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The Career Transitions of High-Profile Athletes: Role Engulfment, Psychological Well-Being,
and Human Actualization

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the career transitions of NCAA Division I college football student-athletes. This work furthers the literature regarding Division I college football student-athletes in their role as students and as athletes and explores what may impact their preparedness for their post-athlete careers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 former Division I college football student-athletes who were football student-athletes at 14 different Division I institutions. Utilizing role engulfment, psychological well-being, and human actualization as conceptual frameworks, this study discusses the *how* and *why* behind the experiences of high-profile student-athletes as they transition from athlete to their post-playing careers.

Keywords: student-athlete, role engulfment, role identity, psychological well-being

Introduction

While most college football players approach college with the goal and desire to play in the National Football League, there is a very small chance they will achieve this goal. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, of their estimated 73,712 college football participants, only 1.6% move on to play in the National Football League. John Keim, ESPN (2016) wrote in an article that the average NFL career is 3.3 years. Even while knowing their miniscule chances of ever playing the NFL, and the short career length if they do “make it” to the NFL, college football players manage to develop a hyper-focused mindset towards football. While universities offer career preparation programs and opportunities, they are often “...sacrificed as student-athletes succumb to pressures from coaches and media to produce winning records and maintain eligibility” (Navarro & McCormick, 2017). It can be difficult for them to explore their other interests and majors, as *A Focus on Career Consideration* explains, “...they also make it difficult for these individuals to change majors or enroll in programs that require afternoon labs or internships...many student-athletes will find themselves locked into a major that is incompatible with their interests or skills” (Petitpas & O’Brien, 2008, p. 134-135).

Because of this focus on football, college football student-athletes tend to construct a sense of identity around football. Menke and Germany (2019) explained that, “Retirement and transition pose a challenge for those who have constructed strong athletic identities, as this may invalidate the individual’s self-concept and world assumptions, with lasting implications” (p. 19). This study endeavors to build upon previous literature on the stages of career preparation of college student-athletes by examining role engulfment, psychological well-being, and human actualization as it relates to preparation for “post-playing days” life.

Literature Review

Role Identity and Role Engulfment

Menke and Germany (2019) explained role identity by denoting that individuals have preconceived beliefs in themselves based on their interests and the paths they take in life. These role identities for each individual may change over time dependent on life-altering events, which ultimately will affect their short-term and long-term career goals. These short-term and long-term career goals will act as guides for how an individual will act in their preparation for their determined path to success. A comprehensive understanding of their role identity will allow them to be self-aware and confident in decision-making aimed for the betterment their future. Lally and Kerr (2005) found that “to develop mature career plans older adolescents must evaluate their needs, values, interests, and abilities through identity development” (p. 276). Role identities differ from role engulfment in a very particular way in that role identities encompass numerous characteristics about an individual, whereas role engulfment is when an individual embraces one of their stronger identity traits often neglecting others (Zvosec et al., 2019). We see examples of the dangers of role engulfment in the study by Adler and Adler (1991) as they “observed that male basketball players invested so heavily in athletics and their athletic selves that they failed to seriously invest in other immediately available roles, notably the student role” (Lally & Kerr, 2005, p. 276). According to Menke and Germany (2019), “strong athletic identity and a high identity foreclosure was negatively associated with the quality of career transition” (p. 18). As athletes further their career, their identity as an athlete continues to grow with their local and national exposure. That can act as a social construct that will ultimately lead to a difficult transition from their athletic life to their life outside of sports.

Role engulfment in this context discusses the notion that college football players identify more with the athlete role which overpowers their role as a student. Role engulfed college student-athletes develop a narrow focus on skill development for their engulfed role (i.e., as an athlete; Adler & Adler, 1991). This brings up the idea of the hyper-focused mindset college football players have on their aspirations of playing football at the next level, rather than exploring non-football career options. When role engulfed individuals experience role overload from multiple responsibilities competing for time and energy (e.g., the roles of student and athlete), it can be difficult to fully dedicate to competing interests (Richards & Templin, 2012). This is where role conflict may come into effect when the responsibilities of a college football players interfere with their responsibility as a college student.

