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Athletic identity, cohesion, and termination from sport

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ATHLETIC IDENTITY, COHESION, AND
TERMINATION FROM SPORT

by

Lori Sadewater

An Abstract

of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in the Division
of Health, Physical Education,
and Recreation at
Ithaca College

September 1991

Thesis Advisor: Dr. A. Craig Fisher

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between athletes' feelings of termination from intercollegiate sports and the degree of identity and cohesion was investigated. Ithaca College senior athletes ($N = 59$) completed a three-part questionnaire comprised of athletic identity, cohesion, and feelings of termination. Athletic identity and cohesion were moderately correlated. These variables independently were also significantly correlated with several of the termination feelings. There were no gender or status differences for identity, cohesion, or any of the feelings. A multiple regression was used to predict the termination feelings from athletic identity and cohesion. The variables of identity and cohesion accounted for significant variance of the following termination feelings: frustrated, satisfied, self-aware, fulfilled, indifferent, resentment, sad, successful, shock, deprived, happy, abandoned, depressed, and proud. It was concluded that feelings of termination can be predicted from the degree of athletic identity and the perception of a cohesive athletic environment.

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TERMINATION FROM SPORT

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of
the Division of Health, Physical
Education, and Recreation
Ithaca College

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Lori Sadewater
September 1991

Ithaca College
Division of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation
Ithaca, New York

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to two special people: Michele Preuss, my teammate and my friend, like no other, "For Just a Moment"; and to Pam Samuelson without whom learning would have never taken place and because "thank you" isn't nearly enough.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES.	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Scope of Problem	3
Statement of Problem	4
Hypothesis	4
Assumptions of Study	4
Definition of Terms.	4
Delimitations of Study	5
Limitations of Study	5
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
Termination Defined.	7
Termination Research	10
Identification with Athletics.	12
Team Cohesion.	15
Termination as Loss.	19
Summary.	22
3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	25
Selection of Subjects.	25
Testing Instruments.	26
Method of Data Collection.	26
Scoring of Data.	27

Treatment of Data.	27
Summary.	27
4. ANALYSIS OF DATA	29
Descriptive Statistics	29
Gender Analysis.	32
Status Analysis.	34
Prediction of Termination Feelings	34
Summary.	38
5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS.	39
Descriptive Statistics	39
Gender Analysis.	46
Status Analysis.	47
Prediction of Termination Feelings	48
Summary.	50
6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.	52
Summary.	52
Conclusions.	53
Recommendations.	54
APPENDIXES	
A. TELEPHONE CONVERSATION.	55
B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM	56
C. TERMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE	58
REFERENCES.	67

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"We laughed until we had to cry
And we loved right down to our last goodbye
We were the best I think we'll ever be
Just you and me
For just a moment"

For Just a Moment

Participation at the collegiate level represents the last stage of competition for most athletes. From a young age, these athletes have grown up with a ball in their hands now only to have it cruelly snatched away just before graduation. Of course the thief, otherwise known as athletic eligibility, has been lurking in the shadows patiently awaiting the opportunity to steal a dream. Although this crime is looked upon as a natural occurrence, it does not lessen the shock or make the blow any less painful when it actually happens.

For many athletes, sport is a primary focus in their lives. They spend countless hours practicing, modifying, and perfecting a skill. They run miles of sprints, lift endless amounts of weights, and exert considerable amounts of energy while dripping oceans of sweat. Competition elicits every conceivable emotion in various situations from the elation of victory to the disappointment of defeat.

Coaches become more than the usual authority figures. They are leaders, motivators, slave drivers, and friends. They have

the patience to help athletes mature within the sport and life itself. Coaches see their athletes at their best and worst moments. There is bond that is formed between a coach and an athlete that does not exist as intimately in other contexts.

Teammates come and go year after year, inevitably leaving when their eligibility is exhausted. With each season diverse individuals combine to form a united team. The experiences they share are unique to the sport, to the season, and to the team. They have the same dedication, commitment, and desire to participate. The unspoken communication or understanding teammates share while fighting for a common cause cannot be effectively conveyed to someone who has not been through this extraordinary experience. The memories linger even after the laughter, the frustration, the exhilaration, and the love fades.

The coaches, teammates, and opponents have each been memorable in their own respect. But the sport remained the same, seemingly forever. The athlete was always left with the ultimate opponent, her/himself. The athlete had to find the energy to keep going, even to the point of exhaustion. The athlete had to overcome the pain to continue playing. The athlete had to create the motivation to overcome the frustration and the monotony. The athlete had to learn to become a team player. The athlete had to keep the commitment, dedication, and desire year after year. Now the athlete must somehow find the strength to say goodbye.

Most college athletes are forced to face the reality that their playing careers have come to an end. Although this is an

expected and "normal" result, its effects can be quite devastating. The athlete is forced to step out of the limelight. The relationships that were shared are now out of context. For many athletes, sport has been a life long companion, one that they are not yet willing to leave. Not every athletic experience is pleasurable but each one is remarkable in its own respect, and the individual who is facing termination from athletics is not always prepared to leave these moments or these people behind.

Scope of Problem

This investigation sought to examine the feelings of termination from intercollegiate athletics and the relationships of athletic identification, cohesion, gender, and status of athletic eligibility to these feelings. Graduating senior athletes at Ithaca College were asked to participate in this investigation. Subjects ($N = 59$) were administered a three-part questionnaire. The first part assessed athletic identity; the second part assessed cohesion; and the final part examined feelings of termination.

The interrelationships between all variables (identity, cohesion, and the 35 feelings) were assessed by Pearson product-moment correlation. Gender and status differences in identity and cohesion were assessed by t tests prior to analyzing the predictive value of identity and cohesion in explaining athletes' feelings following termination. Additionally, gender and status differences for athletes' feelings were assessed by MANOVA. Finally, a multiple regression was used to predict termination

emotions from athletic identity and cohesion.

Statement of Problem

This study was designed to investigate the athletes' feelings upon termination from intercollegiate varsity athletics.

Hypothesis

This study examined the impact termination from intercollegiate athletics had on graduating seniors. The relationship between the termination process and the interaction of several variables was examined. The variables that were theorized to have an effect on termination were athletic identity and team cohesion. It was hypothesized that athletes who identified highly with their sport(s) and perceived a greater cohesive environment would likely be affected more by termination than athletes who reported lower athletic identity scores and perceived a less cohesive environment.

Assumptions of Study

The following assumptions were made for the purpose of this investigation:

1. Each athlete given the questionnaire responded honestly and accurately.
2. The questionnaire used to evaluate the subjects offered an accurate assessment of the variables being examined.
3. The athletes answered the questions with respect to their major sport.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined for the

purpose of this investigation:

1. Athletic identity: The extent to which an individual perceives him/herself to be an athlete as opposed to other roles.
2. Cohesion: The overall sense of belonging to a team based upon both social and task dimensions.
3. Feelings of termination: The words chosen to describe emotions following the end of an athlete's playing career.
4. Termination: The end of an athlete's playing career due to the exhaustion of athletic ability.
5. Varsity athlete: An individual who has participated in an acknowledged NCAA Division III sport.

Delimitations of Study

The following delimitations were made for the purpose of the investigation:

1. This investigation involved only 59 male and female senior athletes who had competed in intercollegiate athletics at Division III.
2. This investigation measured athletic identity only through the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale.
3. This investigation measured cohesion only through an adaptation of the Sports Cohesion Questionnaire.

Limitations of Study

1. Results of this investigation can only be generalized to intercollegiate athletes who are similar to those in this investigation.

2. Results are only relevant when sport identity is assessed by the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale.

3. Results are only relevant when cohesion is assessed by an adapted version of the Sports Cohesion Questionnaire.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the relevant literature associated with the concepts under investigation in this study. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) termination defined, (b) termination research, (c) identification with athletics, (d) team cohesion, (e) termination as loss, and (f) summary.

