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The Experience of Retiring from Sport Following a Career in High School Football: A Phenomenological Investigation

Douglas J. Muccio
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Douglas J. Muccio entitled "The Experience of Retiring from Sport Following a Career in High School Football: A Phenomenological Investigation." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

Mark A. Hector, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Craig A. Wrisberg, Joel F. Diambra, Jacob J. Levy

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Jacob J. Levy

Accepted for the Council:

Linda R. Painter
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

The Experience of Retiring from Sport Following a Career in High School Football: A
Phenomenological Investigation

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Douglas J. Muccio
August 2007

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my experience of...

Friday nights in the fall in Warren, Ohio, the thrill of playing for JFK high school, watching high school football with my family, the allure of the lights, the crisp smell of the air, and the cheeseburgers and chocolate milk shakes after the games.

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ABSTRACT

The major objective of this research was to explore the experience of retiring from high school football. Previous research has neglected qualitative investigations of high school athletes' experiences of retirement. High school football was chosen due to its popularity and importance in American communities. The purpose of this study was to give participants an opportunity to voice their experiences of retiring from high school football so that others may be better able to understand and learn from their experiences.

The phenomenological method was used to interview ten retired high school football players identified as elite based on team and individual statistics. These interviews were then transcribed and analyzed by a phenomenological research group looking for themes that existed among the ten participants. Themes emerged on the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing**, which set the context for the study. The themes included **The High School Football Player**, **The Others**, and **The Spotlight**, each of which contained sub-themes. The ground, themes, and sub-themes are outlined and described in detail, with quotes from the participants provided to exemplify each one.

This research provides a clearer understanding of the experience of retiring from high school football so that counselors, coaches, parents, and athletes can take steps toward having a successful and constructive retirement. The current study has been used to facilitate counseling and workshop efforts with both current and retired athletes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review	4
Football and Education	4
Theoretical Perspective.....	5
Research Models Used to Describe Sport Retirement.....	7
Phenomenology and Sport	12
Phenomenology and Retirement.....	13
Impact of Retirement on the Athlete.....	16
Identity	16
Age and Career	18
Control	20
Deselection.....	21
Stressors	22
Applied Models to Help Athletes in Retirement.....	23
Literature Summary	27
Chapter 2.....	28
Methodology.....	28
Existential-Phenomenological Theory.....	28
Phenomenological Interview	30
Bracketing Interview.....	31
Participants.....	32
Procedure	32
Interview Method.....	34
Data Analysis	35
Chapter 3.....	36
Results.....	36
Thematic Structure.....	38
The Ground for the Experience: Missing & Reminiscing	39
Void.....	42
Memories	45
Time	47
Missing & Reminiscing Summary	50
Figure-Ground Juxtaposition	51
Theme I. The High School Football Player	51
Identity	52
Body	54
Emotions	56
Shoulda Coulda Woulda's	59

Reason: Decision or Deselection	61
Life Transition	64
The High School Football Player Summary	66
Theme II. The Others	67
Team Camaraderie	68
Family	72
Community.....	75
The Others Summary	77
Theme III. The Spotlight	77
Friday Night	80
The Play	82
Hitting	84
Excitement	86
Competition.....	87
Work.....	88
Staying Close to Sport	91
No Comparison	92
The Spotlight Summary	95
Chapter 4.....	98
Discussion	98
Introduction.....	98
Bracketing Interview.....	99
Verification of Themes	100
Reflections of Previous Research	101
REFERENCES	115
APPENDICES	125
APPENDIX A.....	126
INFORMED CONSENT FORM B	126
APPENDIX B	136
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER'S PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY	136
APPENDIX C	138
SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	138
VITA.....	145

Chapter 1

Introduction

Retirement in society today can be considered from several different perspectives, with the most common perspective being the employee who ends his or her work career. In this dissertation another type of retirement that affects large numbers of individuals every year is addressed. The distress experienced by athletes retiring and leaving their sport is a significant issue in sports today (Abbot, Weinmann, Bailey, & Laguna, 1999). Obviously, retirement from sport can take place at any level from elementary school, to college, to the professional ranks. Few athletic careers extend beyond college, with only 1% of all student-athletes continuing their sport careers in professional athletics (Stankovich, Meeker, & Henderson, 2001). Implicit in this fact is that 99% of college athletes retire at or before the end of their college careers. Similar statistics exist for high school football players, with only 5.8%, or one out of 17, moving on to play college football (NCAA, 2004). According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS, 2004), 1,023,142 students participated in high school football in 2002-2003. High school seniors represented approximately one fourth of that number, or 255,786 students. Thus, when considering the statistics presented by the NCAA, approximately 240,740 young males end their football careers after their senior year in high school.