Psychological Well-being

According to Ryan and Deci (2001), well-being is composed of “optimal psychological functioning and experience” (p. 142). Ryan and Deci (2001) explain that psychological well-being originates from two different ideas: hedonism and eudaimonism. Hedonism is the idea that well-being comes from happiness, whereas eudaimonism is the idea that well-being comes from fulfilling one’s dream, purpose, etc. Ryan and Deci (2001) found that hedonism is subjective, and one’s well-being is based on 3 factors: life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood. The article implies that “...much of the work fits with the expectancy-value approach which in its simplest form suggests that well-being is a function of expecting to attain (and ultimately attaining) the outcomes one values, whatever those might be” (p. 145). On the other hand, Ryan and Deci (2001) wrote that philosophers argued that some achievements did not result in happiness or well-being. These philosophers believed that eudaimonism is more about one aligning themselves with their true selves and their true purpose.

Studies have discovered the psychological well-being of college student-athletes may be compromised due to “their experiences of role interference and role conflict between two roles” (Kim et al., 2020, p. 378). This particular study discovered the satisfaction and well-being of student-athletes based on the services provided to them by their university. This study looks at the student’s well-being in two different ways (leadership and program design) using Academic Psychological Capital (PsyCap), which “refers to students’ positive psychological states, consisting of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, in order to achieve academic success” (p. 379). The first component of the Academic PsyCap, leadership, whether it be coaches or teachers, impacts the students’ well-being through their ethics and leadership styles. This goes hand in hand with program design and if the students are given efficient and quality pathways to achieving academic success. The better the academic PsyCap, the more the student-athlete can feel positive about their educational experience along with their athletic experience.

Ryff and Keyes (1995) explained psychological well-being as having 6 distinct aspects that make up human actualization: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, environmental mastery, and positive relatedness. With each component, one can score high or low. A person who scores high in autonomy has mastered the ability to “resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways” (p.727) This person is independent and self-regulating. One who scores low in autonomy “is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others” (p.727). They have trouble thinking for themselves. A high scorer in the area of personal growth is a person who is always looking to expand and develop in various areas of their life. They are “open to new experiences, has sense of realizing his or her potential, sees improvement in self and behavior over time” (p. 727). One who scores low in personal growth “lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time, feels bored and uninterested with life” (p. 727). As a high

scorer of self-acceptance, one “possesses a positive attitude toward the self” (p.727). A low score in the area of self-acceptance results in dissatisfaction with oneself and the desire “...to be different than what he or she is” (p.727). Obtaining a high score in life purpose means one “has aims and objectives for living” (p.727). They have the desire achieve their goals and follow their life purpose. One who scores low in life purpose “lacks a sense of meaning in life” (p,727). This person is not sure of their direction in life and struggles with establishing goals, dreams, and purpose. One who has mastered their environment “controls the complex array of external activities” (p.727). This person has the ability to take advantage of and modify their environment for their success. A person who has not mastered their environment “feels unable to change or improve surrounding context” (p.727) They feel a deficiency of control over their situation. A high scorer in positive relatedness is a person who “has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others” (p.727). This person values their relationships with others. A low scorer in positive relatedness is a person who “finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned about others” (p.727). This person is not willing to be vulnerable with others and form trusting relationships.

This study will examine the career transitions of high-profile college football players to their life after their playing days are over. We have discussed that role identity is how one sees themselves and how they present themselves to the world based on their unique traits. Role engulfment is when one engulfs one of their identifying traits and lives according as that specific role. As mentioned, psychological well-being is derived from two ideas: hedonism and eudaimonism. Hedonism says that psychological well-being is a result of increasing happiness and decreasing sadness. On the other hand, eudaimonism says that psychological well-being is found through living according to one’s higher self. The purpose of this study is to determine

how the transition of college football players out of college affects their role identity, role engulfment, and psychological well-being.

Methods

After gaining IRB approval, semi-structured audio interviews were conducted via phone or Zoom with 16 former college football players from 14 different Division I institutions. Potential interviewees were contacted from a volunteer contact list from an internship database. Data was collected with interviewees who had been football student-athletes at Division I institutions in the following 12 states: California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. Sample questions included: “Was there much coaching staff turnover during your time as a student athlete?” and “Did you utilize career-planning services while in undergrad? How so?” and “How easy or difficult was it to transition from being a student-athlete to your professional job?”

