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Students Transitioning to College and Out of Competitive Sport

Athletic Identity, Coping, and Stress

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Abstract

High-school athletes who transition into higher education as non-athlete students encounter several social and emotional difficulties. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influences of aforementioned participants' athletic identities on their utilization of coping strategies and resulting perceptions of stress. A structural model was developed and empirically tested using a 48-item questionnaire. The sample population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in freshman-level courses at three public southwestern universities. Structural equation modeling (SEM) indicated a strong model fit, including a significant correlation between various factors of athletic identity and coping, as well as a significant correlation between coping and stress. Assessing the athletic identities of competitive athletes at all levels could serve to identify those who may be susceptible to difficulties upon transitioning out of competitive sport and prone to a reliance on ineffective coping efforts.

Keywords: *Athletic identity, transition, coping, stress, college*

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Introduction

While participation in high school athletics is common and associated with several noted benefits, few high school athletes will compete at the collegiate level (Downs & Ashton, 2011). As many of these former high school athletes transition to college, they begin to encounter several social and emotional difficulties, ranging from departing long-established social support networks to increased academic pressures (Pedrelli, Nyer, Yeung, Zulauf, & Wilens, 2015). As a result, these individuals are prone to stress, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Pedrelli et al., 2015). Furthermore, stronger identification with an athlete role at the time of the transition out of competitive sport results in longer adjustment periods and can lead to identity crises, as well as increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Erpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004; Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997; Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Moreover, a strong and exclusive athletic identity—identification with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993, p. 237)—has been associated with the utilization of poor coping mechanisms during the transition out of competitive sport (Brand et al., 2013; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Park et al., 2013; Wippert & Wippert, 2010).

Athletic Identity and Coping with the Transition Out of Sport

The termination of an athletic career has proven difficult for many retiring athletes and correlates with numerous symptoms of emotional and social disturbance, including identity loss, high levels of stress, and depression (Brand, Wolff, & Hoyer, 2013; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Butt & Molnar, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Park et al., 2013; Wippert & Wippert, 2010). Athletic identity has proven to be a crucial factor in the transition out of competitive sport among athletes (Erpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004; Park et al., 2013; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). For instance, those who hold strong and exclusive athletic identities at the time they make the transition out of competitive sport often face more social and emotional difficulties in adapting, including identity crises, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Grove et al., 1997; Lally, 2007; Park et al., 2013; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Athletes with strong and exclusive athletic identities upon transitioning out of competitive sport elicited less positive and more negative emotions in response to sport career termination, necessitating the usage of a greater number of coping strategies in order to adjust to retirement from competitive sport and spending greater amounts of time adjusting to post-career life (Alfermann et al., 2004; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Grove et al., 1997; Wippert & Wippert, 2008). More specifically, Grove et al. (1997) assert exhibiting a strong and exclusive athletic identity upon transitioning out of competitive sport correlates with an increased reliance on ineffective coping strategies, such as denial, mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, and venting of emotions in adjusting to the transition.

Many competitive athletes are involuntarily forced into terminating their competitive athletic careers earlier than they may have wished due to circumstances such as deselection or injury (Butt & Molnar, 2009). Athletes involuntarily transitioning who have developed strong and exclusive athletic identities are at increased risk for unhealthy adaptations to transitioning out of competitive sport (Brand et al., 2013; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Erpič et al., 2004; Wippert & Wippert, 2010). Similarly, those who have failed to pre-plan for the transition out of competitive sport and have yet to establish healthy coping resources outside of sport are likely to encounter difficulties upon the transition out of competitive sport (Alfermann et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1997; Park et al., 2013; Stambulova et al., 2007; Warriner & Lavalée, 2008). However, those who have left sport by free choice, pre-planned for the transition, established a social identity outside of sport, and developed healthy coping skills are likely to successfully adapt to the transition out of competitive sport with little difficulty (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Lavalée, 2005; Warriner & Lavalée, 2008).

Many former varsity high school athletes who had hopes of continuing their competitive sport careers at the collegiate level will likely face this transition (Brand et al., 2013; Downs & Ashton, 2011). That said, the majority of published research has focused on professional and elite/Olympic level athletes transitioning out of sport, rather than former high school athletes (Park, et al., 2013). Consequently, this study examines former varsity high school athletes and current non-athlete college students. In particular, herein we investigate the influences of participants' athletic identities on the coping strategies employed in response to stressors, their subjective experiences of perceived stress, and the effectiveness of the various coping strategies they employ in terms of lowering their perceptions of stress.