High school football is an infectious and passionate sport that has captivated many communities across America. Hale (1999, abstract) addressed this passion, stating that “the local high school, for many rural communities and small towns, is the hub of the

community,” and in the fall the community focuses on high school football searching for new heroes and linking the identity and culture of the community with the high school football team’s performance.

The passion for high school football has also been portrayed in recent years by the media in film and literature, most notably by H. G. Bissinger’s (1990) non-fictional book “Friday Night Lights,” W. Peter Iliff’s (1999) fictional film “Varsity Blues,” which depicts high school football in Texas, and by Carlson’s (2001) documentary “Go Tigers!” which gives viewers an inside look at the high school football culture in Massillon, Ohio. Carlson’s (2001) opening scene of “Go Tigers!” displays how intertwined high school football is with the daily lives of the residents of Massillon by giving viewers a peek at one of the town’s traditions. Every baby boy that is born within the Massillon city limits receives a visit in the hospital from the president of the Massillon Washington High School Tigers football boosters and is presented with a Massillon football, a ritual that presumably prepares the infant for the football socialization he is about to live out during his coming life in the community. In the next scene of the film, Carlson (2001) introduces Massillon’s undertaker, who stands proudly over his best selling casket decorated with Massillon Tigers’ colors and logos. Truly in Massillon, Ohio, football is a way of life “from the cradle to the grave” (Carlson, 2001).

The town of Berwick, Pennsylvania displays this same type of high school football fanaticism (Walters, 1992). In a community of 10,976 residents, the Berwick High Bulldogs football team draws 10,000 fans to their home games (Walters, 1992). In these football-crazy communities, 18-year-old boys are the town’s heroes. However, the

total impact of this high school football culture on its participants is frequently overlooked. Grant Teaff, executive director of the American Football Coaches Association, states that “Football requires the mind, the body, and the spirit of the player. It utilizes the total person.” (1995, p. A16). In the communities described above, and many others across America, young men give their mind, their body, and their spirit to their high school football team for 18 years of their lives. Many grow up wanting to play football for their high school teams more than anything else in the world. As a result, these young men face the possibility of significant psychological distress and other maladaptive experiences when their playing days end. That the fanatical high school football system is far too common in the United States begs the haunting question that many high school football players who retire face each year; what do I do when what I was born to do ends at age 18?

Judy Oppenheimer (1991, p. 324) illustrates the difficulty that her son’s high school football team, as well as the families of the team, had when football was over.

We held on tenaciously, squeezed all the juice we could out of this football season. But it was over; we were finally being forced to admit it. The season was gone, the year was passing, the most important part of our lives was ending forever. What were we going to do now?

Jerrod McDougal, a player on the Odessa Permian High School football team featured in Bissinger’s (1990, p.344) “Friday Night Lights,” described the impact that retiring from high school football had on him:

A lot of people tell me to let it go... You just can’t let somethin’ like that go. It’s like you’re married for thirty years and all of a sudden you get a divorce. You don’t just stop lovin’ something. You just don’t give the better part of your life away and just stop thinkin’ about it. You just don’t do it... I’m only eighteen. I spent six years working for it, and all the time before thinkin’ about it. When I

got to the eighth grade, I found out I wasn't going to be able to play college ball. Shit, high school football was the best thing for me. And now it's history. I've got no idea what I want to do. I've got no idea what school I'm going to go to. I don't have a choice...I want to play football bad...There isn't a day I don't think about it. There isn't an hour...What hurts so bad about it, I was part of it (high school football) for awhile.

In the following literature review, the impact that retirement from high school football might be having on the youth of this country is discussed. Specifically, the literature dealing with the relationship between football and education, the theoretical perspectives and research models dealing with retirement from sport, phenomenology research on sport and retirement, the role of identity, age and career, control, deselection, and stressors in the retirement process of high school football players, and applied models that have been developed to help athletes retire is presented.

Literature Review

Football and Education

Many have questioned the educational purpose and reasoning for including football and other sports within the high school curriculum. Scholarly publications have investigated this educational phenomenon and outlined both the pros and cons of having sports in school.