Procedures

Each virtual interview lasted between 10 and 30 minutes. An interview guide was developed based on prior literature on career transitions for college student athletes (e.g., Navarro and McCormick (2017), Menke and Germany (2019), Petitpas and O’Brien (2008)). These interviews encompassed questions related to personal background, dreams and aspirations related to football, preparation process for leaving college, relationship with coaches, advisors, tutors, etc., and confidence going into the professional world. This study represents a diverse collection of age (mean = 37.0 years), college institution, current job title, years in the NFL (six participants with no NFL experience, 1 current NFL player, and ten former NFL players who played an average of 7.1 NFL seasons), and college awards/accolades. Sixteen former college football players took part in this study. Of the 16 former college football players, 11 played or

are currently playing in the National Football League, 8 were drafted into the NFL, 3 went undrafted, 10 received college accolades of all-conference team or higher (e.g., conference player of the year, All-American, etc.), and 2 were awarded the Heisman Trophy. Of the 16 interviewees, six are between the age of 20-30, five are between the age of 31-40, three are between the age of 41-50, and two are between the age of 60-70. In addition, various job titles were represented including surgeon, NFL player, business owner, software developer, basketball coach, and real estate investor/agent.

Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was utilized to discover the career transitions of high-profile athletes. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Braun & Clarke (2006) list the phases of thematic analysis as: “familiarizing yourself with your data”, “generating initial codes”, “searching for themes”, “reviewing themes”, “defining and naming themes”, and “producing the report” (p. 87). In this study, the honor’s thesis student and honor’s thesis director independently read and coded the data to develop preliminary themes. Then, the two met to discuss, review, and name themes. A third, unaffiliated researcher independently read de-identified transcripts to also develop and review themes. “Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexibility and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data” (p. 78). Thematic analysis can be identified in 2 ways: inductive and deductive. “An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves” (p. 83). Thus, the questions asked during the interviews, were prepared specifically to discover the career transitions of high-profile athletes. “Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding without trying to fit into a preexisting coding frame” (p.83). As part

of the coding process, investigators inductively came up with role engulfment, psychological well-being, and human actualization. The idea of role identity was developed through deductive reasoning as investigators read up on role identity prior to the interviews.

Trustworthiness

Shenton's (2004) four recommendations for trustworthiness in qualitative research (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) were utilized. Specifically for credibility, Shenton (2004) recommends the adoption of well-established research methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews), debriefing sessions for data analysis, and triangulation. In interviewing participants from an array of NCAA Division I institutions, varied age ranges, and various professional football experience, the authors worked to engage in Shenton's recommendations for triangulation. Shenton articulates that triangulation

may involve the use of a wide range of informants. This is one way of triangulating via data sources. Here individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behavior of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people ... Where appropriate, site triangulation may be achieved by the participation of informants within several organizations so as to reduce the effect on the study of particular local factor peculiar to one institution. Where similar results at different sites, findings may have greater credibility in the eyes of the reader. p. 64

In collecting data across multiple sites and across collegiate football programs, the authors worked to gain a rich understanding of the transition from playing days to post-playing days of Division I college football student-athletes by engaging in data triangulation. For Shenton's (2004) recommendation of transferability, findings need "to allow readers to have a

proper understanding of it (the data), thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those they have seen emerge in their situations” (p. 69). The authors have worked to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the mindset college football student-athletes have on their aspirations regarding football and how that mindset affects their transition out of football. Shenton (2004) communicated that dependability and confirmability be accounted for by providing details on the data collection and analysis processes to give future researchers sufficient information to show that the findings were a result of the data collection processes.

Results

This study discovered four main themes: (1) hyper-focus on football, while aware that football will not last forever, (2) career planning programs were available, but not taken advantage of because of the “can’t take the foot off the gas” mindset, (3) coaches were tunnel vision too, but interviewees did not blame them, (4) wanted to focus on other things, but did not want to remove focus from football even though they knew they should.