Termination Defined

The end of an athlete's playing career can be described in a positive or negative manner depending on the attitude of the individual involved in the process. Competitive sport, which is an organized play activity involving training and performance on a regular basis that meets expected standards for a given level, elicits a commitment and dedication that only athletes seem to accept and understand (Coakley, 1983).

Sport from an athlete's standpoint, is a relationship--a living, loving relationship. It is a kind of love/hate relationship with challenge, struggle, sacrifice, victory, defeat, self-improvement, coaches, teammates, audiences, and so on. For those athletes who have been committed to high performance sport for many years, the relationship grows into something very intimate and intense. (Werthner & Orlick, 1982, p. 188)

Sport emphasizes a youthful exuberance, on which its loyal followers thrive until being forced to confront the harsh reality that their playing days are over. Athletes experience stress

when forced to leave the realm of athletics because of their cognitive appraisal of the situation (Svoboda & Vanek, 1982). The ability to respond appropriately to the demands of the termination process differs from athlete to athlete depending on the level, intensity, and duration of involvement. For many, termination from the experience is psychologically devastating and initiates a period of emotional turmoil. This is quite ironic because, based upon common complaints frequently uttered by athletes, termination should be cause for celebration (Coakley, 1983). The seasons are long, practices exhausting, workouts difficult, exploitation frequent, and privacy limited. But at the moment of truth, the athlete is often not willing to pay the "prices of retirement" (Curtis & Ennis, 1988).

Athletes must leave behind teammates and friends who become like family. Day in and day out, during practices and competition they continued to work together in the world of sport. Living and learning through the good times and the bad, the team worked to accomplish its goals. The terminated athlete is now alone. Without the support of teammates, s/he must continue in the "game of life." Although this is a normal and even expected transition, it none the less robs the athlete of the security and comfort to which s/he had become accustomed.

Some athletes view the end of their careers as just another role transition in the larger game of life. They leave one activity to engage in and develop other interests. They view the process of retirement as one of growth or development, simply

graduating to the next phase (Coakley, 1983). For athletes with this perspective, termination is not viewed as an ending but rather as a beginning. They do not completely disengage themselves from sport but remain involved as players in city or recreational leagues, as coaches or referees, or even as members in a health and exercise center.

Some individuals find that participation in intercollegiate sport is irreplaceable. They continually seek satisfaction in other endeavors but find themselves still searching for an adequate replacement. But, often, nothing else seems to match the intensity or the camaraderie previously experienced. Unfortunately, for many athletes, the process of resocialization takes time and demands a willingness to change.

Career termination refers to the end of a playing career. Often times, this termination comes before the athlete is psychologically and socially prepared to leave (Ogilvie, 1987). Sports supposedly build character, confidence, discipline, cooperation, strength, independence, awareness, and so on (Botterill, 1982). For many, these qualities seem only temporary or at least contingent upon participation in sport. Termination marks the first time an athlete is forsaken by sport and deprived of that which has become accustomed and familiar (Hill & Lowe, 1974). Athletes "have a special commodity that separates them from the rest of the (college) population--athletic talent. Unfortunately, while they benefit from the special attention, they are often blocked from "normal" development by being

segregated, even if they don't realize it" (Remer, Tongate, & Watson, 1978, p. 628). For an individual whose self-concept has been formed largely within the context of athletics, there is no substitute for sport.

Termination Research

There is very little information in the literature regarding athletic termination (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1990; Broom, 1982; Ogilvie, 1987; Werthner & Orlick, 1982). The information that exists is limited in terms of the diversity of the sports examined, the level of performance, and the age of the competitors (Ogilvie, 1987). Studies in this area have been restricted almost exclusively to males. Findings from research on retirement have also been misapplied to studies on sport termination (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Werthner & Orlick, 1982). It has not been possible to generalize findings from studies on old age and retirement from occupations onto young adults and termination from athletics.

The majority of research involving termination from athletics involves forced exit due to injury or examines the departure of professional or elite athletes. This may be because the media makes information regarding the personal lives of these superstars available to the public, therefore there is an interest as to how those individuals in the spotlight cope. More often than not, these are ill-fated or tragic cases (Ogilvie, 1987). Frequently, this information gets translated, generalized, and then applied to athletes in other situations and

environments. Unfortunately, we do not know how representative these cases are when examining termination from other levels of competition.

Sports, for professional or elite athletes, are not just games, diversions, or hobbies, but occupations. Retirement from athletics not only necessitates psychological adjustment but requires changes in lifestyle. The retired professional often faces turmoil within the family structure, a change in economy, and expectations regarding standards of living, loss of recognition, and a multitude of other crises upon leaving sport (Ogilvie, 1987).

Athletes must understand the implications of participating in a Darwinian sports world (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). From the beginning of their involvement athletes have lived by the principle, "survival of the fittest." Inevitably, an athlete must succumb to deselection, chronological age, ineligibility, or injury. Although the end result is unavoidable, it is not often readily accepted.

Several investigations examined the perceived evaluation of the end of an athlete's career and subsequent life satisfaction (Coakley, 1983; Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, & Samdahl, 1987). Because the end of one's playing career in high school or college occurs simultaneously with other changes in early adulthood, it may be difficult to correctly identify the cause for trauma. It has been suggested that comparative studies be performed to isolate and distinguish the variable having the main effect

(Curtis & Ennis, 1988).

Coakley (1983) examined high school students and found no evidence of trauma, identity crisis, or serious adjustment problems upon leaving competitive sports. The individuals who strongly identify with athletics may have planned to pursue their sport at the collegiate level and, therefore, felt no remorse at leaving high school competition. It only follows that those individuals who chose not to continue participating did not feel the effects of termination because they were socially and psychologically ready to leave athletics. It appears that a voluntary decision to retire from sport does not elicit the same emotions as a forced exit. An investigation on professional female tennis players showed that retirement was not traumatic but instead produced a profound sense of relief and opportunity for growth (Allison & Meyer, 1988).

Identification With Athletics

An individual's identity forms during childhood. The concept of self is multidimensional (Brewer et al., 1990). It is changed through experience, molded through internal and external reinforcement strategies, and altered with the overt and covert interactions of others and the expectations of society. Our identity is a schema based upon cognitive generalizations that set standards against which to measure subsequent interpretations of information.

Our identity consists of roles with a given set of norms or prescriptions for behavior as well as a given script for the role

we choose to portray at a given time. Role theory states that we often become what we play at. Every minute of competition helps to substantiate a definition of self (Stevenson, 1982). Athletes become caught in a self-perpetuating system set in motion from the first day of their involvement (Remer et al., 1978). Sport follows a contingency model consisting of four stages: presocialization, selection and recruitment, socialization, and acceptance/ostracism (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Presocialization involves all of the information obtained prior to actual participation. This information can be obtained from the media, friends, family, and others involved in sport. Selection and recruitment refers to the way in which an individual becomes a member of the athletic community. Socialization is the process of learning and adapting to the customs, traditions, and practices of the sport team. It involves learning a new role. The stage of acceptance/ostracism depends upon whether or not the individual chooses to accept and play this new role. Once the role has been accepted, it is often strengthened to the point where it begins to dominate the individual's actions and lifestyle. This decreases the opportunity for the individual to completely discover him/herself (Heyman, 1987). Because the individual's role as an athlete has developed so completely, it is often difficult to disengage oneself from the role of athlete during the final stage of termination.

