, and avenues into sustainable fitness and health routines that reach beyond collegiate athletics. Fortunately, valuable intrinsic opportunities associated with continued physical activity were identified by participants in this research.

Multiple participants viewed health and wellness as an investment that should be carried out on a daily basis for the longevity of their lives. Several participants mentioned that they hope to stay active and healthy throughout their lives once they were finished with the athletic career: “I hope to continue to be active and healthy throughout my life,” and “I am blessed that I can take my sport with me throughout my whole life.” Multiple participants even mentioned specific activities and exercises their body might need after retirement from their athletic career: “I plan to continue to be active in my everyday life by working out and/or doing yoga,” “I will do athletic classes and group fitness activities,” and “I will for sure be doing more cross-training as I love to bike and swim.”

Along with staying active and engaging in specific activities, the intrinsic opportunity of maintaining one’s fitness level was also important to participants. Participants addressed their hopes of remaining athletic and keeping up their fitness and staying in shape by pursuing other sports: “I hope to remain very athletic and active by pursuing other hobby sports,” “I do hope to keep up some level of fitness, “ “I might still try and play my sport casually to stay in shape,” and “I hope to remain very athletic and active by pursuing other hobby sports.” Additional fitness hobbies were seen as a blueprint that served participations as a useful guide while transitioning to a lifetime of healthy physical activity after collegiate athletics.

Diverging away from the competitive aspect of athletics was mentioned several times by participants when explaining how they plan to stay active after collegiate sports. There was an interest to continue playing sports for the purpose of enjoyment and staying healthy, but

participants no longer wanted to engage in a competitive capacity: “I plan to continue running, but I will no longer compete,” and “I will definitely continue to run, but I’m not sure how competitive I will be.” Enjoyment of sport participation was also identified several times through the mention of positive feelings such as pleasure: “I do plan on continuing to run for pleasure.”

Although athletic identity tends to decrease after sport retirement (Houle et al., 2010), several participants indicated that they may become less active in competitive sport but more active overall. Collegiate student-athletes may know how to work out, but it is possible that they do not understand how to make exercise and wellness a part of their everyday routines and lives. Given the health concerns associated with physical inactivity, there is a need to identify student-athletes that may be at risk for sedentary behaviors after athletic retirement and understanding effective intervention strategies that will help those student-athletes stay physically active after college (Reifsteck et al., 2016).

### **Fulfilling recreational and competitive drive**

The competitive behavior of student-athletes does not end when they retire from their sport. It is common for male and female athletes to continue participating informally in their sport at some level after their sport retirement, and it is also quite common for them to join formal or organized recreational leagues (Greendorfer et al., 1985). Student-athletes can reprioritize their interest after their sport career and channel pieces of their athletic identity into other recreational avenues (Menke & Germany, 2019). It can be argued that sport is more intrinsically motivating than exercise and fitness (Ryan & Patrick, 2009), so transitioning to a sport-based activity after an athletic career may make it easier for retired athletes to maintain a healthy level of physical activity.

The intrinsic rewards associated with having teammates and competition in recreational and club sports can lead retired athletes to be more motivated to engage in those leagues (Ryan

& Patrick, 2009). No longer having regularly scheduled, intense exercise alongside teammates and coaches can leave a large void in student-athletes daily schedules and motivation to be physically active. Participants mentioned that they hoped to fill that void and continue competing in their sport for as long as possible: “I hope to continue competing as long as I can,” and “I may be able to continue competing in my sport.”

It was important for some participants that they invest in lifelong recreational pursuits of their sport: “I do plan to continue fencing recreationally for the rest of my life,” “I expect fencing to remain in my life as a recreational activity,” and “I hope to be able to still play tennis as I get older as well.” Finding local competitions and recreational leagues and teams was also a priority: “I will most likely be doing some triathlons or marathons/half-marathons for fun but also fulfill my competitive drive,” “I want to continue playing tennis in a league after I graduate,” and “I am ready to go back to how the sport should be played and ready to join a league for after work.”

Participants’ continued commitment to competitively engage in their sport after athletic retirement indicated that they may believe they will still enjoy playing their sport, that they recognized valuable extrinsic or intrinsic opportunities in participating, or that they have made a personal investment of time and efforts in their sport career (Iñigo et al., 2015). It is critical to understand how to continue motivating physical activity and lifestyle changes of athletes after the sport career is over (Ryan & Patrick, 2009). Athletes may feel intrinsically motivated to be healthy and fit and look good to others (Grouzet et al., 2005), but it is important to identify and place an emphasis on intrinsic goals which promote enhanced overall well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

### **Difficulty detaching**

Identity has the ability to regulate behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000), and people pursue behaviors that will reinforce and validate their self-perceptions of their identity. When an

individual's identity is particularly salient, it is possible that they will engage in related behaviors (Burke & Reitzes, 1991), which provides a reasonable explanation for why several student-athletes in this research were struggling to separate from their sport after athletic retirement. Adjustment to post-athletic life can be difficult with numerous changes in lifestyle, and a forced transition from a strong athletic identity to a non-sport career role can be especially challenging for student-athletes (Menke & Germany, 2019).

The end of a sport career can require athletes to make an adjustment to their daily lifestyle and goals. Former athletes can struggle to detach from their athlete role when they experience a sport career transition, and their athletic retirement can be accompanied by feelings of unexpected grief and depression (Menke & Germany, 2019). Retirement from sport is often associated with loss of identity and self-esteem for athletes because they previously relied on sport for gauging their self-worth and abilities (Botterill, 1981). Several participants shared their unresolved desires to continue participating in athletics and expressed how difficult it was to envision themselves disassociating from their athletic identity.

The inevitable pivot from a sport career to a career field outside of athletics often presents a compromising situation for the identity development of student-athletes. Several participants relished and cherished their identity as an athlete. Whether it brought pride or notoriety, many participants were not ready to let go of their role as an athlete: "I love running and will always be a runner," "Running is a way of life not just sport I did," and "I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit." It was nearly impossible for some participants to understand what life would look like without athletics, and they wanted themselves and the world to continue seeing their main role as an athlete.



Participants identified that they wanted to be integrated into sports for as long as they could after their athletic retirement: “I want to be around athletics as much as possible,” “I would like to be heavily involved in rowing even after I graduate from university,” and “I feel like I will still be connected to the sports world which has played a huge role in my life ever since I can remember.” Several participants also indicated that they hoped to continue playing their sport for as long as possible when their athletic career ended: “I plan on playing for as long as I can play,” “I also want to continue to play golf as much as possible,” and “I want to continue to practice my sport throughout my life, even if it is not professional.” Difficulty detaching from athletics can cause student-athletes to experience confusion while identifying their current roles, values, beliefs, and passions (Griffith & Johnson, 2002).

Athletic retirement is inevitable for all athletes, but athletic retirement differs greatly from occupational retirement. As athletes are finishing their sport career at a relatively young age, their non-athlete counterparts are beginning their careers in non-sporting domains, getting married, and starting families (Baillie, 1993). Spending a large majority of time in their sport since an early age often makes it difficult for athletes to allocate any time to exploring and acquiring new interest in other areas of life (Bernes et al., 2009). This lack of exploration of interest and roles can lead to disruption of normal identity development and makes it difficult to disassociate from athletics (Brewer et al., 1993; Person & Petitpas, 1990).

It was important for several participants to stay connected to and continue identifying with their sport, which reflected their core principles and values. Being confident of personal values and beliefs can be useful in the process of identity development, but student-athletes may become cemented in their fleeting role of being an athlete if they become too firm or resistant in their athletic pursuits (Martens & Lee, 1998). It is important that student-athletes are encouraged

to explore new hobbies and interests, engage in a variety of activities, and spend time pursuing new interest before they cement their identity in athletics or experience identity foreclosure. An athlete's ability to consider other roles outside of athletics is an indicator of a successful sport career transition (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985).

### **Pursuing a professional athletic career**

Statistics published by the NCAA state that the likelihood of college student-athletes being drafted to play sports professionally in the NFL NBA, WNBA, and MLS hovers around 1% (NCAA, 2011). Being drafted also does not ensure that student-athletes will make the final roster and sign a lucrative contract (Tyrance et al., 2013). The extremely low possibility of playing professional sports makes it crucial for college student-athletes to adequately prepare themselves for life and career roles after their athletic retirement. Having narrowly defined occupational aspirations to play professionally can become problematic for individuals if they are unable to adjust to the rapidly changing labor market (Orrange, 2007).

It was disheartening to see that such a large conglomerate of student-athletes in this research expected to play professionally due to such a small percentage of colligate student-athletes playing at the professional level: "I know that I would have the ability to play professionally after soccer," "I plan to play professionally," and "I see myself playing my sport professionally." Playing professional in their sport was the one and only option and career path for many participants, and some participants identified specific leagues, tournaments and trophies they plan to participate in and win: "I will be playing in the ANWA as an amateur," "It was one of my Goals to play on the Solheim cup team and win a major; hopefully the British Open," and "I will only stay pro until the next Olympics in 2024."

Several participants acknowledged that playing professionally may sound unrealistic or too narrow focused, but they had the ambition to play at the professional level regardless: "I

know it's not that realistic to assume I'm gonna go pro, but I hope to play at the next level," "I would like to try out for the national team at some point in the next two years and see where I make it when it comes to European Championships and world Championships," and "If I could be a really successful professional golfer, I would like to do that for the rest of my life." Playing sport overseas after graduation was also addressed multiple times by participants: "I am going to try to play overseas and then return to the states once I have more experience as a professional," "I hope to play pro after college or go back to Europe and go play pro over there," and "I hope I am playing for a professional team in Europe." Individuals who do not have any skills or interest outside of sports may choose to pursue a professional athletic career or stay within sport instead of addressing an identity crisis, which can cause a multitude of adjustment difficulties (Gorbett, 1985).