Methods

Participants

Three large institutions in the Southwest region of the United States, ranging in enrollment from 20,000 to 58,000, participated in this investigation. Data collection occurred throughout the Spring academic semester. To be eligible for inclusion in this investigation, respondents had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) be an undergraduate student and former high school athlete not currently participating in collegiate athletics; (2) be no older than 20 years of age; and (3) be a currently enrolled student attending one of the three institutions of higher education participating.

Questionnaire

The variables used in this study include: 1) athletic identity (Athlete Identity Measurement Scale; Brewer & Cornelius, 2001); 2) problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping (Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations – Situation Specific Coping; Endler & Parker, 1994); and 3) perceived stress (Perceived Stress

Scale; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Demographic information was also collected. See Tables 1-4 for a complete list of items employed.

Athletic identity. Athlete identity was assessed using a 7-item version of the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). The AIMS (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001) is designed to measure the extent to which an individual identifies with the athlete role based on three factors. These factors include social identity (e.g., "Most of my friends are athletes."), exclusivity (e.g., "Sport is the most important part of my life."), and negative affect (e.g., "I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport."). Respondents indicate level of agreement on statements based on a 7-point Likert type scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7). Scores on the AIMS were added for each of the three factors of athletic identity to achieve an overall cumulative score for that factor. Higher scores were indicative of a greater possession of the respective factor of athletic identity.

The 7-item, three-factor version of the AIMS utilized in this study demonstrated adequate validity and reliability. All factor loadings exceeded .71 (.55-good, .63-very good, .71-excellent; Comrey & Lee, 2013), indicating convergent validity. Factor loadings ranged from .76 ("Most of my friends are athletes") to .90 ("Sport is the most important part of my life"). Interfactor correlations ranged from .72 (AI exclusivity $\leftrightarrow$ AI negative affect) to .81 (AI social $\leftrightarrow$ AI exclusivity), establishing discriminant validity (correlation > .90 between factors indicates multicollinearity [Hair et al., 1998]). All Cronbach's alpha values for the various factors of athletic identity exceeded the .70 threshold (Cronbach, 1951), ranging from .82 (AI - negative affect) to .88 (AI - exclusivity).

Coping. Coping was assessed via the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations - Situation Specific Coping (CISS-SSC, Endler & Parker, 1994). The CISS-SSC (Endler & Parker, 1994) is a 21-item scale measuring four factors of coping: 1) problem-focused coping (e.g., "Focus on the problem and see how I can solve it."); 2) emotion-focused coping (e.g., "Feel anxious about not being able to cope."); 3) avoidant coping distraction (e.g., "Go buy myself something"); and 4) avoidant coping social diversion (e.g., "Spend time with a special person"). In order to examine a fifth dimension of coping (i.e., exercise coping), three exercise coping items were added to the original scale, as Thome and Espelage (2004) have suggested. The CISS-SSC (Endler & Parker, 1994) asks respondents to indicate how often they engaged in various coping strategies over the previous month in response to a particularly stressful situation. The CISS-SSC (Endler & Parker, 1994) is a 5-point Likert type scale with responses ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much" (5). Scores on the CISS-SSC were added for each of the four factors of coping to achieve an overall cumulative score for that factor. Higher scores were indicative of a greater utilization of the respective factor of coping.

In this study, any item with a factor loading <.55 was removed one item at a time, until all factor loadings were $\geq$.55 (.55-good fit, .63-very good, .71-excellent

[Comrey & Lee, 2013] $\geq .60$ [MacCallum et al., 1999]). Of the original 24 items, one item was removed from the avoidant coping distraction factor (CA7 – “Take time off and get away from the situation”) due to a very low factor loading. This process established convergent validity. Cronbach’s alpha values for the five factors of coping ranged from .68 (avoidant coping social diversion) to .92 (exercise coping). Four of the factors demonstrated adequate construct reliability ($>.70$; Cronbach, 1951).

