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Alumni Collegiate Student-Athletes' Wellness After Sport

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ABSTRACT

College student-athletes (SA) may be more likely to experience difficulty transitioning from college than non-athletes, which could lead to decreased levels of overall wellness. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to explore the wellness of alumni SA who recently transitioned from college. **Methods:** Semi-structured interviews with former SA (n=12) were administered at a university in the Midwest. Interview questions were based on the Indivisible Self Model's five factors of wellness (coping, social, physical, creative, and essential). Data were analyzed using the process of immersion/crystallization. **Results:** Results indicate that subjects generally experienced negative feelings at the end of their athletic career, but were able to overcome any struggles they experienced. Subjects mostly displayed high levels of wellness, especially in the creative, essential, and physical factors of wellness. **Conclusion:** Alumni SA that participated in this study displayed high levels of wellness. These findings: 1) illustrate the unique challenges in transitioning from college for alumni SA, and 2) inform prevention and intervention strategies for alumni SA struggling to transition from college.

INTRODUCTION

Establishing a career path, forming a new identity, loss of social support, and maintaining physical activity (PA) are standard challenges of transitioning from college that are especially treacherous for alumni SA. First, 56.6% of SA believe it is somewhat likely that they will go on to play professionally, while only 2.6% actually will. This, along with the time demands of athletics that make it more challenging to complete internships, go to workshops, and network, makes SA more likely to lack vocational skills and resources. Second, time and energy investments and socialization towards athletics lead SA to form a specific, unbalanced identity as an athlete. When this identity dissipates upon graduation, former SA take on the challenge of forming a new identity. Identity loss is a distressing experience that has been linked to lower levels of wellness. Third, SA tend to seek support from coaches and teammates during college, and these relationships decrease substantially after graduation. Lack of social support has also been linked to lower levels of wellness. Fourth, alumni SA drastically decrease their PA, and are similar to non-SA after graduation. Not only is lack of PA linked to lower levels of wellness, but former SA are more sensitive to adverse physical and psychological effects of detraining. Clearly, there is a need for greater understanding of former SA's overall wellness.

METHODS

- 12 alumni SA that recently (within 5 years) transitioned from athletics
- Semi-structured interviews to assess transition experiences and overall wellness based on the Indivisible Self Model (Figure 1).
- Data analyzed using the process of immersion/crystallization.

Figure 1. Indivisible Self Model

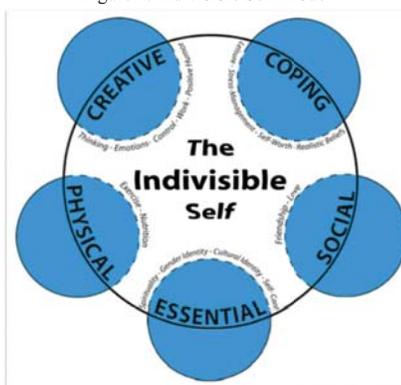


Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Gender	Male	4 (33.3%)
	Female	8 (66.7%)
Age	Mean	23.9
	SD	±1.83
	Range	22-27
Sport-type	Team	5 (41.7%)
	Individual	7 (58.3%)
Years out of college	Mean	2.25
	SD	±1.42
	Range	1-5

RESULTS

- Biggest challenges with transition from college
 - Loss of sport-related facet (e.g., team, competition, routine) (n=9)
 - *I really miss being around the team and group...*
 - *It was difficult because for...four years you have everything scheduled for you.*

RESULTS (Cont.)

Creative

- *Work*
 - Felt they have resources to attain career goals (n=12)
- *Emotions*
 - Positive mood on most days (n=12)
 - “I feel like I’m pretty happy, pretty upbeat...”

Social

- *Friendships & Love*
 - Satisfied with current relationships (n=9)

Essential

- *Self-care*
 - Good overall wellness (n=10)
 - Less fit, but equal/better overall wellness than as SA (n=8)
 - Maintain wellness through PA (n=8)