Hyper-focus on football, while aware that football will not last forever

Out of the 16 interviews, most brought up the idea of “tunnel vision” on football. They were extremely focused on playing football at the next level, but also knew football does not last forever. This notion was framed by Interviewee 5 who explained,

“football doesn't last forever and it’s important for all students to have an understanding that even if they do go play professional sports that the careers are typically not going to last but that 3-5-year range” (interviewee 5).

They explain their drive and ambition to continue playing football in the National Football League because for them, that is how they reach their goals and achieve success. They

admit to their tunnel-vision while aware that football does not last forever, even if they do make it to the NFL, as Interviewee 7 described,

“understand that football or sports will eventually come to an end right and once they are done are you going to freeze and not know what to do or you going to have at least an idea of what you want to do” (interviewee 7).

Many believe that this hyper-focus on football is the key to getting them to that next level of professional football. Based on their responses, they would not change their behavior or focus on football while in college if it meant they earned a chance to play in the NFL, as Interviewee 1 stated,

“I lost sight of everything else which I think you have to do to achieve that level of success in football” (interviewee 1).

Career planning programs were available, but not taken advantage of because of the “can’t take the foot off the gas” mindset

In the question about whether they believed career planning programs should be mandatory for student-athletes, most interviewees believed they should. The interviewees went on to explain their reasonings for not taking advantage of the career planning programs their institution offered. Some justified their decision by saying they did not have enough time in the day due to their class and football schedule. However, several explained this “can’t take the foot off the gas” mindset. Interviewee 3 goes into detail of this mindset by saying,

“the moment you stop thinking about football, the moment you take your eyes off of football and stop focusing on football, kind of seems to be the moment you slip up. And maybe that’s the day your career starts to take a downward spiral...The moment you take your eyes off of it, you know, it crushes you” (interviewee 3).

Though this mindset may be good for them as far as preparing them for the next level of football, it hinders them dramatically at developing their mind outside of football. Interviewee 8 agreed as he said “It wasn’t mandatory, but I thought it should have been required. What you do is you end up graduating and you get caught with your pants down”. Although, many of them confess that they wished they would have taken advantage of the career planning programs or internships that were offered because they felt “stuck” once football ended. For example, “So, yes there were other options, opportunities and I just didn't really take attention that much. I don't think a lot of college players do because most of them think that they're going to the next level” (interviewee 1).

Coaches were tunnel vision too, but interviewees did not blame them

Numerous participants mentioned during the question: Were you encouraged by your coaches, advisors, etc. to find interests outside of athletics?, that their coaches were just as hyper-focused on football as they were if not more. However, in that same thought, participants did not blame their coaches nor feel a negative connotation towards them. Instead, they understood the tunnel-vision, and implemented it on themselves. Interviewee 3 explains his experience with the tunnel vision of his coaches,

“And again, I don’t think anyone was trying to do any harm by me. You know, I think that all that’s on their minds in football, football, football. And they want you to be the best football player you can be” (interviewee 3).

Based on the participants’ answer to this question, it seems like the hyper-focus of the coaches was for a different reason than the hyper-focus of the players. The idea was introduced by Interviewee 8 as he says,

“I want to maximize you so that we win games so that I get the bonus, I get promoted...and I care about you graduating but that’s because I probably have a bonus tied to it and because it helps for recruiting for the next 5-star athlete” (interviewee 8).

Wanted to focus on other things, but did not want to remove focus from football even though they knew they should

Throughout the interviews, several participants mentioned the dichotomy between having other ideas and interests outside of football, but they were not comfortable exploring them because of this idea of “letting off the gas.” Many felt torn between their identity as a football player and their other ventures of interest. This dichotomy impacted their transition out of football, whether directly out of college or retirement from the NFL.