An intense personal investment of physical, mental, and emotional resources in their sport and playing career can make it challenging for student-athletes to consider any other career option beyond playing professionally (Jolly, 2008). Student-athletes might allow their student-athlete identity to eclipse their responsibility to investigate other feasible career roles and options (Brown et al., 2000) especially when their athletic identity holds greater significance than their other roles (Webb et al., 1998). Failure to participate in pre-retirement career planning, self-exploration, and concentrated introspection can put student-athletes with a strong commitment to playing professionally at a disadvantage when developing career plans (Crites, 1978) and occupational purpose (Grove et al., 1997).

### **Vocational pursuits in the sport industry**

Valuable opportunities for extrinsic material and monetary benefits (Iñigo et al., 2015) were identified by participants when addressing the opportunity to pursue a career in the sport industry. The aspiration of working within the sport industry and for organizations was expressed

several times: “I hope to start working in sports,” “I am hoping to also do something in the Sports Industry,” and “I hope to be accepting a full-time job with a sports company.” Multiple participants even identified the exact league or department for which they wanted to work: “I hope to work at the D1 collegiate level and then at the professional setting,” “In life I hope to start a job with the major league baseball,” “I hope to be able to get a job in a local sport organization or University in the athletic department,” and “Another career aspiration would be working in marketing for a professional sports organization.”

The inability to pursue a professional athletic career did not deter several participants from chasing careers in the sport industry. Participants recognized that if they could not continue their sport career at a professional level that they would have to revert to the next best option of working in the sports industry: “I hope to stay involved in athletics working with either a professional or collegiate athletic organization,” and “..so if it’s not for my sport, then I would love to be able to be an athletic trainer for one of those professional teams.” There were also mention of opening privately owned athletic facilities or managing their own sport team: “I also want to open my own gym/basketball club,” and “I would like to manage my own team in the company that I enjoy the most.”

A career in the sport industry, or an athletic-related field, was seen as an opportunity for many student-athletes to blend their passion for sports with a professional career path. Personal resources like account making or social resources like teammates and coaches might influence a student-athletes ability to choose an alternative career filed upon retirement (Grove et al., 1998; MaKenna & Thomas, 2007; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). The transition of student-athletes from their sport career into a vocational role in the sport industry can be improved by exploring and solidifying their career aspirations and acknowledging and accepting that their sport career has

come to an end. The desire to stay vocationally connected to sport should not be a last-minute decision, but continued involvement should be the result of careful and considerate planning to ensure a successful sport career transition (Svoboda & Vanek, 1982).

Remaining connected to sport after retirement has been linked to better emotional adjustment for elite athletes (Baillie & Danish, 1992), but maintaining involvement with athletics after retirement can also put athletes at risk of difficulties when they finally end their connection and involvement in sport (Lavallee et al., 1997). A sport career transition does not always mark the end of an athlete's involvement in sport, but sport can often remain an important element in the lives of retired athletes (Greendorfer et al., 1985). Involvement and investment in athletics can be processual and vary over time due to shifting interests during and after sport career transitions. Considering sport career transition as continuing participation and shifting interest challenges sport retirement and transition's theoretical and operational definition (Greendorfer et al., 1985).

### **Transition acknowledgment and acceptance**

Sport career retirement has been compared in previous research to feelings that parallel those related to dying and social death (Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Hallinan & Snyder, 1988; Lerch, 1985). Stages of grieving, coping, and loss have been utilized in sport career transition literature (Kibler-Ross, 1969; Werthner & Orlick, 1982). The five stages in the grieving process are tied closely to coping with loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Johnson, 1997). Denial is when individuals refuse to acknowledge the death and are often devoid of feelings (Brammer & Abrego, 1981). Anger is then directed towards the perceived situational injustice, which leads individuals to bargain or negotiate for lengthened engagement and existence (Wolff & Lester, 1989). Anger and unsuccessful negotiation are then replaced with loss and depression. The final stage of acceptance is when

individuals recognize the inevitability of the situation and come to terms with their current circumstances.

All student-athletes will experience a sport career transition and retirement from their sport at one point in time, so acknowledgment void of denial and acceptance are particularly important for a successful career development process. This sport career transition and career development process can only be improved by student-athletes acknowledging and validating their current situation of athletic retirement and accepting their current circumstances. Explicitly acknowledging and accepting athletic retirement and sport career transitions was shared numerous times throughout narrative data. A total of 43% of participants mentioned transition acknowledgment and acceptance in their narratives at least once.

Acknowledgment of sport retirement was shared by participants when they addressed the fact that they knew their athletic career was coming to an end: “It's a tough decision to make because I want to keep playing, but I don't see my sport in my future,” “I do not plan on playing my sport after college as I would need to play for 3 more years before the next Olympics,” “When I officially retire from Track and Field at the University of Memphis,” and “Once I graduate I will most likely retire from rowing.” When there is no formal acknowledgment by student-athletes that they have finished their sport career, it may be challenging for them to explore and fully move into their next life and career roles (Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

Acceptance of athletic retirement was expressed when participants indicated that they understood and were at peace with their sport career transition: “I saw myself in a different light outside of soccer for the first time and I was ok with that,” “Sports is a big part of my life right now but I know it is going to end eventually and that there are more important things than becoming an athletic superstar,” “I have many aspirations in life and many goals I wish to

accomplish many of those are outside of football,” and “I do not want to move on professionally because I am ready to get on with my life.” As shown through previous research and this research’s narrative data, student-athletes will be more likely to accept their situation of athletic retirement when they have new interest outside of their main sport (Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

It should not be presumed that the process of retirement is an overtly negative event (Chow, 2002) that is psychologically traumatic for all student-athletes, and that adjustment is required after their sport career comes to an end (Allison & Meyer, 1998). With that being said, it is important for student-athletes to acknowledge their athletic retirement when their sport career does come to an end. Avoiding the realities of athletic retirement can become developmentally harmful or unpleasant when student-athletes refuse to admit their sport career transition (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). When student-athletes are able to acknowledge the difficulties of sport career transition and choose to accept their retirement, they may be able to suppress fear, doubt, anxiety, and apprehension about their sport career transition and focus of starting the career development processes of new life and vocational roles.

Identifying student-athletes that are struggling with acknowledgement and acceptance of their sport career transition may provide career development professionals with insight on how to best guide student-athletes through the crisis of retirement (Wolff & Lester, 1989). Student-athletes can also oscillate between stages (Blinde & Stratta, 1992), so professionals should continually monitor student-athletes they may be concerned about to help them avoid exaggerated, prolonged, or revisited stages of grief. Provide coping skills and career development assistant can help student-athletes acknowledge and accept their sport career retirement as they adjust and adapt to their continually changing internal and external demands of collegiate sports.

## **Transferable life skills**

Transferable cognitive and behavioral skills, or life skills, are abilities that are helpful and relevant across many domains of life both personally and professionally (Bernes et al., 2009). Transferable life skills are generally free from context and are not domain specific (Wiant, 1977). Examples of transferable life skills that can be applied to various settings are organizational and time management skills, flexibility, self-motivation, perseverance, performing under pressure, and setting and achieving goals (Danish et al., 1993).

Particularly within sports, transferable skills are developed through participation and can be utilized in other domains of life and non-sporting roles (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). Athletes may feel lost and become disillusioned during their sport career transition (Person & Petitpas, 1990), and they often struggle to acknowledge the life skills they developed through their athletic career (Bernes et al., 2009). It can be challenging for athletes to notice that their life skills that have helped them become successful in sports can make them prosperous in other career and life roles (Petitpas et al., 1992). A total of 10% of participants mentioned transferable life skills in their narratives at least once and attributed their athletic participation to future professional success.

Retirement from sport was approached as an opportunity by some participants to practice and display the life skills they learned through their athletic experience. Several participants were excited to utilize their learned life skills from sport after their athletic retirement: "I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college." Sports played a major role in teaching participants invaluable work ethic, communication skills, and investing in physical healthy lifestyle: "Being a college athlete I have great time management," "Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more," and "I hope I will use everything swimming has



taught me such as grit, passion, and resilience.” Sports also had a major impact on the overall developmental growth of participants: “Playing sports while growing up has had a greater impact on me than any other thing in my life.” Realizing that life skills are not compartmentalized to sports can help student-athletes connect the value of those skills to their future life successes. Increasing the awareness of transferable skills can also help student-athletes make effective life changes and have a more positive sport career transition experience (Bernes et al., 2009).

It is important that student-athletes recognize a lack of professional experience outside of their sport career is not necessarily a barrier to becoming a competitive applicant in the job market. Several participants addressed that they had confidence in their life skills developed through sports, which would help them be successful in their professional career: “I also think that the lessons and skills you develop in sports replaces not have as much experience,” and “Hopefully the lessons I learn through collegiate athletics will translate into valuable skills I can apply to my professional career.” Student-athletes need to believe that they have valuable cognitive and physical skills for a professional career outside of sports and recognize how they acquired and learned their skills. The ability to identify developed life skills will help student-athletes succeed in professional work environments and build a career outside of sport (Bernes et al., 2009).

Student-athletes may have the perception that transitioning out of sport can be a troublesome process and that they are not prepared for entering professional life. Athletes intuitively recognize learning transferable skills as essential for a successful adjustment to life after their sport career (Bernes et al., 2009). Research has shown that athletes become worried about the transferability of their life skills and knowledge when planning for their retirement athletic retirement (Swain, 1991), but athletes also respond positively when they are taught how

their skills and knowledge can be transferred to other career roles (Petitpas et al., 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Athletics, regardless of competition level, provide opportunities to learn life lessons and skills that can be valuable in other domains of life. Athletes can become empowered when they acknowledge that they already possess the skills and knowledge that will make them successful in other life and career roles (Petitpas & Schwartz, 1989; Petitpas et al., 1992). An inability to understand how sport-based life skills can transfer to other career roles can lead athletes to experience a negative sport career transition (Bernes et al., 2009). Address a sport career transition proactively, like accentuating transferable life skills, can help make the transition process more successful for athletes (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Danish et al., 1993).