Coping

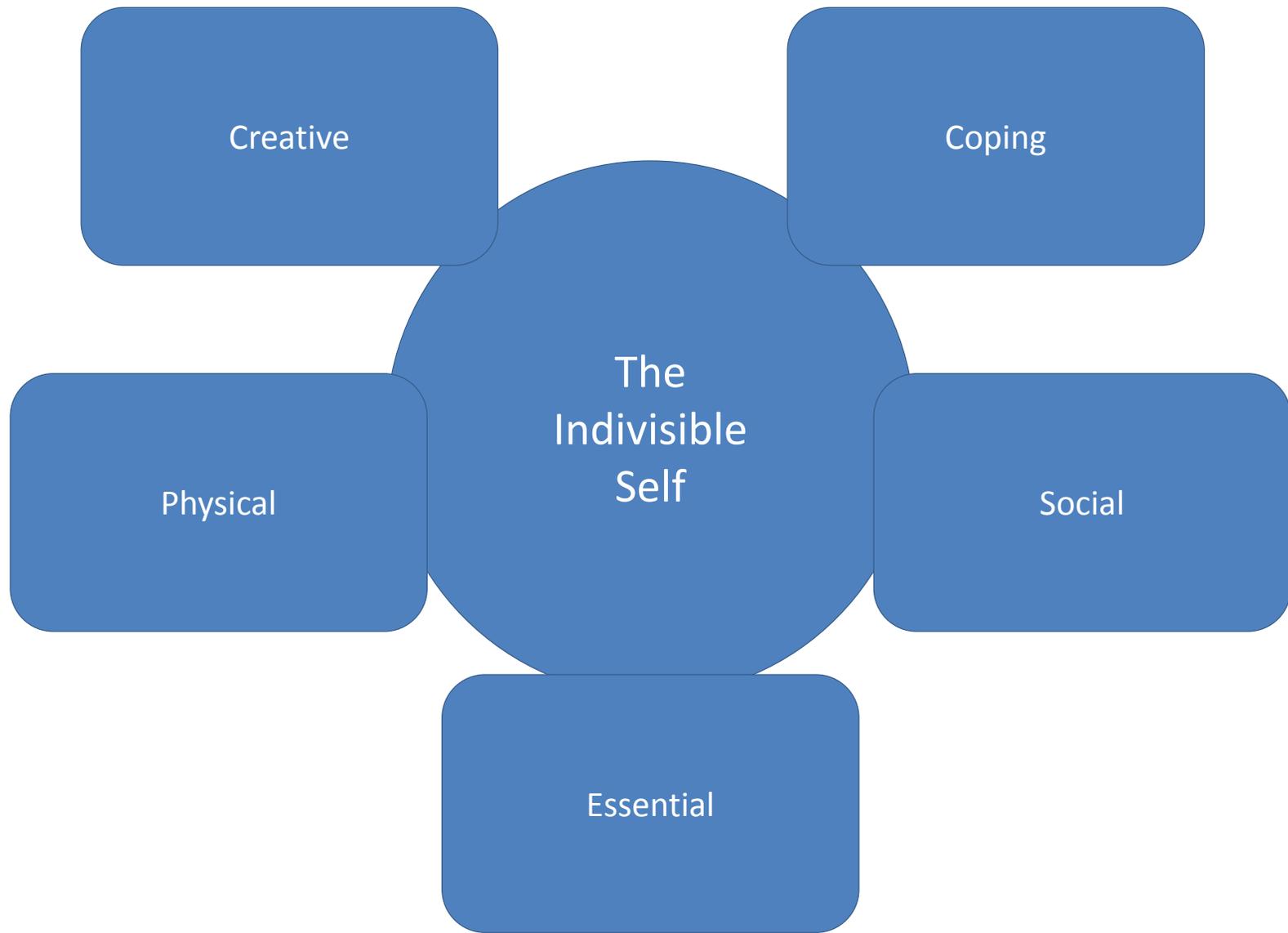
- *Self-worth*
 - Satisfied with current view of self (n=12)
 - Identified positive personality or mental attributes (n=11) vs. physical attributes (n=2)

Physical

- *Exercise*
 - Regularly PA (n=12)
 - Less PA than as SA (n=9)
 - *“I definitely allow myself to workout less than I did as a student-athlete.”*
- *Nutrition*
 - Good overall nutrition (n=11)
 - Better nutrition than as a SA (n=10)

Discussion

Alumni SA that participated in this research generally displayed high levels of wellness. Only trivial indications of low levels of wellness existed inconsistently across the wellness model. Therefore, our findings contradict previous literature suggesting that former SA may experience difficulties transitioning from college and display lower levels of wellness. Due to a sample that was small, mostly female, lacked diversity, and did not represent all sports, results cannot be generalized to all alumni SA. These findings can be used to illustrate the unique



Creative

Coping

The
Indivisible
Self

Physical

Social

Essential