One's personal reality, including the perceived evaluation

of self, is often times partly illusion due to the romanticized aspects of sport (Werthner & Orlick, 1982). Sport and one's participation in sport is magnified. "What one does in sport becomes the center of who one is" (Heyman, 1987, p. 189). Athletes often base their decisions upon what is in the best interest of their lives as athletes. A recognition of this fantasy life would result in cognitive dissonance. This is a state of mental tension and discomfort caused by the contradiction of cognitive elements. An example of such a state would be if an athlete refused to study into the early morning hours because s/he had a game the following day. With this attitude, the athlete could justify his/her behavior because s/he was convinced that the game was more important than a grade on the test. Therefore, athletes behave the way they do to be consistent with their self-concept. Any deviations from this behavior would lead to dissonance.

Society perpetuates this mythical state of being only an athlete by way of the self-fulfilling prophecy. An individual's beliefs and expectations about reality cause reactions in specific ways, and these reactions often make beliefs and expectations come true. Because athletes place such high regard on the status of being "an athlete," they tend to deemphasize other aspects of their lives. But, the athlete is not alone in this endeavor. This belief is reinforced by coaches, parents, teammates, peers, and the media (Heyman, 1987). The distinction between sport being "the only thing" as opposed to being "the

most important thing" is so miniscule that either belief may be harmful to the athlete during the period of desocialization from athletics (Werthner & Orlick, 1982). The reinforcements for the athlete's identity are specific and time-limited. When athletic eligibility runs out, the athlete becomes a "has been." What is left? There are "no adoring fans, no coaches to pamper him, no skills to fall back on--only past glory, excuses, and recriminations" (Remer et al., 1978, p. 628). The stronger the athletic identity, the more traumatic leaving sport will be (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982).

"Termination" has been coined "social death." Individuals who create their self-image by exhibition of their physical skills will be the most vulnerable by the consequences of ending a playing career (Ogilvie, 1987). Athletes are also apt to be affected if they have little support outside of sport, if they have no alternatives, and if they do not have adequate personal resources (Coakley, 1983). It has been suggested that the way in which a career ends may result in differences in coping with termination (Kleiber et al., 1987). Satisfaction of the completion of a role may lead to dissonance reduction, alleviating the process of termination when individuals are forced to re-examine who they are. If an athlete has "no regrets" upon termination, then it may be easier to move on to the next phase of life.

Team Cohesion

The social psychological definition of a group is a

collection of individuals who are interacting with one another so that each person influences and is influenced by each other person. Sports teams constitute a collective personal identity. A team is a small group in the natural setting of athletics. Within this team, there are features and characteristics that set it apart from merely existing as an assortment of random individuals. Team members, although individually distinct, share commonalities with respect to sport itself. They share common goals, communicate with linguistic variations and nonverbal gestures often unintelligible to those outside of the environment, abide by hierarchical structures within the sport, create elaborate ceremonies and rites of passage, and believe in countless myths and superstitions (Cratty, 1983). Cohesion is the "adhesive property of groups--the force that binds group members together" (Carron, 1980, p. 234).

Many coaches hold the belief that the most effective team is not necessarily the most talented, but the team that plays the best together. Considerable research has been done on team cohesion and how it relates to performance, but findings have been inconsistent (Carron, 1980). Although it is possible to find a correlation between cohesion and performance, researchers are unable to explain causation. Which comes first, cohesion or winning? Did a successful season promote team unity, or did increased teamwork lead to increased team productivity?

Many believe that team cohesion determines peak performance. Some of the widely used cliches are "the team that plays together

stays together" or "the team did not play well as a unit." A team's performance is more than the summation of individuals' abilities. This follows the Gestalt idea that the whole (team performance) is more than the simple summation of its parts (individual performance). The performance of athletic teams is based upon many factors; only one of which is cohesion. Other factors that determine success must also be taken into consideration (Yukelson, Weinberg, & Jackson, 1984). The talent of the athletes, the coaching, the ability of the opponents, the momentum of the game, and a multitude of other factors can influence a team's performance.

During the development process of an athlete, the exposure to nonathletes can be rather limited. In fact, athletes tend to interact most with other athletes. This is a logical practice because a great deal of time is spent with "fellow" athletes before, during, and after competition or practice. These individuals segregate themselves and frequently turn aside outsiders. They bond together and resist intrusion. The very essence of their lives, the sport experience, isolates them. "When we think of athletes, we think of a privileged group and assume that such an identity would carry with it only positive relationships" (Heyman, 1987, p. 137). But, athletes accentuate their interaction in sport to the degree that they neglect other aspects of their lives.

Cohesion is not static, it is a dynamic process that unites a group (Carron, 1984). Team cohesion is multidimensional,

consisting of common goals, valued roles, complimentary teamwork, feelings of satisfaction, and identification with group membership (Yukelson et al., 1984). When an individual is a part of a cohesive group, s/he tends to lose some individuality. The more distinct a group becomes, the more unity increases and the more quickly differences diminish (Carron, 1984). An outward display of the distinctiveness is achieved through team jackets or sweatshirts, team mottos, and social activities. The internal conformity is not as apparent by simple observation. One's orientation of self may become entangled with the role that has been defined by the team. The more an individual conforms to a group, the more difficult it becomes to reassume self-identity. Therefore, upon separation from the team, the individual may need to reclaim a sense of self.

Not only must an individual complete the development process upon leaving sport, but s/he must now proceed without the support of teammates. The individual is left alone to meet the challenges of life out in the real world. The games have ended. The others have gone home to their family (the team). And the terminated athlete is left by him/herself holding a tattered ball, souvenir to the accomplishments past.

The athlete has worked so hard during a short career to become a "team" player. Differences, conflicts, and disagreements were put aside for the good of the team. The sport created a family atmosphere. The athletes' involvement in a variety of activities brought a group of individuals close

together. This forced interaction was unavoidable. They ate pregame meals, shared water bottles, slept on vans and buses, embraced in victory, and comforted one another after defeat.

Now the terminated athlete has to move out. S/he must leave behind teammates, packing up only memories to take along. Within the team, the athlete's role had been defined. Now s/he is forced to proceed without a strong identification of self. Each step away from the team erases a bit of the definition until the athlete is left with only a question--who am I?

Termination as Loss

When an athlete's playing career ends, friends, teammates, coaches, status, identity, and sport itself in a familiar context are lost forever (Astle, 1986). The reaction experienced after departing competition follows the typical pattern of loss whether it be real, perceptual, or symbolic in nature (Werthner & Orlick, 1982). These losses are often "not recognized and the grieving process is either ignored or misunderstood by coaches, teammates, trainers, and even the athletes themselves" (Astle, 1986, p. 279). "Understanding and finishing with loss hinges on our admitting what we lost" (Tatelbaum, 1980, p. 111). If an athlete remains in denial, s/he may suffer psychological consequences without ever identifying the cause. Athletes must confront the loss head on and experience the grieving process.

Every athlete advances from team to team through different age and skill levels. And, each time this happens, the athlete has to leave old friends behind and adjust to a new environment

and new teammates. But, although the surroundings change, the athlete still remains immersed in the world of competitive sports. However, there comes a time when an athlete must depart from sports one final time, never to return again. Eventually, the availability of competition, as previously known, is no longer possible. Although everyone gets too old to play games everyday, leaving athletic competition still can elicit a number of intense feelings. The actual loss is concrete. It is not being able to play the sport. But the symbolic loss is much more difficult to explain. It stems from the actual loss and involves the sense of self-identity (Sanders, 1989). "People need to be absorbed. They need to be preoccupied nearly all the time with something that can make them feel awe, curiosity, pleasure, love, hate, relief, amusement, pride, lust, devotion, and communion" (Klinger, 1977, p. 4). For many individuals, sport gives their lives a sense of meaning.