An unfortunate barrier many athletes experience is being unaware of their aptitude to utilize and transfer skills to other life and career roles (Danish et al., 1993). Increasing student-athletes' cognizance of their skills and characteristics learned from sport and their ability to transfer those skills to other areas and roles in life can help affect their adjustment to their sport career transition (Mayocci & Hanrahan, 2000). Teaching athletes about skills transfer can increase and improve their aptitude to utilize their skills in various life domains and increase their confidence when they do start a new career role (Petitpas et al., 1992). Having a better awareness of their abilities and concept of skill transfer will also help athletes better explain their skills and characteristics to future employers in non-athletic careers (Mayocchi & Hanrahan). Awareness of transferable skills can increase student-athletes' assurance that their skills can be utilized in other contexts outside of athletics and diminish doubts about their ability to successfully begin a new career (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). It is important that athletes are knowledgeable about their transferable life skills and believe they are competent individuals with

adequate coping skills. If individuals believe that they possess adequate coping skills, they will address a situation with increased confidence (Bandura, 1977).

### **Developmental cost**

It is common for student-athletes to indicate relief when released from the pressure and demands of intercollegiate athletics (Greendorfer et al., 1985), so it might be possible that athletes look forward to their sport career transition and athletic retirement. Current research is sparse in considering that although student-athletes may be fully committed to their sport during their intercollegiate experience, they may also recognize the imposed limitations on their self-exploration and development due to their commitment to sport (Greendorfer et al., 1985). Retirement can actually provide student-athletes the opportunity to engage in other activities that they did not have much time for during their collegiate career.

There are identifiable costs and high-impact outcomes tied to engaging in contemporary elite level athletics. From a developmental perspective, sport commitment for older elite athletes has been associated with lower levels of enjoyment (Harter, 1999; Raedeke, 1997; Weiss & Weiss, 2006), minimal time for social engagement (Weiss & Weiss, 2007), lost opportunities for personal development due to time requirements of training and competition (Weiss & Weiss, 2003), and a decline in perceived competence due to increased competition standards (Horn, 2004). A total of 7% of the participants mentioned the developmental costs, specifically negative costs, associated with engaging in collegiate athletics. Several of the participants viewed collegiate sports as a barrier to their personal and professional growth outside of their athletic career.

Negatively impacted academic progress and GPAs were both emphasized as a concern of sport participation: “I’m not sure how accurate this is going to be because I feel like my sport is preventing me from getting good grades,” “My academics are impacted from the sport,” and “If

it's preventing me from doing well academically, I feel like I should stop playing, but I've never not played a sport.” Academic support and success are essential tools for student-athletes as they develop career interest and gain confidence in their life skills outside of athletics (Diley-Knowles et al., 2010). Struggling to reach the academic standards of their university and team can lead to additional strains on student-athletes confidence and potentially their athletic performance (Lance, 2004). The intent behind many student-athletes that commit to playing at the collegiate level is to trade their athletic performance for a worthwhile education (Edwards, 1984); therefore, struggling to maintain good grades and academic eligibility might make student-athletes view sport engagement as a developmental cost and point of contention for their future personal and occupational goals. This challenges previous research that has recognized athletic participation positively impacts academic achievement (GPA) (Lance, 2004; Sack & Theil, 1985).

Several participants shared that engaging in collegiate athletics also came at a cost of their mental health and wellness: “College teams destroy confidence in athletes by playing all of these mind games and not being transparent with teammates by giving each teammate different reasons,” “I've never worked so hard to be the strongest, fastest, a great role model for my teammates, and have been so undermined as a player,” and “I believe there should be a lot less politics in the sport and athletes should play every match if they are in the strongest and fastest on the team.” Research has previously identified that sport participation has a positive consequence for mental health (Chalip et al., 1992; Pate et al., 1995; Wheeler & Frank, 1988), but participants’ shared experiences from this sample challenged this perspective and addresses how poor mental health lead several participants to question their engagement in collegiate sports. Student-athletes experience an immense amount of stressors not experienced by their non-

athlete student counterparts: extensive time demands, pressures to achieve, physical injuries, and conflicts with teammates and coaches (Sudano et al., 2017). These additional stressors for student-athletes can lead to increased anxiety and or depression if left unaddressed, and collegiate student-athletes are unfortunately less likely than their non-athlete peers to seek any additional help for mental health and wellness (Armstrong et al., 2015).

Developmental cost of engaging in athletics reached beyond academics and mental health for some participants as they missed engaging in valuable life experiences and questioned their current sport participation: “I additionally hope to get a job in a new city or a job that requires travelling as with my sport I have only been able to see a very small portion of the world as I have dedicated a lot of my time to it,” and “I’m not sure if I should continue to play because it can have an impact on the rest of my life.” Class, workouts, practices, and competition leave little to no room for participating in Life Skills and career development experiences (Adler & Adler, 1985; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Navarro, 2014). Research has shown that student-athletes also differ in their level of career maturity, psychological growth (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Sowa & Gressard, 1983) and critical thinking skills (McBride & Reed, 1998) in comparison to their non-athlete peers.

Meaningful engagement in a collegiate educational experience can contribute positively to overall learning experience and personal development of student-athletes (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Kuh, 2001), but the perspective drawn from several participants highlights sports as a conduit for increased pressure to athletically and academically perform well, declined mental health and wellness, barriers to academic excellence, and missed opportunities for personal and professional growth. It is assumed that when athletes leave sports they are ill-prepared for their transition and that their retirement from athletics is due to a disruptive or traumatic influence which causes

developmental costs and adjustment difficulties (Greendorfer et al., 1985). A lack of exploration and preparation for life and career roles after sport can negatively affect an athlete's ability to adjust to life after sports (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Cook & Robertson, 1991). Pursuing other interest and activities and maintaining a balance during engagement with competitive sport can be positive factors in adjusting to life after athletic retirement (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

There is still much to learn about collegiate student-athletes' career exploration and construction experiences and how they can potentially influence the sport career transition processes. The microlevel perspective of this research provided detailed insight of student-athletes' career construction and emphasized that one process of career development does not work best all student-athletes. The varying degrees in knowledge, diversity, background, and experiences of student-athletes makes a variety of career development programming beneficial to support to their sport career transition and career pursuits (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008).

### **Phase II Quantitative Findings: The Relationship Between Career Construction and Depth-Based Career Exploration**

Another focus of this research was to identify the potential relationship, or lack thereof, between career exploration activities of student-athletes and the construction of their future life and occupational narratives. To address this relationship, research question 2 asked the following: "Do student-athletes with high levels of overall career exploration portray more constructed and fulfilled FCAs?" Career development and narrative theory literature have suggested that individuals have the ability to construct and achieve a clearer storied identity (McAdams, 1997) when they can attribute their career interest to specific entities, experiences, relationships (Brott, 2005; Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012; Savickas, 2010). Therefore, the goal of narrative career theory and interventions is to help individuals

enhance the understanding of their vocation and career (Savickas, 2005) by shifting and changing their story (Rehfuss, 2009). Current career theories and interventions have yet to supply a tool that addresses if career exploration is a viable means for helping student-athletes construct a fuller and more complete occupational and life narrative. This research attempted to address this void by combining the qualitative and quantitative designs of the FCA and CIDI.

### **Overall Career Exploration and Narrative Construction**

Research question 2a asked, “Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce significantly more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?” There was no significant difference in the word count scores for individuals with high levels of overall career exploration and low levels of career (Table 7-1). This indicated that overall levels of career exploration, or the act of engaging in more career exploration activities, did not influence an individual’s ability to produce a more constructed FCA.

Word count, or the “construction” of an FCA, was introduced in Rehfuss’ (2009) original research as a descriptive quantitative measure that could highlight narrative change between an individual’s pre and post FCA. The pre-post measure of word count provides quantitative support to say that an individual’s narrative developed over time after partaking in a specific intervention or life experience (Cochran, 1997; Rehfuss, 2009; Savickas, 2005, 2010). Word count does not validate change, but it is reported to “clarify quantitatively the degree of narrative change that has taken place” (Rehfuss, 2015, p. 156). This research utilized a cross-sectional design and did not address narrative change or utilize a pre-post inventory, but an insignificant relationship between overall levels of career exploration and word count provided evidence that in-depth career exploration experiences may not be responsible for student-athletes’ abilities to produce clearer and more constructed FCAs.

Narrative career theory suggests that an individual's narrative will become more whole, clear, and expanded when they engage in interventions and have new life experiences (Guichard, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009). Other career development activities participants have engaged in outside of exploration are not accounted for in this research, but it can be concluded that overall depth-based career exploration is not responsible for the construction of student-athletes' FCAs, or their abilities to include more specific information about lives and occupational futures. Future research would benefit exploring other types of career exploration (Wendling, 2019) in a pre-post design.

### **Overall Career Exploration and Narrative Fulfillment**

Research Question 2b asked, "Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of overall career exploration produce more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of career exploration?" Narrative theorist asset that an individual's occupational narrative will become more complete or fulfilled when they embrace and engage in the process of career exploration. A MANOVA was conducted to investigate the differences in levels of overall career exploration in narrative fulfillment. There was no statistically significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of overall career exploration on the narrative fulfillment of their FCAs (Table 7-2).

Although there was not a statistically significant relationship between levels of overall exploration and the narrative fulfillment of FCAs, there was a difference in projected FCA themes between the levels of overall career exploration. Individuals with high levels of overall career exploration mentioned more achievement (QL), experiential (QL), relationship (QL), negative (OD) and transferable life skills (SCT) themes. Individuals with low levels of overall career exploration mentioned more security (QL), positive (OD), uncertainty (OD), continued



connection (SCT), transition acknowledgment and acceptance (SCT), and developmental costs (SCT) themes.