Perceived stress. Students’ subjective perceptions of stress due to a combination of factors, including the initial stressors of transitioning out of competitive sport and to college, athletic identity at the time of the transition, and the use of various coping strategies were analyzed with the use of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). The PSS (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) includes 14 items (e.g., “In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control something important in your life?”) designed to assess participants’ feelings and thoughts over the previous month with possible answers ranging from “Never” (0) to “Very often” (4). Scores on the PSS items were added to achieve an overall cumulative score for perceived stress. Higher scores were indicative of a greater level of perceived stress.

Of the original 14 items, 3 items were removed due to low factor loadings (.55-good fit, .63-very good, .71-excellent [Comrey & Lee, 2013]; $\geq .60$ [MacCallum et al., 1999]). Two items were removed from the perceived stress positively worded items (PS4Reverse: “In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?” and PS13Reverse: “In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?”). One item was deleted from the perceived stress negatively worded items (PS12: “In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?”). After these items were removed, convergent validity was established. The Cronbach’s alpha values ranged from .79 (perceived stress positive) to .84 (perceived stress negative) for the perceived stress factors ($>.70$ acceptable; Cronbach, 1951), indicating adequate construct reliability.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 554)*

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	226	41
Female	328	59
Age		
18-19	302	59
20-21	212	41
>21	2	0
Race/Ethnicity		
Caucasian	311	56
African American	56	10
Hispanic	113	21
Asian	39	7
Other	13	2
Biracial	20	4
Live with family		
Yes	98	18
No	454	82
Current Sport Participation		
Yes	302	55
No	251	45

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics for Athletic Identity*

Variable	M	SD
Social		
I consider myself an athlete.	4.81	1.77
I have many goals related to sport.	3.71	1.92
Most of my friends are athletes.	4.23	1.81
Negative Affect		
I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport.	4.45	1.93
I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.	4.30	2.07
Exclusivity		
Sport is the most important part of my life	2.93	1.78
I spend more time thinking about sport than anything	2.46	1.73

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics for Coping*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Problem-focused coping		
Focus on the problem and see how I can solve it	3.90	.83
Think about how I have solved a similar problem	3.52	.90
Determine a course of action and follow it	3.74	.89
Work to understand the situation	3.74	.88
Take corrective action immediately	3.30	.92
Think about the event and learn from my mistakes	3.69	1.00
Analyze the problem before reacting	3.37	1.06
Emotion-focused coping		
Blame myself for having gotten into the situation	2.99	1.16
Feel anxious about not being able to cope	2.97	1.21
Blame myself for being too emotional about the situation	2.69	1.41
Become upset	2.61	1.30
Blame myself for not knowing what to do	2.64	1.28
Wish that I could change what happened or how I felt	3.51	1.23
Focus on my general inadequacies	2.78	1.12
Avoidant coping – distraction		
Treat myself to a favorite food or snack	3.43	1.17
Go out for a snack or meal	3.20	1.22
Buy myself something	2.55	1.34
Take time off and get away from the situation	3.06	1.18
Avoidant coping – social diversion		
Visit a friend	3.34	1.20
Spend time with a special person	3.21	1.32
Phone a friend	3.09	1.30
Exercise coping		
Go to the gym to work out	3.27	1.32
Do something active, such as running	3.43	1.27
Get some exercise	3.46	1.25

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Stress*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	3.24	1.00
How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	3.22	1.15
How often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?	4.07	1.01
How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	2.78	1.07
How often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	3.17	1.10
How often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?	4.42	.79
How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	3.04	1.16
How often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?	2.29	.84
How often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?	2.34	.93
How often have you felt confident in your ability to handle your personal problems?	2.16	.97
How often have you felt things were going your way?	2.66	.95
How often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	2.51	.85
How often have you felt that you were on top of things?	2.58	.90
How often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?	2.26	.89

Analytic Technique

Only students who participated in high school varsity sport and were either first-year students or under the age of 21 were included in the final analyses. For these 554 students, descriptive statistics, pertaining to age, race, gender, living arrangements, and high school/current sport participation were calculated using SPSS 23.0 (Table 1). Assumptions, including normality and heterogeneity, were assessed.