Individuals proceed through a series of stages following loss. The five stages are labeled by Kübler-Ross (1969) as follows: denial, projection, anger, depression, and acceptance. These are sometimes used to explain the experiences of terminated athletes. The steps of the grieving process have also been described as shock, numbing projection, yearning and searching, loneliness, resentment, disorganization, understanding, and personal growth (Astle, 1986; Ogilvie, 1987). Individuals experience these stages with varying levels of intensity. The duration of each stage is contingent upon the level of

commitment, devotion, intimacy, and dependency, as well as the motivation and support an individual has in order leave the athletic experience (Schoenberg, Carr, Peretz, & Kutscher, 1970).

Psychoanalytic theory has relied on defense mechanisms to explain an athlete's reaction to loss. Typical defense mechanisms include denial, reaction formation, and intellectualization. These serve to distort or falsify the reality of the situation. Ogilvie (1987) stated: "The persistence that has taken athletes so far in sport is now applied in the defense of accepting the truth" (p. 228). In order to grow and move on, an athlete must work through the grieving process. The feelings must be recognized and released, or the athlete will remain in the past as just another form of trivial memorabilia.

Emotions are elusive. Not only are they difficult to measure but they are also difficult to recognize and differentiate. What may be viewed as anger to one individual may be taken as depression to another. This ambiguity does not blame an individual for being incorrect in labeling a feeling but emphasizes the reliance on perception.

Feeling an emotion and expressing it are not necessarily the same (Tavris & Wade, 1984). The old stereotype that women are more emotional still exists today (Goldberg, 1976; Nicholson, 1984; Tavris & Wade, 1984), but there is no conclusive evidence to support this claim. It appears that women are more expressive of their feelings, whereas men tend to suppress their emotions.

This is a result of the socialization process in which girls are molded into the feminine ideal and boys are hardened into masculinity.

Individuals faced with termination must make some type of adjustment. The way in which athletes respond to this change varies from individual to individual and from team to team, as well as from sport to sport. Termination exhibits characteristic symptoms of psychological stress (Svoboda & Vanek, 1982). An athlete can use either adaptive or maladaptive strategies to cope. Quite possibly the best way to cope is to anticipate the inevitable ending of a career (Stevenson, 1982; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982). But, in a sense, that defeats the very purpose of training (Broom, 1982).

An athlete must detrain not only physically but psychologically as well. Unfortunately, the motivation to adhere to exercise quickly wanes because of lack of goals, incentives, discipline, desire, and structure (Werthner & Orlick, 1982). An athlete must accept the present and focus on the future rather than remaining in the past. It is a difficult struggle to release the iron grip of the past because sport immortalizes performance through films, clippings, records, awards, trophies, and other nostalgia (Coakley, 1983). The athlete must break this connection to regain a state of homeostasis.

Summary

Athletes become involved in an intimate relationship with sport. The depth of this involvement may depend upon a variety

of factors. Identification with the role of athlete and the perception of team cohesion are two such factors to consider. Often, the athletic experience, when it ends, becomes irreplaceable. The process of mourning follows this ending, whether the bereavement is conscious or unrecognized.

Most of the research that has been done on termination from athletics has focused on the professional or elite athlete. Very little research has been done on the much larger group of "average" college athletes who have committed a tremendous amount of time, energy, and effort to structured athletics for years and who are abruptly forced to walk away. It appears that an individual who becomes socialized into the role of an athlete may suffer an identity crisis when having to disengage him/herself from this role. Furthermore, the more cohesive a team becomes, the less likely differences between individuals will exist. This conformity serves to lessen individuality and, therefore, makes it much more difficult to regain a sense of self. When an individual identifies highly with the role of an athlete and is immersed in a cohesive environment, s/he may be unable to find a definition of self other than that which has been created in the sports arena.

Leaving competitive athletics creates a loss, which can be real, perceptual, or symbolic in nature (Werthner & Orlick, 1982). With every loss, there exists a series of stages: denial, projection, anger, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Individuals progress through these stages at

different rates. Each individual experiences these stages with varying intensity and duration. These differences exist due to the level of commitment, devotion, intimacy, and dependency, as well as the type of support and motivation an individual feels s/he has. An athlete must work through the grieving process and recognize and release the feelings otherwise s/he will continue to live in the past.

The topic of athletic termination is complex and has not been fully examined. Because termination can be a traumatic and potentially devastating experience, it is imperative that further research be done on its effects.

Chapter 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter will outline the methods and procedures used in gathering data for this investigation. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) selection of subjects, (b) testing instruments, (c) method of data collection, (d) scoring of data, (e) treatment of data, and (f) summary.

Selection of Subjects

The subjects who participated in this investigation consisted of 59 graduating seniors from Ithaca College who had completed or were in their final season of athletic eligibility. Each subject was contacted separately by phone and was read a standardized explanation and request for participation (Appendix A). A convenient time and place for both the subject and the test administrator was arranged in order to complete the questionnaire.

The athletes arrived at the assigned classroom at a specified time to complete the questionnaire. Informed consent forms explaining the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality of the investigation were distributed and signed by the participants (Appendix B). Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, the athletes were given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the study and were given the opportunity to leave if they decided that they did not want to participate. The athletes were read standardized instructions and they were asked to answer the questionnaire as honestly and accurately as possible.

Confidentiality was guaranteed.

Testing Instruments

The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1990), an adaptation of the Team Cohesion Questionnaire (Martens, Landers, & Loy, 1972), and a section describing feelings toward termination were administered to the subjects. A four-point Likert scale was used to answer the questions. Possible responses were as follows: 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = very much. For the purpose of this investigation, the directions were to answer using the response that best applied.

The AIMS consists of 10 items used to measure an individual's degree of athletic identity. The cohesion section consists of six items examining the relationships the athlete had within the team. The section examining feelings of termination consisted of 35 feelings that describe emotional states.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher talked individually with subjects over the telephone to recruit them for participation in this investigation. The purpose, procedures, and confidentiality of the investigation were explained during this conversation.

At the testing site, subjects received a packet containing an informed consent form and the questionnaire. The purpose, procedures, and confidentiality of the study were explained and the informed consent forms were signed by each participant. Upon completion of the questionnaires, subjects returned the packets

to the researcher.

Scoring of Data

Subject numbers were assigned to each questionnaire. Cumulative scores for the individual questions in the AIMS section and the individual questions in the cohesion section were totaled resulting in a single AIMS score and a single cohesion score. The AIMS score, the cohesion score, and the data regarding feelings toward termination were submitted for treatment.

Treatment of Data

The means and standard deviations for the AIMS total, the cohesion total, and each individual termination feeling were calculated. The interrelationships between all variables (identity, cohesion, and the 35 feelings) were assessed by Pearson product-moment correlation. Gender and status differences in identity and cohesion were assessed by t tests prior to analyzing the predictive value of identity and cohesion in explaining athletes' feelings following termination. Additionally, gender and status differences for athletes' feelings were assessed by MANOVA. A multiple regression was used to predict termination feelings from athletic identity and cohesion.

Summary

Graduating senior athletes at Ithaca College without remaining athletic eligibility in their given sport(s) were the subjects (N = 59) for this investigation. A three-part

questionnaire was administered, and the data were returned to the researcher.

The means and standard deviations for each variable were calculated. The data were analyzed by Pearson product-moment correlation to determine how discrete each of the variables were. Independent t tests on AIMS and cohesion were calculated first by gender and then by status. MANOVA assessed gender and status differences with regard to the athletes' feelings. Finally, a multiple regression was used to predict the termination feelings from athletic identity and cohesion.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The results of the investigation are presented in this chapter. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) descriptive statistics, (b) gender analysis, (c) status analysis, (d) prediction of termination feelings, and (e) summary.