These results indicate that student-athletes with more career exploration experiences may be able to provide a clearer picture of their future achievements, relationships, and experiential goals they wish to attain. They may also be able to identify the transferable life skills they possess and the how important those skills are for their vocational future outside of athletics. Student-athletes with lower levels of overall career exploration acknowledged and accepted the fact that their sport career was not going to last forever, but they showed more interest in staying connected to their sport or the sport industry after their sport career transition. Although some student-athletes mentioned occupational uncertainty, they knew what type of job would be fulfilling and satisfying for them after their sport career.

### **Specific Types of Career Exploration and Narrative Construction**

Research question 2c asked, “Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal a more constructed FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?” Three independent samples t-test were conducted to compare the word count score for individuals with high and low levels of advanced, self, and network career exploration. There was no statistically significant difference in the construction of FCAs for individuals with low and high levels of network and advanced career exploration. These results indicated that network and advanced career exploration experiences do not influence an individual’s ability to share a more constructed narrative of their occupational motives and values.

There was a statistically significant difference in the construction of FCAs for individuals with high and low levels of career self-exploration. This means that the act of engaging in career self-exploration activities influenced an individual’s ability to produce a more constructed FCA.

Although significant, only 5% of the variance in word count was explained by the level of career self-exploration. It is interesting to report that individuals with lower levels of career self-exploration produced more constructed FCAs in comparison to individuals with high levels of career self-exploration. This goes against narrative theory and career development literature, which posits that more self-exploration experiences and opportunities will help individuals paint a thicker, fuller picture of the self and one's life and occupational goals (Savickas, 2005, 2010).

The contradiction between the results of this research and career and narrative theory could be due to several factors. There are various kinds of career exploration proposed by Wendling (2019) and operationalized within the CIDI. The type of career exploration that was chosen for this research, which was depth-based career exploration, might have been an untimely form of career exploration to use with this specific population of collegiate student-athletes that was predominantly sophomores and juniors. This group of student-athletes should be engaging in more breadth-based career exploration activities. In-breadth career exploration happens early in the developmental course of career choice and is the process of focusing on stimulating careers while learning broadly about the self and the world of work (Wendling, 2019). Career exploration in-breadth should be more common for freshman, sophomore, and junior student-athletes due to being in early stages of the career exploration processes. In-depth career exploration is the process of simultaneously learning about the self and the world of work in order to achieve a clearer understanding of available and realistic careers that are aligned with specific skills, talents, values, and interest of the self (Wendling, 2019). In-depth exploration should theoretically be utilized by senior student-athletes who have had more career and self-exploration experiences, are reaching the end of the sport career, and are preparing for refined and specific career fields they wish to enter after their sport career transition.

Another alternative explanation for higher career self-exploration's relationship with less constructed FCAs could be that as a narrative tool, the modified FCA is not designed to be utilized in a cross-sectional study. The FCA was initially built as a qualitative pre-post instrument that could measure change in occupational narratives resulting from career interventions (Rehfuss, 2009). The ability to measure narrative change, or lack thereof, that is consistent with narrative and career development theory is highly sought after by researchers and practitioners (Cochran, 1997; Rehfuss, 2009; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012; Savickas, 2005; White & Epston, 1990). As a narrative instrument, the FCA should empower individuals to share their current life and occupational perceptions and commitments. When given a second time after an intervention or participation in a program, the FCA should then be able to identify any narrative changes and if career interventions were effective through comparing and contrasting shared values, self-concepts, and occupational commitments.

### **Specific Types of Career Exploration and Narrative Fulfillment**

Research question 2d asked, "Do student-athletes that are engaged in higher levels of specific types of career exploration (i.e., advanced, self, network) reveal more fulfilled FCAs when compared to those engaged in lower levels of each type of career exploration?" Three MANOVAs were conducted to investigate the differences in levels of network, advanced, and career self-exploration in narrative fulfillment. There was no statistically significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of network and advanced career exploration on narrative fulfillment of their FCAs. There was a significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of career self-exploration on narrative fulfillment. A total of 24% of the variance in narrative fulfillment was also explained by levels of career self-exploration. Individuals with high and low levels of career self-exploration differed only on the variable of positive occupational desires. Specifically, individuals with lower levels of career self-

exploration had more mentions of positive occupational desires than individuals with higher levels of career self-exploration.

The MANOVA results of this research also go against narrative and career development theory, which suggests that engaging in more career self-exploration activities can account for a significant portion of an individual's ability to produce a more constructed and fulfilled FCA (Guichard, 2005; McAdams, 1997; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2019). Narrative and career development theory project that individuals with an insufficient understanding of who they want to be outside of sport and what they want to do next could may feel disengaged, lost, and aimless as they search for a new sense of self outside of athletics (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2019). Career self-exploration has also been significantly and positively associated with flourishing (Wendling, 2019), which would lead to the belief that engaging in career self-exploration would help individuals improve their quality of life as they experience positive emotions, build relationships, and achieve new accomplishments.

Results of this research challenged narrative and career development literature and indicated that participants from this sample that engaged in less career self-explorations were able to produce more constructed life and occupational narratives that shared more positive occupational desires. Simply put, individuals who engaged less in career self-exploration activities knew more about what types of career roles would be satisfying and rewarding for them.

Forming an understanding of a sense of self is a developmental process that is shaped by new experiences and changes that happen over a lifetime. Attempting to redefine a sense of self can lead to feelings of disorientation (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000), so it is possible that engaging in more career self-exploration can cause feelings of anxiety and aimlessness if an individual

cannot connect with a specific career role. The results of this research suggest that student-athlete development professionals may want to consider placing an emphasis on other types of career development initiatives beyond career self-exploration if they want to positively influence their student-athletes' abilities to develop more constructed and fulfilled FCAs.

As previously mentioned, this study's population consisted of mainly sophomore and junior student-athletes, so breadth-based career exploration may have been a better career exploration construct to utilize in this study. It is possible that career exploration in-breadth over the last year was more prominent for the student-athletes within this research sample. The depth-based career exploration utilized in this study may have been a more appropriate construct to implement with a sample of only senior student-athletes.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research advanced career development literature by further validating and expanding the FCA and identifying distinct aspects of the career construction process specifically experienced by student-athletes. Expansion of the FCA as a narrative tool provided directions for career development scholars in terms of assessing the career construction processes of student-athletes, specifically during their sport career transitions. Inductively developed SCT themes of continued connection, transition acknowledgement and acceptance, transferable life skills, and developmental costs identified ways in which collegiate student-athletes navigate numerous external institutional barriers and internal psychological challenges, which commonly cause them to struggle constructing career paths (Fountain & Finley, 2009).

The modified FCA from this research contributes to career development literature by unveiling how student-athletes position themselves into the continually changing context of athletics in higher education. Student-athletes shared in their narratives how personally constructed values and meanings in their lives helped them make career choices after their sport

career. Many student-athletes also shared how their future careers could be meaningful or purposeful for them by projecting their current desires or interests on their future vocational pursuits.

Few career development researchers have explored how collegiate student-athletes narrate their sporting career transitions or projected experiences, but several researchers have started to promote the importance of student-athletes practicing life-design, sharing life stories (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Ryba et al., 2015) and foretelling their future career trajectories (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019). Through newly developed SCT narrative themes, this research provided additional insight and improved understanding into how collegiate student-athletes design their preferred future trajectories based on life and occupational desires. Sport management and career development scholars interested in improving the quality of student-athletes' sport career transitions could benefit from utilizing theoretically founded interventions and programs based in CCT, promoting the practice of life-designing and projecting future career trajectories, and analyzing the underlying narrative process of career construction through the application of the SCT themes derived from this research.

This research also made an attempt to further validate the construct of depth-based career exploration to the population of student-athletes, which is recently established construct in career development, vocational psychology, and sport management literature (Wendling, 2019). Previous narrative and career develop theory posit that individuals will share a fuller, thicker story of themselves and become more aware of whom they perceive themselves to be in the future if they engage in exploration activities (Brott, 2001; Guichard, 2005; Savickas, 2005, 2010, 2012). The only statistically significant finding between career exploration and student-athletes' abilities to build a more constructed and fulfilled FCA contradicts these previous

findings and posits that career self-exploration is actually related to lower levels of narrative construction and fulfillment. Student-athletes have previously identified that some of the most valuable ways they can prepare for the career field is through completing practicums and internships and exploring career alternatives before their sport career transition occurs (Navarro, 2012). Young adults may have a considerably more difficult time deciding on future occupations (Savickas, 2005), but long-term occupational attainment is likely to be enhanced when uncertain occupational aspirations lead to exploration of different types of careers fields during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006).

One finding of this research provides evidence that contradicts narrative and career development theory, but it should be noted that the sample of this research was very small due to data being difficult to collect from Division I student-athletes in the midst of a global pandemic. This study was also exploratory in nature, so future research should build on these findings to utilize a larger sample size of just junior and senior athletes when exploring depth-based career exploration.

### **Practical Implications**

Athletic departments across all NCAA Divisions and members institutions are charged with the responsibility of providing academic support and career development services to student-athletes. Researchers and practitioners of the 1990s started to identify how student-athletes struggled to sufficiently investigate and plan for vocational roles after their athletic career (Baille & Danish, 1992; Martin, 1996). As previously noted in the Chapter 2 literature review, there is a large body of literature on the sport career transition process of student-athletes as they retire from their sport, but there is no current tool that captures various measures of the process. Thus, this research explored the career construction and sport career transition processes

of student-athletes to generate specific codes and themes that were used to help operationalize the career construction and exploration processes.

NCAA policy makers and the department of student athlete affairs have yet to provide objective learning outcomes for career development programs (Navarro, 2012). Relevant learning outcomes supported by career development theories, like CCT, could help create operationalized and measurable learning outcomes for career programming. Creating learning objectives based in career development theories could help enhance policies and programs through impartial program evaluation. Program quality and development can be improved through maintaining clear program goals and objectives, which also ensures a fulfilling developmental opportunity for participating student-athletes.