Next, a standard two-step model testing procedure was followed, whereby a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in order to confirm the validity and reliability of the model. In analyzing the measurement model, validity coefficients (i.e., factor loadings) and reliability coefficients (i.e., measure of error variance) were calculated. Internal consistencies for all factors with an acceptable alpha coefficient being equal to or greater than .70 were retained (Cronbach, 1951). To establish discriminant validity related to coping factors, multicollinearity was assessed to ensure each factor of coping was its own distinguishable factor (i.e., correlation > .90 between factors or VIF > 10 indicates multicollinearity; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). After confirming the measurement model accurately measured the latent variables, the structural model was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in order to explore the relationships between the latent variables (See Table 5).

Table 5

Goodness of Fit Statistics for Measurement and Structural Model

Model	<i>df</i>	χ^2	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
CFA for measurement model	443	1030.59	2.33	.93	.049	.055
SEM for structural model	451	1072.50	2.38	.921	.050	.062

Note: (RMSEA - value < .05 - .08 indicates good to great fit, SRMR - < .05 - .08 indicates good to great model fit, CFI - value > .90 - .95 indicates good to great fit; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010).

Estimation of the model parameters was executed through maximum likelihood (ML) estimation (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). Then, the model was tested for model-fit using the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and comparative fit index (CFI

Results

Structural Model

Given the measurement model demonstrated the adequate validity and reliability of the model, the structural model was assessed. First, the relationship between the factors of coping and perceived stress was assessed. This was done in order to determine whether each of the factors of coping had a significant relationship with the outcome of perceived stress before considering a model that also included the three factors of athletic identity. It was determined three of the five factors of coping had almost no relationship at all with the perceived stress outcome variable. These coping factors were avoidant coping distraction (ACD $\rightarrow$ PS = -.01), avoidant coping social diversion (ACS $\rightarrow$ PS = .01), and exercise coping (EXC $\rightarrow$ PS = .01). Based on the insignificant results, these three coping factors were removed from the model in order to achieve a more parsimonious fit. After model respecifications, the final structural model was constructed (Figure 1). Goodness of fit indices - RMSEA (.050), CFI (.921), and SRMR (.062) - indicated the model fit the data well (RMSEA - value < .05 - .08 indicates good to great fit, SRMR - < .05 - .08 indicates good to great model fit, CFI - value > .90 - .95 indicates good to great fit; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010).

Discussion

Overview

There is an abundance of research addressing the subjective experiences of stress impacting college students, as well as the methods in which these students cope (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Pedrelli et al., 2015). Similarly, recent research has begun to examine the retirement experiences of professional athletes in terms of stress, coping, and the role of athletic identity in these processes (Brand, Wolff, & Hoyer, 2013; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Erpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004; Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013; Wippert & Wippert, 2010). However, almost no research has focused on the interaction of all three of these factors among athletes transitioning out of competitive sport in order to examine the impacts of athletic identity and coping processes on subjective stress outcomes.

The sport management research related to aforementioned topics has largely focused on the transitions out of competitive sport made by professional athletes. The scope of research focusing on this population of athletes examines an extremely limited demographic and fails to account for the majority of persons competing in sports who will make the transition out of competitive sport prior to reaching a professional career (Downs & Ashton, 2011). While participation in competitive sport is profuse at the high school level, most athletes end their competitive athletic careers upon graduation. Many of these former high school athletes will simultaneously initiate another stressful major life transition when they begin college (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Pedrelli et al., 2015). Those who are