Descriptive Statistics

The first step in the analysis of data was to calculate the mean ratings of athletic identity and cohesion. The range of scores for athletic identity could range from 10, which indicates a low sense of athletic identity, to 40, which was the highest possible score. Results are reported in Table 1. The mean rating for identity was 29.88 with a standard deviation of 3.71. The mean rating for identity was above average or what might be expected. Cohesion scores could range from 6, indicating a low sense of cohesion, to 24, which was the highest score possible. The mean rating for cohesion was 21.37 with a standard deviation of 2.70. The mean rating for cohesion was extremely high; in fact the scores were very close to the highest score possible.

The mean ratings for each of the 35 feelings were calculated with "very much" scored as 4, "somewhat" as 3, "a little" as 2, and "not at all" as 1. The mean scores and standard deviations for each of the feelings are shown in Table 1. The five strongest reactions to sport termination were proud, independent, successful, self-aware, and fulfilled. The five lowest rated

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of All Variables

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Identity	29.88	3.71
Cohesion	21.37	2.70
Frustrated	2.58	0.95
Satisfied	3.02	0.82
Self-aware	3.17	0.62
Independent	3.37	0.72
Fulfilled	3.12	0.72
Indifferent	1.52	0.75
Anxious	2.03	0.95
Numb	1.64	0.83
Self-destructive	1.15	0.41
Understanding	3.10	0.76
Overwhelmed	2.05	0.92
Accepting	2.80	0.87
Resentment	1.61	0.83
Closure	2.49	0.75
Supported	3.08	0.75
Sad	3.02	0.97
Confused	1.44	0.68
Empty	2.05	1.04

(table continues)

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Successful	3.19	0.80
Lonely	1.53	0.70
Angry	1.59	0.85
Shock	1.86	0.94
Lost	1.51	0.70
Defeated	1.31	0.56
Deprived	1.58	0.75
Isolated	1.36	0.58
Happy	2.42	1.07
Helpless	1.37	0.74
Content	2.54	0.93
Abandoned	1.27	0.64
Withdrawn	1.44	0.62
Uncertain	1.78	0.87
Depressed	1.93	0.90
Proud	3.44	0.75
Grief stricken	1.34	0.60

feelings were self-destructive, abandoned, defeated, isolated, and grief stricken.

The interrelationships of all variables (identity, cohesion, and each of the 35 feelings) were assessed by Pearson product-moment correlation. Athletic identity was moderately correlated with cohesion ($r = .41$). The highest correlated feelings with athletic identity were sad ($r = .40$), depressed ($r = .36$), and frustrated ($r = .34$). The lowest correlated feelings with athletic identity were anxious ($r = .00$), fulfilled ($r = .03$), satisfied ($r = .05$), and defeated ($r = .06$).

The highest correlations with cohesion were proud ($r = .40$), self-aware ($r = .39$), fulfilled ($r = .37$), and successful ($r = .36$). The lowest correlations with cohesion were angry ($r = .04$), empty ($r = .02$), helpless ($r = .02$), and anxious ($r = .00$).

The interrelationships of the feelings themselves were also assessed. The highest correlations were as follows: deprived and angry ($r = .67$), helpless and angry ($r = .65$), happy and content ($r = .65$), overwhelmed and empty ($r = .63$), helpless and abandoned ($r = .62$), and frustrated and angry ($r = .61$).

Gender Analysis

Separate scores were calculated for males and females on the variable of athletic identity, and the results are shown in Table 2. The results revealed that there were no gender differences for athletic identity, $t(58) = 0.71$, $p > .05$. In addition, separate scores were calculated for males and females on the

Table 2

Gender Differences in Identity and Cohesion

	Identity			
	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>
Males	33	29.58	3.26	0.71
Females	26	30.27	4.25	
	Cohesion			
	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>
Males	33	21.12	2.76	0.81
Females	26	21.69	2.64	

cohesion variable. The results revealed that there were no gender differences for cohesion, $t(58) = 0.81, p > .05$.

MANOVA revealed no gender differences with respect to the feelings, $F(1, 57) = 1.54, p > .05$. There were, although, some scattered apparent univariate F differences on certain feelings (frustrated, sad).

Status Analysis

Status differences and their impact on athletic identity were calculated. Results are shown in Table 3. The results indicated that there were no status differences for athletic identity, $t(58) = 1.61, p > .05$. Status differences were then calculated for the cohesion variable. Results show that there were no status differences for cohesion, $t(58) = 0.89, p > .05$.

MANOVA revealed no status differences with respect to the feelings, $F(1, 57) = 1.06, p > .05$. There were, although, some scattered apparent univariate F differences (resentment, supported).

Prediction of Termination Feelings

A multiple regression was used to predict termination feelings from athletic identity and cohesion. Results are reported in Table 4. The hypothesis, that athletes who identified highly with their sport(s) and perceived a greater cohesive environment would likely be affected more by termination than athletes who reported lower athletic identity scores and perceived a less cohesive environment, was accepted. There were

Table 3

Status Differences in Identity and Cohesion

	Identity			
	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>
Past	29	29.10	3.92	
Present	30	30.63	3.39	1.61
	Cohesion			
	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>
Past	29	21.69	2.38	
Present	30	21.07	2.98	0.89

Table 4

Prediction of Termination Feelings from Identity and Cohesion

	Predictor	<u>R</u>	<u>R</u> ²	<u>F</u>
Frustrated	I ^a	.34	.12	7.26**
Satisfied	C ^b	.27	.07	4.35*
Self-aware	C	.37	.14	8.72**
Independent	C	.21	.05	2.61
Fulfilled	C, I ^c	.38	.15	4.58*
Indifferent	C, I	.38	.15	4.67*
Anxious	- ^d	---	---	< 1
Numb	I, C	.26	.07	2.02
Self-destructive	C, I	.29	.08	2.39
Understanding	C, I	.33	.11	3.28*
Overwhelmed	I	.20	.04	2.18
Accepting	I	.16	.03	1.42
Resentment	C	.27	.07	4.35*
Closure	-	---	---	< 1
Supported	C, I	.30	.09	2.75
Sad	I, C	.43	.18	5.98**
Confused	I	.17	.03	1.70
Empty	I	.13	.02	< 1
Successful	C	.36	.13	8.11**
Lonely	I	.16	.03	1.52

(table continues)

	Predictor	R	R ²	F
Angry	I	.19	.04	2.11
Shock	I	.30	.09	5.38*
Lost	I	.24	.06	3.27
Defeated	C,I	.23	.05	1.52
Deprived	I	.31	.10	5.92*
Isolated	-	---	---	< 1
Happy	I,C	.39	.15	4.88*
Helpless	I	.11	.01	< 1
Content	I,C	.31	.09	2.80
Abandoned	I	.27	.07	4.24*
Withdrawn	C	.11	.01	< 1
Uncertain	I	.15	.02	1.23
Depressed	I	.31	.09	5.75*
Proud	C,I	.42	.18	5.75**
Grief stricken	-	---	---	< 1

^aIdentity. ^bCohesion. ^cOrder of entry into regression equation.

^dNeither predictor met .50 limit.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

significant results between athletic identity, cohesion, and the following feelings: frustrated, satisfied, self-aware, fulfilled, indifferent, resentment, sad, successful, shock, deprived, happy, abandoned, depressed, and proud.

Summary

Athletic identity and cohesion were moderately correlated ($r = .41$). There were also significant relationships between several of the termination feelings and the individual variables of identity and cohesion. The highest correlated feelings with identity were sad ($r = .40$), depressed ($r = .36$), and frustrated ($r = .34$). The highest correlated feelings with cohesion were proud ($r = .40$), self-aware ($r = .39$), fulfilled ($r = .37$), and successful ($r = .36$). The most significant interrelationships of the feelings themselves were as follows: deprived and angry ($r = .67$), helpless and angry ($r = .65$), happy and content ($r = .65$), overwhelmed and empty ($r = .63$), helpless and abandoned ($r = .62$), and frustrated and angry ($r = .61$).