Student-athletes heavily invest and rely on intercollegiate athletics departments and their staff throughout their career development process (Navarro et al., 2019). This places pressure on practitioners to stay informed on best practices to support student-athletes as they investigate and plan for the career field after their athletic career comes to an end. Intercollegiate practitioners may want to consider collaborating with student affairs units and academic departments across campus and universities to create more comprehensive and impactful career development curricula and interventions for facilitating meaningful career development and exploration experiences for student-athletes. The responsibility to help facilitate the personal and professional career development of student-athletes does not belong independently to athletic departments, but career support and guidance should be a campus-wide initiative.

Student-athlete development literature calls for an individualized approach to career construction curricula in order to better understand what factors impact student-athletes as they search, select, and plan for their professional career after sport (Navarro et al., 2019).



Understanding specific life experiences and exploratory behaviors that influence the process, or lack thereof, of career construction would help shape future initiatives of career development programs. This research intended to promote narrative growth and expression of student-athletes during sport career transitions through emphasizing the importance of career exploration, but statistically significant results to support this claim were not achieved when observing the relationship between FCA outcomes and depth-based exploration over the past year.

Theoretically speaking, intercollegiate athletics practitioners should receive beneficial insight from utilizing both the FCA and CIDI to investigate student-athletes' different patterns of career construction. However, this exploratory research did not show any evidence that the modified FCA could be used in conjunction with the CIDI could help practitioners identify career construction and exploration patterns. This research was not able to inform practice by detecting student-athletes' career construction and exploration differences, but the ability to do so would help practitioners better understand what type of career development programming could be most beneficial in helping student-athletes adjust to the career field after sport. Future researchers interested in depth-based career exploration should consider focusing on student-athletes in their final year of playing eligibility.

Although only one variable of career self-exploration was found to have a statistically significant relationship with the construction and fulfillment of life and occupational narratives, practitioners can analyze the FCA and CIDI at the item level to identify student-athletes' career development and exploration deficiencies and recommend more specific interventions. Specifically, the modified FCA can help identify adaptive and maladaptive life and occupational desire themes for student-athletes. The modified FCA can also be used to quickly evaluate and

monitor the career development progress of student-athletes throughout the year, before and after interventions, and throughout their athletic career at their university.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This research faced several limitations during the data collection process. An inquiry for study participation and data collection was sent out to Division I universities during the onset of the global pandemic, COVID-19. Student-athletes were also notified that the remainder of their season was going to be cancelled a week prior to this research's shared inquiry. This cancellation of sport seasons encouraged practitioners to turn away any additional inquiries or correspondence for their student-athletes. Several practitioners also mentioned that they were not allowing any correspondence from outside their university to be sent to their student-athletes at that time. A low response rate from Universities made it difficult to get the necessary data from student-athletes. It is possible that the additional stress of a non-normative sport career transition affected student-athletes' ability and willingness to respond to a questionnaire. This questionnaire also addressed a sensitive topic of sport career transitions that many newly retired student-athletes would struggle to address. It is possible that student-athletes did not take the time to provide full, detailed responses to the questionnaire like they could have after a more regular, normative sport career transition.

The sampling selection of participants used in both phases of this research was a non-probability sampling approach due to participants being drawn from a specific pool of participants with desired criterion. Participants agreed to complete the questionnaire in exchange for the possibility of receiving small compensation for their participation. The cross-sectional nature of the data collection also made it challenging to infer any causality between variables of interest. Although there was no statistically significant relationship found between career exploration and construction, a longitudinal design may provide more insight into student-

athletes' future life and occupational narratives and how career exploration can influence their career construction process. Further, experimental designs using the FCA as a pre-post test, as originally designed, could be used in evaluation research due to the FCA's insensitivity in detecting career construction processes in cross-sectional designs.

This research was limited in its ability to address the void of empirical evidence needed to ascertain the relationship between career exploration and indicators of career development. It is possible results were statistically insignificant due to low response rates by practitioners and a small sample size of student-athletes that actually did respond to both surveys. A lack of statistically significant results in this research could not support previously identified theoretical links between career exploration and indicators of career development. Research has address career exploration as a critical part of the career construction process, which helps individuals understand what occupational alternatives available and what careers are best cater to their skillsets (Savickas, 2002). This research was unsuccessful at providing guidance for future researchers and practitioners regarding what specific career exploration opportunities student-athletes experience as influential in the career development processes. It is likely the predominantly younger age of athletes, the research and data collection processes taking place in the middle of a global pandemic, and not utilizing breadth-breadth career exploration could help explain these findings. Future research can control for these confounding design elements that challenged this study.

Due to the qualitative nature of the first phase of this research and small sample size, this research could not conclude that the results are applicable to other populations of student-athletes and situations (Patton, 1999); however, this research provides a baseline understanding (Gross, 1999) with which the results of subsequent studies could be compared. Similar studies

implementing the same methodology should be conducted in different contexts or Division of NCAA athletics in order to assess the extent to which findings could be transferable and true of people in other settings. There are also career development differences to consider among student-athletes of various race and ethnicities. The sample of student-athletes in this research was far from representative and was comprised of predominately white, female student-athletes in non-revenue generating sports. Providing a representative sample of student-athletes from various racial and ethnic backgrounds along with each revenue and non-revenue generating sport could create a more inclusive, overall picture of the sport career transition and construction process of collegiate student-athletes.

Career development researchers and practitioners have struggled to clearly and objectively recognize the most effective curricular methods for helping student-athletes plan and prepare for career roles after their athletic career. The NCAA has yet to create learning objectives to guide the development and evaluation of their mandated programming. Little is known about the phenomenon of career construction and exploration process of student-athletes from their perspective, so future research would benefit from utilizing the experience of student-athletes to continue building tools and instruments like the FCA. Future researchers and practitioners must collaborate on developing clear and objective learning outcomes founded on both qualitative and quantitative research to best understand student-athlete needs.

### **Conclusion**

Further validation of the CIDI and expansion of the FCA for the student-athlete population advanced the future direction of scholars in student-athlete and career development with regards to career exploration and construction. The transition to life and a new career role after collegiate athletics requires student-athletes to construct an ideal future life and occupation outside of sports. Investigating the career construction and exploration processes of student-

athletes and analyzing how specific types of career exploration relate to their future narrative development provided beneficial insights for researchers and practitioners. This research was not accompanied without limitations, but this dissertation unveiled a person-centered approach and qualitative inquiry into the career construction process of student-athletes as they transition to life after sports.

The further validation and expansion of the FCA demonstrated its utility as a narrative tool to discover student-athletes occupational and life narratives over time. This newly modified tool, the FCA, encourages the emergence of new themes and subthemes specific to the population of collegiate student-athletes. The sparse amount of research focused on CCT in the context of NCAA Division I athletics also creates an opportunity for the FCA to theoretically and practically contribute to the field of student-athlete and career development.

Empirical evidence was not derived in the second phase of this research to identify a statistically significant relationship between career exploration and construction for student-athletes within the context of NCAA Division I athletics. Therefore, it is not possible to say at this time if or what types of depth-based career exploration activities influence the career construction process. It is plausible to address the importance behind encouraging student-athletes to continue engaging in career exploration activities to support their life and occupational narratives as they become more real, whole, constructed, expanded, and fulfilled.

APPENDIX A  
PHASE I - EMAIL SOLICITATION TO STUDENT-ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT  
PROFESSIONALS

Dear Athletic Administrator,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Florida researching collegiate athletes' career exploration and development initiatives. The goal of my research is to establish a relationship, if any, between career exploration and improved narrative expression of student-athletes when sharing what they want to do in life and work once they retire from their sport career. I also hope to identify specific career exploration and development initiatives that can facilitate a more positive sport career transition experience for student-athletes.

I am writing today to solicit your student-athletes' participation in this important IRB approved study. Would you be willing to share a link to our online questionnaire with your student-athletes? If yes, please respond indicating your interest and I will share the **student-athlete correspondence** and **informed consent document** with you.

In exchange for your participation, I can offer to provide you and your staff with a report analyzing how your student-athletes narrate their future career autobiographies. If they decide to partake in the second questionnaire in this study, I can tell you what specific types of career exploration activities prove to be most beneficial in supporting their process of career development.

Your institution will never be identified in our results, nor will your athletes' names ever be recorded or identified as part of the study. This data will be analyzed for overall averages, differences by sport, race/ethnicity and sex, but not by institution or at an individual athlete level.

We believe this study is important to better understand and support the large percentage of NCAA Division I student-athletes that are going professional in something other than sports upon graduation. Continued support of our student-athletes' plans of playing their sport professionally is important, but we also aim to provide a metric for why funding, resources and staff are important for career exploration and development initiatives so that student-athletes are prepared for both professional sport and non-sport careers once they leave our institutions.

**Please click here to access the survey: [Exploring Student-Athletes' Career Construction](#)**

My contact information is below. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you for all of your time, help, and consideration!

APPENDIX B  
PHASE I QUESTIONNAIRE – MODIFIED FCA PROMPT

1. Please indicate your first and last name to be eligible to receive a gift card.
2. What is your preferred e-mail address to receive the \$15 Amazon gift card, in the event that you are selected as one of the winners?
3. What is your age (in years)?
4. Which of the following racial/ethnic backgrounds apply to you (check all that apply)?
5. What is the full name of the university in which you attend?
6. Are you playing on men's or women's team(s)?
7. NCAA sports you are currently playing (check all that apply):
8. Based on your roster spot or frequency of competition, how would you classify your status in your main sport during the 2019-2020 season?
9. This year, did you receive an athletics scholarship of any kind in your sport?
10. During the 2019-2020 academic year, what was the status of your playing eligibility?
11. During the 2019-2020 academic year, what is your current academic standing?
12. How likely do you think it is that you will become a professional and/or Olympic athlete in your sport?