A participant said they recommend college football players to look at schools for more than their football program, “look at the approach of this school in relation fit my academic goals and my career goals. Putting themselves in a much better position when college football's over with” (interviewee 5). Several interviewees advocate for internships, apprenticeships, etc. specifically for college football players that work around their demanding schedule. Interviewee 5 advocates for conversations with coaches that are more than about football,

“I think that when you're getting recruited as a high school athlete, I think it's important not only just talk to your coaches about football sports in general but also dive into what that college has to offer in terms of career paths and what you're really interested in doing. I think a lot of athletes just kind of go to the school that they feel most comfortable with the football and kind of skipped academic approach and what's going to happen after their careers are over”.

Discussion

When asked about their dreams and aspirations, most college football players will say they plan to play in the National Football League. Even though they know their chances are incredibly small, these student-athletes develop a hyper-focused mindset around football at the next level. It is imperative to look at the post-playing transition days of college football student-athletes to see how their hyper-focus affected their transition out of football. This study was designed to examine the role engulfment, role identity, and psychological well-being of former college football players. Role identity is how one sees themselves based on their individual characteristics and traits (Menke & Germany, 2019). In the context of this study, role engulfment expresses the idea that college football student-athletes identify more with their role as an athlete than they do as a student. The psychological well-being of college football players is based on six components of human actualization: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, environmental mastery, and positive relatedness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Based on findings from this study, role engulfment was a real aspect in the lives' of the interviewees during their collegiate football careers. The hopes of moving on to the professional level often took precedence over their time commitment to academics, in many ways echoing the role engulfment of coaches found in Zvosec et al. (2019). In particular, we found this notion as our interviewees began to reveal that there were career-planning programs available to them, however they decided to not take advantage of this opportunities due to their engulfment of their football role.

Furthermore, we defined role identity as how one chooses to see themselves based on their attributes. Derived from this study's results, we can see that college football student-athletes tend to identify themselves as a football player first. Their label as a football player leads

their life and ultimately their decisions regarding their future. We see this notion in the fourth theme as many interviewees discussed that while they had other interests outside of football, but they did not feel like that could remove focus from football without it hindering their football career.

From the research I conducted through this thesis, I discovered a combination of both hedonism and eudaimonism well-being. As far as hedonism well-being, college football players discover happiness as they are training and preparing for a life in the National Football League. Hedonism well-being is based on life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood. All of these factors can be found within college football players as they train and practice with their college team. In relation to eudaimonism well-being, there does not seem to be a clear finding. As we discussed previously, eudaimonism originates from fulfilling one's dream, purpose, etc. by aligning themselves with their true selves and their true purpose. Based on our finding, it is uncertain if playing professional football is every college football player's true purpose.

Based on the findings of this study, most college football players indicate high levels in the area of environmental mastery as it relates to their athletic development and identity. This results in a mastery of their role engulfment as an athlete. They are "able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values" (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 727) as it relates to pursuing their goals on the football field. Although the role engulfment of their role as an athlete, poses challenges for their post-football career transitions. Because of their mastery of football, they become "unaware of surrounding opportunities" (p. 727) outside of football.

Once athletes reach competitive levels of football to the extent of Division I and the NFL, they may fixate on their identity as an athlete. By doing so, this enables the athletes to become

engulfed in the idea that being an athlete and focusing on their craft should always be their top priority. This is where the term, “tunnel vision” tends to be common speak for athletes competing at the highest level. By using this ‘tunnel vision’, the interviewees were able to obtain high levels of environmental mastery on the football field. Bringing confidence, demanding excellence, and striving to become the greatest are the steppingstones to environmental mastery relevant to football. However, for most of the interviewees, there was an opportunity cost. In exchange for their athletic rewards were their opportunities to expand their knowledge outside of football. For example, not being able to attend free career fairs their institutions held due to their rigorous student-athlete schedules. This is one of many challenges that most of the interviewees encountered while they took the time to reflect on their past during their interviews. Opportunities to expand their lives outside of football seemed to slip by leaving the interviewees feeling empty and without direction come life after football.