No gender differences existed for athletic identity, cohesion, or termination feelings. Likewise, no status differences existed for athletic identity, cohesion, or termination feelings.

Subjects' athletic identity and degree of perceived team cohesion accounted for significant variance of the following termination feelings: frustrated, satisfied, self-aware, fulfilled, indifferent, resentment, sad, successful, shock, deprived, happy, abandoned, depressed, and proud.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results described in chapter 4. The specific areas for discussion are (a) descriptive statistics, (b) gender analysis, (c) status analysis, (d) prediction of termination feelings, and (e) summary.

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations for all variables are reported in Table 1. Athletic identity scores could range from a low of 10 to a high of 40. The mean for identity was 29.88 with a standard deviation of 3.71. This rating was moderately high and indicated that the athletes in the study placed sport as a high priority. It is very likely that this finding reflects the amount of time and effort athletes have devoted to sports throughout their lifetime, and therefore their roles as athletes constitute an integral part of their identities.

The AIMS has been reported to be reliable and internally consistent (Brewer et al., 1990). This scale comprised the first part of the questionnaire. Present results conflict with those of Brewer et al. (1990), who found that as college students mature their identification with athletics decreases. The apparent difference may be due to the subject pool utilized in each investigation. Subjects in the Brewer et al. study were students enrolled in either an introductory psychology course or a sport psychology course, whereas subjects in the present study

were graduating college athletes. It is possible that the subjects in the Brewer et al. investigation were not all competitors in a structured athletic program. Responding subjects may have been intramural, club, or casual sport participants, which may indicate why they tended to have a lower score on athletic identity. On the other hand, the athletes in the present study were exclusively intercollegiate varsity athletes, and the majority had participated for their entire college career. The subjects in this study, therefore, had become more attached to their athletic roles.

The cohesion score could range from a low of 6 to a score of 24. The mean for cohesion was 21.37 with a standard deviation of 2.70. This rating was extremely high; in fact, the mean score was very close to the highest score possible. This can be explained by the halo effect. Athletes who are forced to reminisce about their competitive history may view the positive events more clearly and might not remember the negative aspects quite as well. After investing a considerable amount of time and energy in an activity, athletes may rationalize this participation by accentuating their achievements as well as the friendships and the bonds that were formed with teammates over the years.

The means and standard deviations for feelings of termination are also shown in Table 1. The five strongest reactions to sport termination were proud, independent, successful, self-aware, and fulfilled. The five lowest rated

feelings were self-destructive, abandoned, defeated, isolated, and grief stricken. These positive responses can be explained by the Kübler-Ross model of loss. Because these athletes are in the first stage, denial, they are going to pretend that there is not a problem. This response follows the typical pattern of loss during which individuals refuse to admit that there is a problem (Astle, 1986; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Ogilvie, 1987; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). This behavior offers only temporary protection, and the athletes must eventually face the reality that their intercollegiate playing careers have come to an end.

It is also possible to attribute these positive responses to the quality of exit. Fame, recognition, visibility, and adequate role enactment could contribute to feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction at the time of termination from athletics (Kleiber et al., 1987). If an athlete left intercollegiate competition with few or no regrets, s/he may reflect on the experience in a positive manner. It is also possible that, because the subjects were on the verge of graduation from college, they were involved with the anticipation of the future rather than dwelling on the past. It is difficult to isolate a single event and examine emotional reactions when a number of role transitions are happening simultaneously (Coakley, 1983).

There is considerable conflict regarding the trauma of the termination experience. Many researchers (Botterill, 1982; Brewer et al., 1990; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982) suggest that the more an athlete identifies with sport, the more

difficult it will be to leave. Recently, this view has been questioned (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983; Curtis & Ennis, 1988). The majority of these investigations examined professional or elite performers who were almost exclusively male. These studies appear to have more in common with studies of retirement, and these "concepts may not be applicable to the chronologically young sport retiree" (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985 p. 88). Some investigations examined termination from high school athletics and attempted to generalize the results to the college level (Coakley, 1983). The ages of the athletes are quite similar as is the general organization of competition, but the significant difference is that high school graduates still have the opportunity to play for another 4 years in a structured program at an academic institution. But, unless the college graduate has an opportunity to play at the professional or international level, serious athletic competition is over.

The lowest rated feelings (self-destructive, abandoned, defeated, isolated, and grief stricken) were negative emotions to the extreme. Athletes who rated these feelings on the high end of the continuum might be in need of counseling or psychological assistance. They would have few personal coping resources, little support, and would feel that they have limited options. It is not surprising that these feelings were the lowest rated.

The interrelationships of all variables (identity, cohesion, and each of the 35 feelings) were assessed by Pearson product-

moment correlation. Athletic identity and cohesion correlated moderately ($r = .41$). Although these variables are not totally discrete, their degree of overlap did not violate the subsequent regression analysis assumption.

The highest correlated termination feelings with athletic identity were sad ($r = .40$), depressed ($r = .36$), and frustrated ($r = .34$). The lowest correlated feelings with identity were defeated ($r = .06$), satisfied ($r = .05$), fulfilled ($r = .03$), and anxious ($r = .00$). The highly correlated termination feelings are consistent with what one might expect from an individual with a high sense of athletic identity. The athlete would be sad about leaving, possibly to the point of being depressed. S/he might also be frustrated because of a loss of control over the situation. S/he had played 4 years, and there was no way to turn back the hands of time. It is surprising to see that there is no significant relationship between identity and either satisfied or fulfilled. This might be explained by looking at the correlation of frustrated with identity. The athlete might not be feeling satisfied or fulfilled because certain goals may not have been reached. It is quite possible that, because subjects identify so strongly with their athletic role, they do not feel any type of satisfaction upon leaving. In fact, they may feel remorse, which once again explains the high correlation with sad, depressed, and frustrated. From a therapeutic point of view, it is gratifying to see that defeated and anxious have such low correlations with athletic identity.

The highest correlated feelings with cohesion were proud ($r = .40$), self-aware ($r = .39$), fulfilled ($r = .37$), and successful ($r = .36$). The lowest correlated feelings with cohesion were angry ($r = .04$), empty ($r = .02$), helpless ($r = .02$), and anxious ($r = .00$). It is surprising to see that self-aware correlated so highly with cohesion. Often, when interacting in groups or teams, individuals are forced to conform. It is reassuring to see that, although individuals experience a high degree of cohesion, they are still aware of who they are. The only problem is that, if they think of themselves as athletes and realize that their playing careers are over, they may have a difficult time with termination.

The correlation of cohesion and successful indicates that cohesion and performance are related but does not imply causation. It is a commonly held belief that the most effective team is not necessarily the most talented, but the team that plays the best together. Although a considerable amount of research has been done on the relationship of team cohesion and performance, the findings have been inconsistent (Carron, 1980). But, if individuals are successful in their endeavors, the logical conclusion is that they will also feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

The correlations of angry, empty, helpless, and anxious with cohesion were not statistically significant. These results can be explained by the very nature of team togetherness and unity. The terminated athlete has a collection of teammates s/he can go

to for support and reassurance. The athlete can draw strength, understanding, and empathy from the very individuals s/he is forced to leave. The old cliches "All for one and one for all" and "The team that plays together, stays together" exemplify the camaraderie typically demonstrated between athletes even after the end of competition. The athletes in this study had not yet graduated and, therefore, were still in close proximity to one another. Although the daily competitive sport involvement had been erased from the athletes' schedules, not enough time had elapsed to cause them to forget one another.