The following prompt was provided if participants indicated that it was **“likely”** or **“very likely”** that they were going to become a profession and/or Olympic athlete in their sport:

15. Please write a brief paragraph or two about where you hope to be in life and what you hope to be doing for work once you retire from your professional sport career.

The following prompt was provided if participants indicated it was **“not likely”** that they were going to become a profession and/or Olympic athlete in their sport:

15. Please write a brief paragraph or two about where you hope to be in life and what you hope to be doing for work once you retire from your collegiate sport career.

**The entire Qualtrics questionnaire can be found online:**

<https://ufl.qualtrics.com/exploringSACareerconstruction>

APPENDIX C  
PHASE I – NEW OD/SCT THEMES, SUB-THEMES, AND CODES

**SCT Theme: Continued Connection**

**Sub-Theme A: Coaching and Mentoring:**

- I believe in the next 8-10 years cheerleading will be in the Olympics and I would like to have some part in that or at least be able to mentor younger athletes.
- I'm majoring in psychology and would love to carry that into coaching.
- So my biggest goal I would say is to work my way up the baseball world as a coach.
- My goal is to make it to the collegiate level as a female coach.
- I would love to be a college basketball coach.
- I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life.
- To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation.
- Going to medical school sounds intriguing, as does physical therapy or being a soccer coach.
- I would consider working part time as a coach in addition to a day job.
- At some point I would like to coach my kids in their sports and maybe coach at the high school level too at some point.
- I would love to mainly work with athletes.
- I am currently interested in psychology and working with athletes
- I hope to be helping other athletes indirectly in the field of athletic research on human performance
- I want to work with young kids all the way up to college athletes and trying to improve there game in baseball
- If I cannot continue to play I want to stay around the game whether that is in coaching
- Whether that be coaching, marketing, or something
- I may want to coach at a high level like professionally or college
- coach little kids in soccer
- I also hope to still be a coach
- I hope to be working with social workers in the sports field helping college athletes cope with mental health while they are still competing at the highest level
- I think I will return to my sport of synchro through coaching or potentially small team start up
- I have considered coaching because that would put me directly in sports,
- I have wanted to be a coach for a while
- I want to give young athletes hope and be able to help them get better on and off the court
- help younger athletes get scholarships and help them achieve their dreams.
- while coaching track or football
- also I love teaching kids for fencing
- Furthermore, I am thinking to be a coach
- potentially coach soccer to keep with athletics
- even have the opportunity to teach lessons on the side to friends and others
- works with high school, collegiate or professional athletes,



- I will be volunteer coaching for Xavier University of Louisiana.
- I will be giving pitching lessons to younger girls when I'm off of practice
- I want to open an academy for young girl golfers in Isle of Man/England to help them develop and improve from the ages of 13-21
- I want to maintain a life in the sports world and by doing that I want to become a coach
- As a job I would like to be a personal trainer, a soccer trainer/coach, and a gym teacher.
- I would like to become a rowing coach for a couple of years
- I hope that maybe I'll get the chance to coach a team of my collegiate sport.
- If I don't play professional golf a career opportunity I want to explore is a PGA teaching professional.
- giving lessons to members.
- I also have a desire to help athletes in how to eat effectively and how to help them in college and maybe in their professional careers.
- but if I have the chance or ability I may try and coach the sport for high schoolers as a way to keep in contact with the sport.

#### **Sub-Theme B: Fulfilling Recreational and Competitive Drive:**

- I hope to continue competing as long as I can.
- I would like to be living a comfortable enough life so that I can still dedicate a large portion of my time to training and competing.
- I will most likely be doing some triathlons or marathons/half-marathons for fun but also fulfill my competitive drive.
- I want to continue playing tennis in a league after I graduate.
- I am ready to go back to how the sport should be played and ready to join a league for after work.
- I do plan to continue fencing recreationally for the rest of my life.
- I love playing sports with friends and family and don't think that will ever change.
- in order to compete casually
- I would love to continue running competitively in road races on the side
- I hope that I continue to play my sport, after college, but at a local level.
- I expect fencing to remain in my life as a recreational activity.
- I'm going to continue playing in tournaments after college just to see how far or close I am to actual professionals,
- I will still be competing in my sport.
- would also consider joining a club rowing team to stay in contact with the sport
- I hope to be able to still play tennis as I get older as well
- I may be able to continue competing in my sport.

#### **Sub-Theme C: Difficulty Detaching:**

- I love running and will always be a runner.
- I would like to be heavily involved in rowing even after I graduate from university.
- I feel like I will still be connected to the sports world which has played a huge role in my life ever since I can remember.
- I want to be around athletics as much as possible.

- Running is a way of life not just sport I did.
- I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit.
- I just know I want to stay in sports however that maybe
- I hope to be continuing to play the sport that I love for as long as I can.
- I hope to still be associated with sports one way or another
- I still want to be around sports because it has been a large part of my life
- I love soccer and want to continue to influence players
- I hope to still stay in contact with teammates and the organization to give back for all they have given me
- I plan on playing for as long as I can play.
- After playing I hope to still be involved with sports to some extent
- I've considered rowing for a 5th year, since we were granted another year of eligibility with the season being cancelled for COVID-19 if I go to graduate school near Creighton
- I hope to still be involved in baseball because it brings me joy
- I feel like I will still be connected to the sports world which has played a huge role in my life ever since I can remember
- As long as I'm still in sport, I hope I'll be happy with the job.
- I also want to continue to play golf as much as possible
- take the next step and give back to the game that gave me everything.
- I still plan on running on my own since it is my sport that I love and feel very passionate about.
- I want to continue to practice my sport throughout my life, even if it is not professional
- I have also always loved sports, so I found this as a good balance between these two passions.
- I want to be around athletics as much as possible
- Even if I don't make it on the national team I would like to be heavily involved in growing even after I graduate from university.

#### **Sub-Theme D: Investing in Health and Wellness:**

- I hope to be active
- I hope to continue to be active and healthy throughout my life
- I plan to continue to be active in my everyday life by working out and/or doing yoga.
- or perform research relevant to nutrition and health correlations
- I hope to remain very athletic and active by pursuing other hobby sports.
- I will do athletic classes and group fitness activities.
- I plan on continuing to run but not in serious competition. I will for sure be doing more cross-training as I love to bike and swim.
- I am hoping to transition to further distances once I start aging, such as the half marathon and marathon.
- I am blessed that I can take my sport with me throughout my whole life.
- I also want to be able to keep working out and have a healthy lifestyle
- With a healthy lifestyle
- I do hope to keep up some level of fitness

- I also hope that in the future I still continue to row in some way whether it's at a gym, a class, or on the water
- I plan to continue running, but I will no longer compete.
- I am working to ensure a healthy life mentally and physically.
- I will continue to stay active by running and other aerobic exercising
- I will definitely continue to run, but I'm not sure how competitive I will be
- I plan to continue to be active in my everyday life by working out and/or doing yoga.
- I plan on continuing to run but not in serious competition.
- doing more cross-training as I love to bike and swim.
- My main focus will be my health
- might still try and play my sport casually to stay in shape,
- I hope to remain very athletic and active by pursuing other hobby sports.
- I will do athletic classes and group fitness activities.
- I do plan on continuing to run for pleasure

### **Sub-Theme E: Pursuing a Professional Athletic Career:**

- I would like to try out for the national team at some point in the next two years and see where I make it when it comes to European Championships and world Championships.
- If I could be a really successful professional golfer, I would like to do that for the rest of my life.
- I plan to remain an athlete but take a couple years to transition to a different sport.
- Plan A is to be a professional soccer player.
- I know that I would have the ability to play professionally after soccer.
- I plan to be a professional golfer for as long as I can to help pay for medical school.
- My biggest dream was always to play professionally.
- I may decide to take a year off from grad school to train for the 2024 Olympics
- I plan to play professionally
- when I am a professional athlete
- I have always had a desire to go to the Olympics
- Be a professional tennis player
- I'll give myself a chance to try and become a professional tennis player
- I hope first to have a fruitful and successful athletic career
- my biggest dream was always to play professionally
- I believe that based off of the level that I have played at and my ability, I think there is a chance to play professionally.
- I am going to try to play overseas and then return to the states once I have more experience as a professional
- If I go pro I will only stay pro until the next Olympics (2024)
- I see myself playing my sport professionally
- I hope I am playing for a professional team in Europe.
- I have signed a contract in Kazakhstan to play professional women's soccer in the UEFA Women's Champions League.
- and may decide to take a year off from grad school to train for the 2024 Olympics
- pursue a career in sports and hopefully play in the NFL

- It would be incredible to be able to compete in the Olympics
- Another career aspiration would be working in marketing for a professional sports organization.
- I hope to be accepting a full time job with a sports company.
- I want to work as an engineer in designing and developing new sports equipment and technologies.
- I would like to work in either athletics or academics at the collegiate level in some capacity.
- I hope to become a professional Golfer.
- It was one of my Goals to play on the Solheim cup team and win a major (Hopefully the British Open)
- I will be playing in the ANWA as an amateur.
- I hope to play pro after college or go back to Europe and go play pro over there.
- My dream would be to play on the LPGA Tour.
- I know it's not that realistic to assume I'm gonna go pro, but I hope to play at the next level.
- I will always run and although I will not be professional, I would like to train for the 2024 Olympic Trials Marathon
- I would like to try out for the national team at some point
- hoping that I get an opportunity to play professional

#### **Sub-Theme F: Vocational Pursuits in the Sport Industry:**

- I hope to work at the D1 collegiate level and then at the professional setting
- So if it's not for my sport then I would love to be able to be an athletic trainer for one of those professional teams
- In life I hope to start a job with the major league baseball
- pursue a career in sports representation
- My end goal is to become a sports agent
- I hope to be able to get a job in a local sport organization or University in the athletic department
- I hope to live in an area that has a top sport organization or top University.
- work in a private clinic or with a sports team
- I can have a job where I can be some sort of sports analyst
- become an Athletic Trainer for a professional sports team
- I hope to continue to work within sports.
- I hope to start working in sports
- I hope to work with any sports brand working in the marketing or advertising field
- I am hoping to also do something in the Sports Industry
- Whether that is working for a collegiate or professional team, or high school AD
- I hope to work with athletes or perform research relevant to nutrition and health correlations.
- I would like to manage my own team in the company that I enjoy the most.
- I would like to join the retail or sport industry but on the finance/operations or business side
- or potentially be employed by a sports team
- I hope to stay involved in athletics working with either a professional or collegiate athletic organization.
- I also want to open my own gym/basketball club.