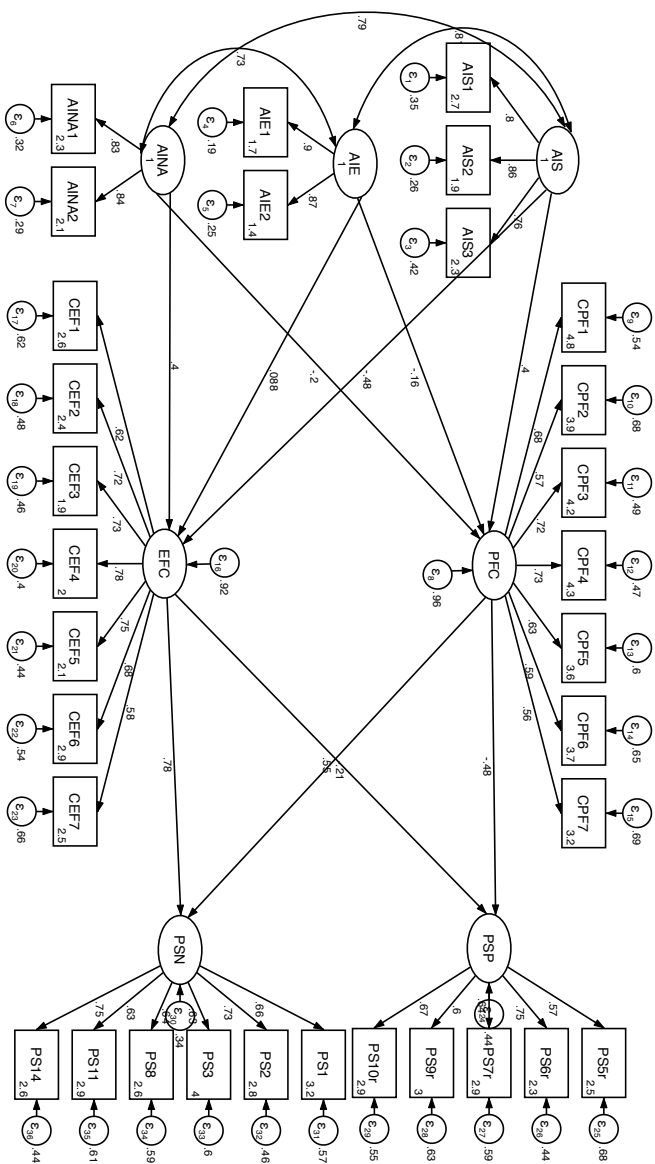


Figure 1. Model of athletic identity, coping, and perceived stress. AIS = athletic identity social; AIE = athletic identity exclusivity; AINA = athletic identity negative affect; PFC = problem-focus coping; EFC = emotion-focused coping; PSP = perceived stress positively worded items; PSN = perceived stress negatively worded items

transitioning out of competitive sport after high school in addition to transitioning to being college students are faced with even more stressors. Stress levels can seem overwhelming when biological development is coupled with the additional changes at the social, environmental, and psychological levels that occur during the transition to college life (Downs & Ashton, 2011; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Hudd et al., 2000; Pedrelli et al., 2015). Many of those who fail to develop healthy coping mechanisms and suffer from high stress levels often turn to less healthy behaviors (e.g., sedentary electronic behaviors, alcohol/drug use, unhealthy dietary choices) when faced with such difficulties, leading to poor academic adjustment (Buckworth & Nigg, 2004; Downs & Ashton, 2011; Wechsler et al., 2002; Weitzman, Nelson, & Wechsler, 2003).

The intent of this study was to examine a largely unobserved population of former athletes and current college students who are in the midst of simultaneously making two major life transitions. These former athletes were not only making the transition out of competitive sport, but also the transition to college. As a result, the high levels of stress experienced by these students and the necessity for coping responses is undeniable (Dyson & Renk, 2006). Hence, a model was proposed in order to determine whether (a) the level of athletic identity among college students who are simultaneously transitioning to college and out of competitive sport correlates with the use of certain coping strategies, and (b) the manner in which these factors interact to impact their perceived stress levels.

Overall, three factors of coping had almost no relationship with perceived stress (PS): (1) avoidant coping distraction; (2) avoidant coping social diversion; and (3) exercise coping. Therefore, these three factors of coping were removed in order to achieve a more parsimonious model, and the three factors of athletic identity were then added to the model in order to assess the interaction of athletic identity, coping, and perceived stress. The structural model proved to be a good fit to the data. As expected, coping strongly correlated with perceived stress (problem-focused coping (PFC) $\rightarrow$ perceived stress positively-worded (PSP) = $-.48$ and PFC $\rightarrow$ perceived stress negatively worded (PSN) = $-.21$; Emotion-focused Coping (EFC) $\rightarrow$ PSP = $.55$ and EFC $\rightarrow$ PSN = $.78$). Similarly, athletic identity proved to have a significant relationship with coping, but each individual factor of athletic identity varied in its correlation with the coping variables. Athletic identity social (AIS) positively correlated with problem-focused coping (AIS $\rightarrow$ PFC = $.40$) and negatively correlated with emotion-focused coping (AIS $\rightarrow$ EFC = $-.48$). On the other hand, athletic identity negative affect positively correlated with emotion-focused coping (AINA $\rightarrow$ EFC = $.40$) and negatively correlated with problem-focused coping (AINA $\rightarrow$ PFC = $-.20$). Similarly, athletic identity exclusivity positively correlated with emotion-focused coping and negatively correlated with problem-focused coping, though these relationships were not significant.