The interrelationships of the feelings were also assessed by Pearson product-moment correlation. The most highly intercorrelated feelings were deprived and angry ($r = .67$), helpless and angry ($r = .65$), happy and content ($r = .65$), overwhelmed and empty ($r = .63$), helpless and abandoned ($r = .62$), and frustrated and angry ($r = .61$). These relationships can be explained by looking at the words themselves. Happy and content and frustrated and angry are synonyms. The feeling of helplessness can incur anger or abandonment. The correlation between overwhelmed and empty, on the surface, is more difficult to explain. These two feelings are more like antonyms. To be overwhelmed is to be overcome and bewildered, whereas to be empty is to have nothing. The athlete may be so engulfed with emotion that s/he is unable to cope and, therefore, is unable to fill the void that the termination experience has created.

Gender Analysis

Separate scores were calculated for males and females on the variables of athletic identity, cohesion, and the termination feelings. The results are shown in Table 2. The results indicated that there were no gender differences for the variables of identity, cohesion, or the feelings of termination.

Sport, by its very nature, places certain demands upon those individuals who wish to participate. These individuals are not categorized by their gender but by their involvement in athletics. Therefore, they are considered either athletes or nonathletes, not males or females. When an athlete is at basketball practice s/he is not considered male or female, but a basketball player. "Roles are learned and are directly commensurate with the values and norms of their social context" (Kalinger & Unkovic, 1969, p. 112). When an individual accepts the role of an athlete, the role can be strengthened to the point it begins to dominate the individual's actions and lifestyle. It is possible that the athletic identity is so powerful it suppresses or influences the exhibition of traditional gender characteristics. The dominance that the role athletics can play in an individual's life might explain the similarity of scores of athletic identity by males and females. Because sport is not gender specific, this could account for the lack of gender differences on the variable of identity.

Although one might think that females, as a group, would be more cohesive, the present study indicated that there were no

gender differences for the variable of cohesion. Because the athletic environment requires daily interaction, close proximity, shared goals, and interests, it essentially demands cooperation. Therefore, the lack of gender differences may be attributed to the type of environment in which the athletes were involved and the standards by which they had to perform.

It is commonly believed that women are more emotional than men. There is no evidence that this is the case, but women may express their emotions more freely (Goldberg, 1976; Nicholson, 1984; Tavris & Wade, 1984). Under the conditions of this investigation (e.g., anonymity of responses), it is possible that males felt more secure in divulging their feelings, which resulted in a lack of gender differences. On the other hand, females may have conformed to the environment as it has been defined. It is possible that the athletic environment dictates the proper emotional response under specific conditions. By their participation, males and females essentially accept these stipulations and act accordingly.

Status Analysis

Scores were calculated for the athletes' current status of athletic eligibility to assess the relationship with the variables of identity, cohesion, and feelings of termination. The athletes' eligibility had either elapsed or they were in their final season. Results are shown in Table 3. There were no status differences for the variables of identity, cohesion, or feelings of termination.

Individuals follow a typical pattern following a loss. They proceed through a series of five stages: denial, projection, anger, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969). These stages are experienced with varying levels of intensity, and the duration of each stage depends upon the level of commitment, devotion, intimacy, and dependency, as well as the individual support and motivation each athlete has (Schoenberg et al., 1970). The largest possible status difference between the two groups, elapsed athletic eligibility and final season of eligibility, was 5 months. The progression from stage to stage can take anywhere from several months to several years and can involve a great deal of effort (Astle, 1986). There was not enough of a status difference to make a distinction between the stages. It is quite possible that most of the athletes involved in this investigation were still in the first stage. In fact, many of the athletes admitted to the investigator that the study forced them to examine the fact that their intercollegiate playing career was really over.

Prediction of Termination Feelings

Multiple regression was used to predict termination feelings from athletic identity and cohesion. Results are shown in Table 4. Athletic identity and cohesion significantly predicted the following feelings: frustrated, satisfied, self-aware, fulfilled, indifferent, resentment, sad, successful, shock, deprived, happy, abandoned, depressed, and proud. The hypothesis, that athletes who identified highly with their

sport(s) and perceived a greater cohesive environment would likely be affected more by termination than athletes who reported lower athletic identity scores and perceived a less cohesive environment, was accepted.

Athletes who felt frustrated, resentment, sad, deprived, abandoned, and depressed realized the time, energy, and commitment they had invested over the seasons. "The more closely identified the athlete is with his or her sport, the more traumatic will be the crisis of identity upon termination" (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982, p. 177). The feelings of shock or indifference are consistent with the belief that the subjects are still in the first stage, that of denial.

The idea of being self-aware is a conclusion that is rather ambiguous. Have these athletes come to terms with termination already, possibly before the actual fact? Or are these athletes simply aware of their identity as defined through their years of participation in sports? Either conclusion may be cause for alarm. It may be possible that, although the athletes think that they have mourned their departure from athletics or that they believe they are capable of simply leaving without even a glance back, they are really just denying the existence of a problem. If this is the case, they must eventually proceed through the rest of the stages: projection, anger, depression, and acceptance. On the other hand, if the athletes are just simply aware of their identity as it has been forged within the sport subculture, they must now find a way to shed or discard their

identity as an athlete and take on new roles in society. This process could be long, frustrating, and even painful, but the athlete must come to terms with reality.

Finally, the feelings of being satisfied, fulfilled, successful, happy, and proud are all related. They are all positive emotions. It is possible that the athletes recognize their accomplishments and are now basking in the glory. Not only should the athletes themselves relish these emotions, if this is indeed the case, but the coach and teammates should also applaud their own contributions.

Summary

Subjects in this investigation showed a moderately high score for athletic identity and an extremely high score for cohesion. These variables were moderately correlated but did not violate the subsequent regression analysis assumption.

The strongest responses to sport termination were proud, independent, successful, self-aware, and fulfilled. These responses all follow the Kübler-Ross model of loss. The first stage of this model is denial. Individuals in this stage typically accentuate the positives, thereby failing to confront the reality of the termination experience. It is also possible that subjects were involved in a number of role transitions simultaneously and, therefore, were unable to discriminate between the emotions these experiences evoked.

As well as revealing no gender differences, this investigation also failed to show any status differences.

Because this study only examined subjects in an athletic environment, the responses are more similar than diverse. This can be explained by the demands required by the environment.

Athletic identity and cohesion significantly predicted the following feelings: frustrated, satisfied, self-aware, fulfilled, indifferent, resentment, sad, successful, shock, deprived, happy, abandoned, depressed, and proud. The hypothesis, that athletes who identified highly with their sport(s) and perceived a greater cohesive environment would likely be affected more by termination than athletes who reported lower athletic identity scores and perceived a less cohesive environment, was accepted.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter gives an overview of the entire investigation. The chapter is divided into three sections: (a) summary, (b) conclusions, and (c) recommendations.

Summary

A total of 59 graduating senior Ithaca College athletes participated in this investigation designed to examine the relationship between the termination process and the athletes' feelings upon termination from intercollegiate athletics. Subjects were administered a three-part questionnaire comprised of athletic identity, perception of team cohesion, and termination feelings.

Athletic identity and cohesion were significantly correlated with one another. Identity also correlated significantly with the termination feelings of sad, depressed, and frustrated. Cohesion correlated significantly with proud, self-aware, fulfilled, and successful. The following termination feelings showed significant interrelationships: deprived and angry, helpless and angry, happy and content, overwhelmed and empty, helpless and abandoned, and frustrated and angry. No gender or status differences existed for athletic identity, cohesion, or any of the termination feelings.

It was hypothesized that athletic identity and team cohesion would have an effect on feelings of termination. It was expected that individuals who identified highly with their sport(s) and

perceived a greater cohesive environment would likely be affected more by termination than athletes who reported lower identity scores and perceived a less cohesive environment. This investigation showed a significant relationship between feelings of termination and athletic identity and cohesion. The two variables accounted for significant variance of the following termination feelings: frustrated, satisfied, self-aware, fulfilled, indifferent, resentment, sad, successful, shock, deprived, happy, abandoned, depressed, and proud. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Conclusions

1. Athletic identity and cohesion correlated significantly with one another and with several of the termination feelings. It appears that there is a relationship between athletic identity, cohesion, and feelings of termination.