## SCT Theme: Transition Acknowledgment and Acceptance

### **Sub-Theme A: Acknowledgment:**

- Once I graduate I will most likely retire from rowing.
- After my career ends...
- After my collegiate sport career...
- Once I complete my career as a collegiate athlete...
- I do not have a strict plan to follow for my life or work once my softball career has ended.
- Once I retire from my collegiate sport career...
- When I officially retire from Track and Field...
- Once I retire from my Sports Career...
- The summer after my final games played in college...
- Once I retire from my professional sports career,
- After my collegiate sport career is over...
- After I am done swimming...
- Once I am graduated from school and retired from my collegiate sport career...
- After graduating college and completing my four years of NCAA eligibility...
- Where I hope to be in life after sports...
- Once I retire from my collegiate sport career...
- Once I retire from my professional sport career...
- I hope when I retire,
- I love basketball but I plan to stop playing after my senior year and frustration next year.
- Following the completion of my degree and time on the rowing team...
- After I complete my collegiate career...
- After playing softball...
- Once my soccer career is over...
- Once I retire from my collegiate sport...
- All I want to do after softball is over is go back to school.
- After I retire from my college career...
- Once I retire from my collegiate sport career...
- After I finish my collegiate fencing career...
- After concluding my rowing career...
- Once I finish my career as a collegiate cheerleader...
- When I'm done with my sport...
- Once I graduate and retire from my collegiate sport...
- After I fulfill my four years of eligibility during undergrad...
- So, once I retire from my professional sport...
- I do not plan on competing in the sport any longer.

### **Sub-Theme B: Acceptance:**

- It's a tough decision to make because I want to keep playing, but I don't see my sport in my future
- However, I realized that my focus of attention shifted a little bit.
- I saw myself in a different light outside of soccer for the first time and I was ok with that.

- Sports is a big part of my life right now but I know it is going to end eventually and that there are more important things than becoming an athletic superstar.
- Once my sporting career is over, I will definitely expand upon these areas.
- I do not plan on playing my sport after college as I would need to play for 3 more years before the next Olympics.
- I'm grateful for the opportunity to row at the college level but I will move on from that after school
- I hope I am ready to say goodbye to basketball at that point so I can start a new chapter of my life!
- I love rowing and participating in a collegiate sport, but I know that my rowing career probably won't go anywhere past college.
- I see myself hanging the skates after my last game as a buckeye.
- As much as I love the sport I play, I won't be coming back for the additional year.
- I have many aspirations in life and many goals I wish to accomplish many of those are outside of football.
- I plan on doing my sport for the next three years while in college, and then be done after that.
- I do not want to move on professionally because I am ready to get on with my life.

### **SCT Theme: Transferable Life Skills**

- College athletes has taught me that I need to be active through out my life.
- Being a college athlete I have great time management.
- I am also not afraid to call things out when I see unfairness.
- I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college.
- Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more.
- I hope i will use everything swimming has taught me such as grit, passion, and resilience
- I also think that the lessons and skills you develop in sports replaces not have as much experience
- I hope my college and professional experience will help me see the best type of ways to do that
- I hope that one I enter the work force I will be able to integrate the skills that I have gained from rowing into my daily life.
- My natural competitiveness will aid me in this area and give me an advantage
- Using my college sports experience to fuel my career
- and although it is hard to balance sports and academics I am going to achieve this goal
- Hopefully the lessons I learn through collegiate athletics will translate into valuable skills I can apply to my professional career.
- I deeply treasure all that athletics has taught me, physically, mentally, and emotionally
- I hope to carry those values with me to positively impact and teach other people.
- Playing sports while growing up has had a greater impact on me than any other thing in my life.
- Lifting weights has been especially impactful in my life (taught me self discipline, gave me an internal locus of control, has afforded me certain opportunities that wouldn't be there otherwise, gave me a friend group etc...).

- It is something that I want to give back to the community because I feel that boys can develop to be better young men through the disciplines of weight lifting.
- take my morals that I've learned from my sport and put them into my future life and career.
- In life, I hope to keep my time management, motivation, and work ethic within my work.

### **SCT Theme: Developmental Cost**

- I'm not sure how accurate this is going to be because I feel like my sport is preventing me from getting good grades
- and my academics are impacted from the sport.
- so I'm not sure if I should continue to play because it can have an impact on the rest of my life.
- If it's preventing me from doing well academically, I feel like I should stop playing, but I've never not played a sport.
- I believe there should be a lot less politics in the sport and athletes should play every match if they are in the strongest and fastest on the team.
- College teams destroy confidence in athletes by playing all of these mind games and not being transparent with teammates by giving each teammate different reasons.
- I've never worked so hard to be the strongest, fastest, a great role model for my teammates, and have been so undermined as a player.
- I additionally hope to get a job in a new city or a job that requires travelling as with my sport I have only been able to see a very small portion of the world as I have dedicated a lot of my time to it.
- I have concerns with my lack of experience from being student athlete and not being able to have a full time job/internship
- but nursing school has a difficult schedule especially for athletes.
- This dream has been a goal of mine ever since I got injured (multiple times back to back),
- Not because I want to be done, but there isn't a sustainable professional league for women's hockey.
- I actually just suffered a career ending injury and am waiting for non emergency surgeries to open back up so I can have mine.
- this is the age help isn't available as much to girls especially due to not having college sports and from the Isle of Man with limited coaching and competition
- I cannot go professional in my sport because I do not consider professional cheerleading to be my sport.
- I do not think it is realistic to follow my dream of going to medical school while competing
- I hope that my coaches don't ruin the sport for me and make me want to be done with it.

### **OD Theme: Occupational Uncertainty**

- I can't pinpoint it right now
- but who knows it could change.
- but I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life.

- I think it is a good possibility based on my trajectory, but I realize a lot of factors go into that plan actually working.
- but since only 4 fencers are on the team, it's a long shot for even the best fencers.
- I don't think I would be qualified to try and become a professional rower.
- I'm not sure where I will live
- I'm not sure how accurate this is going to be
- so I'm not sure if I should continue to play
- and my purpose can change.
- I am not sure yet how to do that
- It is extremely hard to tell where I will be looking that far down the road,
- I am unsure as to what area of law yet
- I do not think my life will revolve around my job,
- I think it is a good possibility based on my trajectory,
- but I realize a lot of factors go into that plan actually working
- We shall see what I actually decide,
- Career-wise I am not entirely sure what I would like to do yet
- Which is something I am still working out
- so my academic route has been thrown off a bit
- I have no idea what I want to do with my life
- be successful in whatever I plan on doing
- However, I know that it is difficult to get in, so I am also open for other opportunities that will open up on the way in the field of international relations or international politics
- I am unsure about what I want to do for work after college.
- I responded that it is not very likely that it happens
- being able to be in the top 100 is not a likely thing
- however if I see that that's not going to happen
- Although that is very hard in certain areas I hope that I can stand out enough with all of my credentials
- I still do not know exactly what I want to do
- give me the opportunity to help with whatever type of work I am doing in the future
- I haven't decided between dental or vet school yet
- Then, wherever God takes me, I will go
- I am not sure exactly what I want to be doing once I am completely done playing soccer.
- it's a long shot for even the best fencers
- I'm not entirely sure what I want to do in terms of a career
- I am still considering what this might look like for me.
- I am not sure yet how to do that.
- I would be open to working in any setting where I can assist patients of all classes
- I am not exactly sure what I want to be specifically doing,
- I am currently unaware of what exactly I want to do career-wise.
- Whichever path I desire to pursue



APPENDIX D  
DATA-ORIENTED AUDIT TRAIL OF “STUDENT-ATHLETE A” NARRATIVE

Lincoln and Guba (1985) six categories of audit trail information:

**1. Raw data**

- FCA transcript exported from Qualtrics to Excel to Microsoft word

I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college. I am working towards a career in data analytics, but I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life. My ultimate aim is to be happy and healthy while pursuing a job that will allow me to make a meaningful impact on others. Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit. I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life. To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation.

**2. Data reduction and analysis notes**

- Coded transcripts and narrative description of the emerging themes

I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college. (sport specific – learned skills) I am working towards a career in data analytics, (occupational goals/desires) but I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life. (uncertainty of what they really want to do, open to change) My ultimate aim is to be happy and healthy (desired personal experience – associated to experiencing positive feelings) while pursuing a job that will allow me to make a meaningful impact on others. (positive occupational goal/desire) Soccer has played a major role in my life; (sport specific – impact of learned behavior) it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more. (sport specific – learned skills and behaviors) I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit. (sport specific - psychological difficulty relinquishing participation) I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life. (sport specific – coaching and mentoring after playing career is over) To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation (sport specific – mention of mentoring and guiding younger generation in sport).

Word count: 171

**3. Data reconstruction and synthesis products**

- Visual display of color-coded codes in raw transcription form, which are later grouped with similar emerging themes

I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college. I am working towards a career in data analytics, but I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life. My ultimate aim is to be happy and healthy while pursuing a job that will allow me to make a meaningful impact on others. Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit. I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life. To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation.

#### Grouped codes:

I am working towards a career in data analytics,

My ultimate aim is to be happy and healthy

while pursuing a job that will allow me to make a meaningful impact on others.

