How to “Move On” and “Keep Moving”: Preparing Student-Athletes for Life after College Sports

Erin Reifsteck, Ph.D.

Dr. Erin Reifsteck is a post-doctoral research fellow with IPAHW. She received her Ph.D. and M.S. in Kinesiology (Sport and Exercise Psychology concentration) with a doctoral minor in Educational Research Methodology from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG).
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Outline

- Background and framework
- Identity, motivation, and physical activity in former college student-athletes
- Translating research into practice: *Moving On!*
- Recommendations for professionals working with student-athletes
Retirement from competitive sports after college is inevitable for most student-athletes.

- PA and health not emphasized in most research and programs
- Athlete population may have unique health concerns (Kwiatkowski & Spangenburg, 2008)
- Self-identity can play a key role in the transition to life after competitive sports (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994)
Identity Theory

- Identity functions to self-regulate behavior
  - Engage in behavior that is consistent with & validates identity
  - Saliency influences likelihood of behavior

The role of athletic identity and exercise identity in physical activity participation
Exercise Identity

- Predicts exercise behavior
- Higher self-efficacy for exercise

When EI becomes primary, valued component of self-concept it is important to directing future exercise behavior.

Identity ↔ Behavior = reciprocal relationship

- Fostering exercise identity in exercise interventions
**Athletic Identity**

**Definition:** the extent to which one identifies with the athletic role

- **schema**-framework for interpreting information; inspires behaviors consistent with athletic identity
- **social role**- partly determined by other people’s perceptions of you
- affected by perceived **commitment** and perceived **ability**
Identity and PA in Former Athletes

Identity, Physical Activity, and Sport Transitions
- Identity Crisis → AI decreases after retirement
- PA decreases - and may have important health implications

Former student-athletes no more active than non-athlete alumni

Is AI (competitive, sport-specific) really related to lifetime PA?
Why are Former Athletes Less Active?

Most former student-athletes are less active now compared to college. Why?
Self-Determination Theory

Deci & Ryan (1985)
- Theory of motivation
- Application to PA

Not just amount of motivation; **Type** is important, too

2 main types: extrinsic vs. intrinsic
Moving up the Continuum

Motivation Continuum

Amotivation

Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic Motivation

Introjected

Identified

Integrated

3 Psychological Needs:
Competence
Autonomy
Relatedness

**Well supported in the literature**, e.g., Barbeau, Sweet, & Fortier, 2009; Edmunds, Ntoumani, & Duda, 2006; Markland & Tobin, 2004; McLachlan et al., 2011; Mullen, Markland, & Indeglew, 1997; Thorgersen-Ntoumani & Ntoumanis, 2006; Winninger, 2007
Reward Structures

Positive reinforcement: reward people for behavior to keep them motivated...

**BUT**

Key point:
- External rewards can **undermine** intrinsic motivation!
Identity, SDT, and Former Athletes

- Drop in athletic identity after retirement

- A broader exercise-based identity more strongly related to PA
  - Do athletes transition from AI to EI?
Identity, Motivation, and Former Athletes

Selected Participant Quotes

**Motivation**
- I have been lazy and lost my enthusiasm to workout.
- Since I am no longer competing and am not on a team I do not have to make the commitment to work out every day.
- I am not working towards a set goal. I am not competing. I do not HAVE to exercise every single day.
- We used to run to win races; Running to stay in shape isn't as great a motivator.

**Autonomy**
- (My activity) has changed because I no longer have someone forcing me to be in a certain physical shape
- If you want to take a day, week, or month (off) you can. You don't have your coach, teammates, trainers pushing you to get in there every moment you are required to do so.

**Relatedness**
- I am not around people who exercise anymore now like there was when I was in college.
- I don't have that team environment … It's hard to go out and run hard when you don't have 6-7 guys doing it with you.