2. There were no gender differences for athletic identity, cohesion, or any of the feelings. It does not appear that gender affects the degree of athletic identity, the amount of cohesion, or the emotional responses to termination.

3. There were no status differences for athletic identity, cohesion, or any of the feelings. It does not appear that status has an effect on athletic identity, the amount of cohesion, or the emotional responses to termination.

4. Athletic identity and degree of perceived team cohesion accounted for significant variance for some of the termination feelings. It appears that these two variables can predict

certain feelings of termination.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are being made for further research on this topic.

1. A similar study on a larger scale should be conducted. The number of subjects should be increased and several institutions should be involved. This would increase the generalizability of the results.
2. A similar study should investigate the responses of individual vs. team sport athletes. This could be relevant when assessing the emotional responses to termination.
3. The cohesion section of the questionnaire could be improved upon. A more extensive evaluation of cohesion could be used, covering aspects of task and social cohesion. This would make the results more valid.
4. An additional section on motivation for participation in athletics should be included in the questionnaire. This could help determine whether or not involvement in intercollegiate athletics is replaceable by involvement in other activities and could assist in predicting reactions to the termination process.
5. A similar study should investigate the emotional responses of athletes who have been out of intercollegiate competition for longer periods of time, to better assess the impact of time.

Appendix A

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

May I speak to _____?

Hi. My name is Lori Sadewater and I am a graduate student at Ithaca College. I am doing my thesis on termination from college athletics at the Division III level. I was a two-sport athlete myself and only ended my own playing career just last year. I am very interested in finding out how other athletes react to the fact that their collegiate playing career has ended. So I created a questionnaire and I am asking all senior athletes to take part. The completion of the questionnaire will take no more than 20 min. Because you have devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to sport, I thought you would like to have your opinion counted. Would you consent to be part of the study?

Would you be able to come in and fill out the questionnaire on _____?

Could you come at _____?

Thank you and I will see you on the _____.

Goodbye.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. The study

a. Purpose of the study: This study will investigate the experience of the intercollegiate varsity athlete at the Division III level.

b. Methods: You will be given a questionnaire that will assess your athletic experience at Ithaca College. It will only take a few minutes to complete, and I will be available to answer any questions you might have.

c. Benefits of participation: You will be directly responsible for contributing to the collection of valuable information regarding intercollegiate participation. This information will aid educators, coaches, and athletes in the future. If you desire, you may obtain the results from this investigation once it has been completed.

2. What can I expect to happen as a result of my participation in this study?

Participation in this investigation will not induce any physical or emotional pain or discomfort. I am simply interested in your honest responses regarding your participation. However, if you at any time for any reason decide that you no longer wish to complete the questionnaire, you are free to leave.

Some of these questions may cause you to feel some emotional

Initial on the line signifying that you have read this page.

responses. These emotions are perfectly understandable as you envision leaving college and embarking on a new phase in your life. If you would like to discuss your feelings after you have participated in this study, please feel free to contact Lori Sadewater.

3. For more information

If you would like more information about this investigation and/or the results, please contact me, Lori Sadewater, at (607) 256-5450 as this is my thesis study.

4. Withdrawal from this study

As stated earlier, if you at any time feel uncomfortable or should you decide that you no longer wish to participate, you may leave at any time. No questions will be asked as to why you made this decision.

5. Confidentiality

At no time during this investigation will your name be associated with your responses on this questionnaire. Only grouped data (gender, status) will be used.

7. Consent

I have read the above, understand its contents, and agree to participate in this study. I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C

TERMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

The purpose of this survey is to better understand the relationship between individuals participating in intercollegiate varsity athletics and the consequences of such participation. The information that you provide is important in determining future needs of athletes for varsity sport participation. Please consider each question carefully and be sure you fully understand what each item is asking. Answers are to be written on the questionnaire in the spaces provided. This information will be maintained in the strictest confidence and names will not be associated with your questionnaire. Please answer as honestly and accurately as possible.

1. What sport (or sports) have you played at the varsity level
in college? (major) _____
(minor) _____

PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT BEST APPLIES

2. Are you male or female? Male Female
3. I will continue to play my sport (sports) after graduation.
not at all a little somewhat very much
4. I consider myself an athlete.
not at all a little somewhat very much
5. I have many goals related to sport.
not at all a little somewhat very much
6. Most of my friends are athletes.
not at all a little somewhat very much
7. Sport is the most important part of my life.
not at all a little somewhat very much

8. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else.
not at all a little somewhat very much
9. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself.
not at all a little somewhat very much
10. Other people see me mainly as an athlete.
not at all a little somewhat very much
11. I feel badly about myself when I do poorly in sport.
not at all a little somewhat very much
12. Sport is the only important thing in my life.
not at all a little somewhat very much
13. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.
not at all a little somewhat very much
14. What was your motivation for participation in athletics?
- a. for exercise
not at all a little somewhat very much
- b. to socialize
not at all a little somewhat very much

c. to do something besides studying

not at all a little somewhat very much

d. a habit

not at all a little somewhat very much

e. recognition from others

not at all a little somewhat very much

f. for a sense of personal accomplishment

not at all a little somewhat very much

15. My relationship with my coach was meaningful and positive.

not at all a little somewhat very much

16. How much did you like playing with the particular group of teammates you had this year?

not at all a little somewhat very much

Using your major sport as a reference point, please circle the most appropriate response.

17. How strong a sense of belonging do you feel you had to this team?

not at all a little somewhat very much

18. How adequate do you rate the relative level of teamwork on your team?

not at all a little somewhat very much

19. How closely knit do you think your team is?

not at all a little somewhat very much

20. Compared to other groups that you belong to, how much do you value your membership on this athletic team?

not at all a little somewhat very much

The following questions are concerned with your feelings toward ending your intercollegiate playing career. To what extent do you feel: (Please circle the most appropriate response)

21. frustrated

not at all a little somewhat very much

22. satisfied

not at all a little somewhat very much

23. self-aware

not at all a little somewhat very much

24. independent (self-reliant)

not at all a little somewhat very much

25. fulfilled (complete)
not at all a little somewhat very much
26. indifferent (nonchalant)
not at all a little somewhat very much
27. anxious
not at all a little somewhat very much
28. numb
not at all a little somewhat very much
29. self-destructive
not at all a little somewhat very much
30. understanding
not at all a little somewhat very much
31. overwhelmed
not at all a little somewhat very much
32. accepting
not at all a little somewhat very much
33. resentment
not at all a little somewhat very much

34. closure (letting go)
not at all a little somewhat very much
35. supported
not at all a little somewhat very much
36. sad
not at all a little somewhat very much
37. confused
not at all a little somewhat very much
38. empty
not at all a little somewhat very much
39. successful
not at all a little somewhat very much
40. lonely
not at all a little somewhat very much
41. angry
not at all a little somewhat very much
42. shock (disbelief)
not at all a little somewhat very much

43. lost (searching)
not at all a little somewhat very much
44. defeated
not at all a little somewhat very much
45. deprived
not at all a little somewhat very much
46. isolated
not at all a little somewhat very much
47. happy
not at all a little somewhat very much
48. helpless
not at all a little somewhat very much
49. content
not at all a little somewhat very much
50. abandoned
not at all a little somewhat very much
51. withdrawn
not at all a little somewhat very much

52. uncertain

not at all a little somewhat very much

53. depressed

not at all a little somewhat very much

54. proud

not at all a little somewhat very much

55. grief stricken

not at all a little somewhat very much

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

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