I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college. Soccer has played a major role in my life; it has taught me about persistence, leadership, responsibility, companionship, drive, and so much more.

I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit. I hope to either coach or provide an opportunity for young soccer players to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life. To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood and help pass that along to the younger generation.

but I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life.

#### 4. Process notes

- Description of the evolution of the deductively identified and inductively generated new themes

I am working towards a career in data analytics,

-Identifiable “achievement” Quality of Life theme from Refhuss (2009)

My ultimate aim is to be happy and healthy

-Identifiable “experiential” Quality of Life theme from Refhuss (2009)

while pursuing a job that will allow me to make a meaningful impact on others.

-Identifiable “positive” Occupational Desire theme from Refhuss (2009)

I look forward to using my skills I developed as a student-athlete in my life after college.

Soccer has played a major role in my life;

it has taught me about persistence,

leadership,

responsibility,

companionship,

drive, and so much more.

-New sport specific theme – addressing several important learned in skills from athletics that can be used in life after college sports.

-Important to note is the identified ability to utilize these skills outside of sports.

I cannot imagine what my life would be like without soccer as an escape and a pursuit.

I hope to either coach

or provide an opportunity for young soccer players

to have the chance to experience the joy and privilege I had to play the amazing sport throughout my life.

To me, it is very important to give back to the sport that guided my childhood

and help pass that along to the younger generation.

-New sport specific theme – a strong desire to stay connected to athletics after collegiate career.

-Important to note is that coaching and mentoring, or the act of giving back to the sport, are mentioned several times throughout the narrative.

but I am open to changing my work every few years to find out what I really want to do with my life.

-New occupational desire theme – showing an uncertainty of what will happen next, but also showing a willingness to be adaptive and try new career roles during the transition process.

## 5. Materials related to intentions and dispositions

- Several materials were created during this audit trail: dissertation proposal, notes from committee suggesting revisions, IRB requestion and approval forms, documentation of sampling critierial and processes for each research phase, and an ongoing research log on an Excel sheet that recorded everything that was completed throughout the research processes (meeting with my advisor, correspondence with my advisor, e-mail solicitation sent to universities and student-athletes, new notes from career development literature, data analysis, qualitative and quantitative results, and the steps of organizing dissertation chapters).

## 6. Instrument development information

- Multiple pieces of information were responsible for the development of the modified FCA: protocol revisions from committee, refinement of data collection as it evolved with advisor, bracketed research biases throughout the qualitative data analysis processes, and an effort to described explicitly in detail the general methods and procedures followed for data collection and analysis.

APPENDIX E  
EMAIL SOLICITATION TO STUDENT-ATHLETE WHO AGREED TO PARTICIPATE IN  
PHASE II

Dear student-athlete,

Thank you again for participating in the recent career autobiography research study on NCAA student-athletes. As you might recall, as part of that study, we asked if you would be interested in sharing additional feedback on your career preparation as a student-athlete.

I am reaching out to you today to ask whether you are still interested in participating in this second study.

Please read over the following information and click on the link provided below if you would like to obtain more information about their study.

- The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship, if any, between career-exploration measured by the Career Identity Development Inventory (CIDI) and its association to fuller and more constructed Future Career Autobiographies (FCA).
- Questionnaires will be conducted online through the Qualtrics website.
- Approximate amount of time to complete the questionnaire: 8-10 minutes.
- **Every other participant (up to the first 100 student-athletes) that completes the survey will be awarded a \$15 Amazon gift card.**
- Participation is voluntary; participants always retain the right to decline to answer any question, and they may choose to stop participation at any time.
- There is a minimal risk that security of any online data may be breached, but our survey host (Qualtrics) uses strong encryption and other data security methods to protect your information. Only the researchers will have access to your information on the Qualtrics server. No identifying information will be collected or connected with your responses, which will be anonymous.
- If you have questions about the study, please contact Melissa Weinsz at (330) 324-0836.

**Please click the link below to obtain additional information about this study:**

**[Student-Athletes' Career Exploration](#)**

APPENDIX F  
PHASE II QUESTIONNAIRE – CIDI IN-BREADTH AND IN-DEPTH QUESTIONS

**Exploration In-Breadth:**

This survey is about your career exploration activities in general. Although you may have not decided on a specific career yet, try to think of potential careers you are interested in at this point for your life after sport. Try not to respond merely as you think you "should" respond; rather, try to be as accurate and as objective as possible in evaluating yourself.

**Which of the following statements is the most accurate with regards to the work you want to pursue after your sports career ends?**

- I have decided on the career I want to pursue when my college and pro sports career ends.
- The career I want to pursue in my life after my sports career ends is:
- I have NOT decided on a specific career to pursue in my future "life after sports" yet.

Using the five-point rating scale with **1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**, please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements. If any of the questions simply do not seem relevant to you, "1 (strongly disagree)" may be the most appropriate answer.

**Within the past year, I have been...**

- Considering a number of different career alternatives that might suit me after my sports career concludes.
- Thinking about different career paths that might be good for me.
- Learning more about various career options that I could perform well in after my sport career ends.
- Obtaining information about various career possibilities that might be appealing to me.
- Weighing the pros and cons of various career alternatives.
- Talking with others about the career alternatives I have been exploring.
- Learning about myself for the purpose of finding a career that meets my needs.
- Reflecting on how my past could integrate with various career alternatives.
- Thinking about which career options would be a good fit with my personality and values.
- Reflecting on how my strengths and abilities could be best used in a variety of careers.

**Network Exploration In-Depth:**

Using the five-point rating scale with **1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**, please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements. If any of the questions simply do not seem relevant to you, "1 (strongly disagree)" may be the most appropriate answer.

**Within the past year, I have been...**

- Conducting informational interviews with professionals working in my field of interest.

- Job shadowing with professionals employed in my field of interest.
- Initiating conversations with professionals who are employed in positions similar to what I decided to do for my career.
- Seeking advice from professionals working in my field of interest.

### **Advanced Exploration In-Depth:**

Using the five-point rating scale with **1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**, please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements. If any of the questions simply do not seem relevant to you, "1 (strongly disagree)" may be the most appropriate answer.

#### **Within the past year, I have been...**

- Acquiring practical experience in my desired career.
- Gaining employment to develop relevant skills for the career I plan to pursue.
- Spending time engaged in activities related to my desired career.
- Engaging in the kind of training, education, and/or experience(s) I need to have for the kind of work I decided to pursue.

### **Self-Exploration In-Depth:**

Using the five-point rating scale with **1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**, please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements. If any of the questions simply do not seem relevant to you, "1 (strongly disagree)" may be the most appropriate answer.

#### **Within the past year, I have been...**

- Reflecting on how my chosen career aligns with my past experiences.
- Contemplating what I value most in my desired career.
- Contemplating how the work I want to do is congruent with my interests and personality.
- Reflecting on how my strengths and abilities could be best used in my desired career.

### **Confusion:**

Using the five-point rating scale with **1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**, please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements. If any of the questions simply do not seem relevant to you, "1 (strongly disagree)" may be the most appropriate answer.

- I feel confused as to who I really am when it comes to my career.
- I am uncertain about the kind of work I could perform well.
- Deciding on a career makes me feel anxious.
- I often feel lost when I think about choosing a career because I don't have enough information and/or experience to make a career decision at this point.
- Trying to find a satisfying career is stressful because there are so many things to consider.
- Being unsure about what kind of career I would enjoy worries me.

- I have doubts that I will be able to find a career that I'm satisfied with.
- I have no clear sense of a career direction that would be meaningful to me.

**The entire Qualtrics questionnaire can be found online:**

<https://ufl.qualtrics.com/SAcareerexploration>



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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melissa is an Ohio native and former NCAA Division II student-athlete who played college basketball and lacrosse for Denison University in Granville, Ohio. She graduated with a bachelor's in athletic training in May 2015 from Denison University. After graduating from Denison and retiring from athletics, her interest in physiology lead her to the University of Florida (UF) to pursue a master's degree in applied physiology and kinesiology (APK). She arrived at UF with four years of experience as a strength and conditioning coach for high school and collegiate student-athletes, and she was set on becoming a collegiate strength and conditioning coach upon graduation. She had the opportunity to pursue elective classes in sport psychology while in the APK program. It was in that class that she learned about the athlete development certification offered by UF, which bridges classes from the APK and sport management department. After graduating with her master's degree in 2016, her focus immediately shifted from strength and conditioning to athlete development as she pursued a doctorate degree in sport management.

While in the doctoral program, she had the opportunity to be advised by Dr. Michael Sagas while served as a Graduate Assistant for the Laboratory for Athletic Development Research (LADR). She also had the chance to become a Research Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator for a local non-profit, Aces in Motion. Her research interests and agenda shifted from athlete identity, to sport for development, to serious leisure identity, to finally, career development. She had the opportunity to be a Teaching Assistant and Co-Instructor for a Sport Career Transition course offered by the Sport Management Department for UF student-athletes. The course was intended to facilitate adaptive identity development of junior and senior student-athletes as they made psychological adjustments to life without competitive sports. The opportunity to be a part of that class shaped her research focus of improving the career



construction and development processes of student-athletes as they transition out of their collegiate sport career. Specifically, she is interested in evaluating and improving interventions and programming designed to assist student-athletes with their personal and professional career development.

She had the opportunity to present her research at the Professional Association of Athlete Development Specialists (PAADS) Summit and publish in an international referred journal before her doctoral experience came to a close. She is a member of PAADS, the National Association for Academic Advisors of Athletics (N4A), Women Leaders in College Sports, and the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA). She aspires to continue bridging the gap of research and practice and promote that being a “pracademic” is an invaluable tool. Graduating in December 2020 with a Ph.D. in health and human performance, and a concentration in sport management, she will next finish a post-graduate internship with the University Athletic Association at UF under the guidance of the Student-Athlete Enhancement division. She finds no greater motivation than to serve and promote the holistic development of men and women in the greater community of athletics.