As it relates to purpose in life, it seems to come to the same conclusion as their findings of eudaimonism well-being. Life purpose becomes unclear as they transition out of the athlete role. High scorers in the area of autonomy are people who are independent and self-regulating. Based on our findings, college football players seem to denote average in this area of human actualization. This is due to their own high standards and their role engulfment of their athletic identity, while also being heavily concerned about the opinions and critiques of coaches, teammates, etc. The findings discovered high levels of positive relations with others within college football players. This is likely due to similar aspirations between their teammates and coaches. The area of self-acceptance varies for college football players as they transition from the role of athlete to post athlete. Personal growth is an area that college football players seem to continue to get better at once they leave college. While in college, they see potential growth and

development as far as their role as an athlete. Once they reach the transition point of athlete to post-athlete, they seem to also see areas of growth outside of their identity as an athlete, whether this point comes directly after college or after their professional days.

This study's results have come to be because of the hyper-focus college football student-athletes have on their dreams of playing football in the National Football League. College football players feel that it is necessary to completely engulf their role as an athlete in order to excel at their sport. They choose to identify themselves as a football player and nothing more to make sure their total focus is on moving to the professional level. As a result of their engulfment of their athletic role and their identity as an athlete, we have seen that it makes it difficult for them to transition out of football whether that is directly after college or after retiring from the NFL.

In the area of environmental mastery, we have found that most college football student-athletes excel because of their ability to use their surroundings to foster their aspirations. As it relates to purpose in life, it is difficult to determine if professional football is every college football player's life purpose. In regard to personal growth, this is area that college football student-athletes seem to continue to master after their playing days. Autonomy is an area in which college football players fall somewhere in the middle because their reliance on their coaches, while also practicing independence and governing their behavior and actions. College football student-athletes seem to have positive relations with others, likely due to their shared interests. Self-acceptance is an area in which college football players vary due to the results of their individual football career.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine how former college football student-athletes transition out of their role as a football player whether it be directly out of college or after retirement from the National Football League. Investigators wanted to discover the impact of their role identity, role engulfment, and psychological well-being from their playing days to their post-playing days. This study is of significance because while it is important to have goals and aspirations, it is equally important for college football players to know and understand their slim chances of making it to the NFL and maintaining a career in the professional league. Based on the results of this study, the interviewees developed a hyper-focused mindset on football and the requirements for making it to the NFL. This hyper-focused mindset results from college football players absorbing their role as an athlete, known as role engulfment. Even though college athletes are labelled as student-athletes, college football players focus more on their athlete title, while neglecting their student title. College football student-athletes choose to identify with their athletics qualities over others. This role engulfment and role identity come at a cost. They are not able to shift their focus to other endeavors or interests as they feel they might lose their chance at their number one priority: playing in the NFL. Once football players transition to their post-playing days, many find it difficult to know what is next because while in college, they did not give themselves the chance to explore other career possibilities. Their psychological well-being becomes compromised as most indicate average or low on the six components of human actualization: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, environmental mastery, and positive relatedness. Several are often found lost or unfulfilled, and thus not sure of their life purpose. While football players are independent, they rely heavily on the words of the coaches, teammates, etc. Once they are no longer a player on a team, it becomes difficult from them to

live without the opinions of others. Interviewees seemed to master the environment of football in relation to focusing on that role; they know how to navigate it to result in their success. Although once football ends, they realized they have only mastered one career possibility out of the infinite. Positive relations with others are great benefit to being a member of the football community. If used properly, former football players should use the relationships they have cultivated over their time as an athlete to network into possible career opportunities. Personal growth is an area that we saw improve once football players hung up their cleats, simply because they had no other choice but to move on from football. In addition, self-acceptance is another area that seems to get better once football ends as they find other venues of passion. It is imperative that college football student-athletes make an effort to explore other career possibilities, interests, and passions to prevent compromising their psychological well-being.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As other research studies, this study has its limitations. For one, investigators did not talk to interviewees as they were transitioning from their playing days to their post-playing days. As a result, interviewees were required to recall their experiences that may have occurred years ago. In addition, only one collegiate sport was investigated. Furthermore, this study's interviewees were all from Division I football programs. Future research should focus on other sports to see if levels of role engulfment, role identity, and psychological well-being could have differed. Additionally, future research should consider looking more into specialized programs that have encouraged more broad-based career transition efforts. Prospective research should encompass a large sample pool by incorporating college football student-athletes from Division II, Division III, NAIA, and junior college.

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