College Students: Stress and Coping

The model in this study suggests problem-focused coping negatively correlates with perceived stress levels (i.e., correlates with reductions in stress) among the sample population of students ($PFC \rightarrow PSP = -.48$; $PFC \rightarrow PSN = -.21$). On the other hand, emotion-focused coping positively correlated with perceived stress levels (i.e., correlates with increases in stress levels; $EFC \rightarrow PSP = .55$; $EFC \rightarrow PSN = .78$). The students sampled in this study relied heavily on the use of both factors of coping. Consistent with this finding, Kariv and Heimann (2005) contend students often initiate task-oriented (i.e., problem-focused) coping efforts in dealing with a heavy academic workload, yet rely on emotion-oriented coping strategies in order to deal with the perceived stress associated with the pressures of college life.

Contrary to the findings in this study, previous literature has also identified a correlation between students' high stress levels and a reliance on avoidant coping strategies (Kariv & Heimann, 2005; Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). Yet, the structural model utilized in this study provided evidence for the absence of such a relationship. In fact, our findings suggest there is almost no correlation between perceived stress levels and avoidant coping techniques among this population of college students. This may indicate avoidant coping strategies are ineffective in the sense that they do not necessarily reduce stress, yet the utilization of such coping techniques does not seem to add to subjective stress levels unless used in combination with emotion-focused techniques.

Transition Out of Sport: Athletic Identity, Coping, and Stress

Concurrent with the results of this study, previous literature has represented the potential for the transition out of competitive sport among athletes to produce high levels of stress and the necessity for coping outlets (Grove et al., 1997; Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013; Wippert & Wippert, 2008; Wippert & Wippert, 2010). Grove et al. (1997) established that those exhibiting strong and exclusive athletic identities upon retirement from competitive sport demonstrated an increased reliance on several avoidant and emotion-focused coping techniques. The results of this study did align with prior research in a sense. However, previous studies focusing on the relationship between athletic identity and coping efforts have interpreted athletic identity as a single factor. Yet, the results of this study bring to light the need to examine the influence of athletic identity based on a three-factor structure.

The findings in this study demonstrated certain factors (i.e., exclusivity and negative affect) indicative of the possession of a strong athletic identity exhibit a positive relationship with the utilization of emotion-focused coping strategies. However, to generalize these results as meaning a strong and exclusive athletic identity correlates with the use of emotion-focused coping may be incorrect. This study has demonstrated the athletic identity social factor actually has a significant negative relationship with the utilization of emotion-focused coping efforts. In other words, this study brings to light the need to evaluate athletic identity based

on this three-factor structure, rather than simply grouping these factors into a single overall score representing the strength of one's athletic identity (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001).

This notion is further demonstrated by the results of this study when analyzing the relationships between various factors of athletic identity and problem-focused coping. Once again, the need to distinguish the relationship between athletic identity and coping through each factor of athletic identity is apparent (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). This structural model demonstrates this disparity through the significantly positive relationship between the athletic identity social factor and problem-focused coping, while on the other hand, the exclusivity and negative affect factors possess negative relationships with problem-focused coping.

Practical Implications

Based on the results of this study, assessing the athletic identities of competitive athletes at all levels could serve to identify those who may be susceptible to difficulties upon transitioning out of competitive sport and prone to a reliance on ineffective coping efforts. Catching this at an early stage may provide sport management and health professionals with the opportunity to allocate resources toward assisting such athletes with exploring and establishing alternative identities, developing healthy coping outlets, forming social support networks, as well as pre-planning for retirement from sport. This could be accomplished by enhancing such resources available at these institutions, including enlisting the services of sport psychologists, hosting speakers and seminars on relevant topics (e.g., decision-making, coping, transition), promoting instructive interactive platforms online, and facilitating workshops (e.g., life skills, alternative careers, building relationships). At the high school and college levels, this would in turn lead to enhanced academic performance and better overall mental and physical health for these students.

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