**Competence**
- Everyone expects you to be able to do the things you did in college and have the same amount of athletic ability as you did in college.
- I feel very uncomfortable if I am not as quick the people I compete against.
Back to the “Why”: Motivation a Key Link?

Lack of motivation to remain active:
- “We used to run to win races. Running to stay in shape isn’t as great a motivator.”
- External rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation
  - Rewards disappear → motivation dissipates
  - Transition from competitive sport to recreational exercise → less intrinsically motivating (Ryan, Williams, & Deci, 2009)

Motivation as a link b/w identity & behavior?
Summary of Findings with Former Student-Athletes

Athletic Identity

Exercise Identity

Physical Activity

Exercise Identity

Self-Determined Motivation

Physical Activity

- .15
- .49
- .43 to .79
- .18
- .37

30%
Physical Activity & Health Concerns

NCAA’s SCORE Study
- Close to 3 out of 4 former student-athletes report experiencing difficulty with retiring from competitive sport
- More than 1/3rd say that they only participate in vigorous exercise sometimes, seldom, or never

My Research
- Most student-athletes become less active after college
- More importantly, almost 1 in 5 are not active enough to gain substantial health benefits

What can we do?
Applying Research to Practice

PA transition program using identity/motivation framework to help student-athletes maintain physical activity after college.

The goals of the program are to:

- help student-athletes transition from a *sport-specific* identity (e.g., I am a basketball player) to a *broader*, active-based identity (e.g., I am a physically active person)

- strengthen self-determined motivation for physical activity by enhancing *competence* in a wider range of activities, promoting *choice* of activities, and fostering a *connection* with peers through physical activity participation
Outline of PA Transition Program

- 4x60 min. sessions consisting of discussion activities and PA
  - Session 1: Introduction and Overview
  - Session 2: Identity
  - Session 3: Goal-Setting and Action Plans
  - Session 4: Planning Ahead
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Transition from a narrow, sport-specific identity (i.e., athletic identity) to a broader active-based identity (i.e., exercise identity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Determined Motivation: Competence</td>
<td>Develop competence in a wider range of lifetime physical activities and build self-efficacy for maintaining physical activity after college.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Determined Motivation: Autonomy</td>
<td>Encourage choice in activities to promote personal agency in developing a physically active lifestyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Determined Motivation: Relatedness</td>
<td>Encourage social support and create connections to others through physical activity participation in order to increase self-determined motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Knowledge about PA Guidelines</td>
<td>Increase knowledge about physical activity guidelines and benefits to promote greater intentions to participate in long-term physical activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting and PA Promotion Strategies</td>
<td>Adopt effective goal setting practices; Create action plans that identify potential barriers to maintaining physical activity and behavioral strategies to overcome barriers.</td>
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</tbody>
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Recommended Strategies

- Offer educational workshops
- Provide cross-training opportunities in the off-season
- Promote autonomy within sport
  - Give multiple options; Allow choice
- Prepare student-athletes for the transition
### FITT for Health vs. FITT for Sports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FITT for Health</th>
<th>FITT for Sports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td>How many days per week must you</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>exercise/train?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>3-5</strong> (cardio)</td>
<td><strong>5-7</strong> (cardio)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>2</strong> (strength)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intensity</strong></td>
<td>How hard must you work?</td>
<td><strong>Vigorous</strong></td>
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<td>Your choice:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moderate or vigorous</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>How long must you exercise/train in</td>
<td><strong>8-20 hours</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>a week?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>2.5 hours</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(if moderate)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>1 hour 15 minutes</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(if vigorous)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>OR—Walk 10,000 steps each day</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>More time = greater health benefits</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>What type of movements will lead to</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>benefits?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>ANY movement that is continuous and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>uses large muscle groups</td>
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<td>Sport-specific movements:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Running, Plyometrics, Power lifting,</td>
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<td>Agility drills, etc</td>
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</tbody>
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Questions?

Contact Info:
Erin Reifsteck
ejreifst@uncg.edu
Selected References