Several popular arguments exist to support the current arrangement in which sport and scholastics are combined in the United States (Coakley, 1999). First, sports are seen as a tool to build student pride for their school, boosting student involvement in school activities and academics. This pride fosters school spirit and facilitates unity, giving the school a unified identity. Sports also give schools an additional opportunity to teach students things such as responsibility, teamwork, and achievement that they will need to

succeed in the workplace. A direct, positive consequence of sports in school is that they expose students to physical activity and contribute to improving the fitness of America's youth. Sports at school provide students with additional opportunities to acquire and demonstrate skills valued by society. Finally, high school sports promote community involvement in the school. This involvement can take the form of parents spending time attending sporting events and practices, alumni who are inspired to donate money for both the school's athletic and academic needs, and the community as a whole coming together to cheer on the school's athletic accomplishments.

Miracle and Rees (1994) did research comparing high school student-athletes as a group to non student-athletes, finding that compared to non-athletes, the group who played sports in high school scored higher in grade point average, had more desire to pursue higher education following high school graduation, and had a more positive attitude toward school in general. This finding reinforces the view of Marsh (1993), who stated that being a member of a varsity high school sports team appears to equate with positive educational experiences.

Theoretical Perspective

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) outlined the theoretical perspectives used by researchers to study retirement from sport. First came the application of research models on retirement outside of sport (Hill & Lowe, 1974; Lerch, 1982; and Rosenberg, 1982). However, applying these models to sport became ineffective due to their tendency to be more descriptive than developmental (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Thanatology, or social death theory, was applied to the study of retirement from sport by Rosenberg (1982) and Blinde and Stratta (1992). In this theory, retiring was seen as a social death in that the retired athlete is socially isolated and rejected by his or her former teammates once he or she retires or leaves the team (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Social gerontological theories emphasize age in retirement from sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). These theories take four perspectives: Disengagement, Activity, Continuity, and Social Breakdown. The disengagement perspective asserts that retirement is beneficial for both the individual and society, leaving younger athletes to do the job (play the sport) and allowing retired athletes to be free to enjoy the rest of their lives (Cummings, Dean, Newell, & McCaffrey, 1960). The activity perspective states that retired athletes remain at the same level of activity after their sport careers, shifting their activity from their old “sport” role to a new role (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953). The continuity theory takes a similar slant, stating that when one role ends, the time and energy from that role shifts to another one (Atchley, 1980). Finally, the social breakdown perspective states that retirement from an activity (sport) leads to a poor self-image internalized by the individual (Kuypers & Bengston, 1973).

Others have used the theory that retirement occurs as a transition process, rather than as a singular event (Carp, 1972; Taylor, 1972). This perspective focuses on the gradual process of moving away from a role, rather than making a clean break (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Hill and Lowe (1974), Schlossberg (1981), Hopson and Adams (1977), and Kubler-Ross (1969) have taken this transition perspective and applied

it to athletic samples, supporting the use of this perspective in studying retirement from sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Despite the growing trend in the field, little research has been done to investigate the negative stress experienced by the specific population of ex-athletes (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Stankovich et al., 2001). According to Baillie and Danish (1992), there are three reasons for this lack of research. First, studies on career transitions have been typically associated with elderly populations. Second, the percentage of individuals from the general population participating in sport may not be significant enough to warrant the effort that a research study demands. And third, there is a lack of applicable models involving athletic retirement to facilitate the research process.

Furthermore, with the exception of two studies by Baillie (1993) and Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick (1998) in which athletes participating in high school, college, Olympic, and professional sports were grouped together, the research on high school athletes who retire from sport has been neglected. Virtually no data have been gathered to describe the experience of the hundreds of thousands of individuals who each year end their athletic careers following their last year of high school football.

Research Models Used to Describe Sport Retirement

Drahota and Eitzen (1998) took the third factor discussed by Baillie and Danish (1992) into account and attempted to apply Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory to the retirement process of an athlete. In this study, Drahota and Eitzen (1998) successfully applied the four stages of Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory—*first doubts, seeking alternatives, the turning point, and creating the ex-role*-- to the experience of an athlete

retiring. They did this by holding 27 face-to-face interviews with ex-athletes from a variety of sports, collecting data qualitatively and relating it to the four stages of role exit (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998). Drahota and Eitzen (1998) found that retired athletes' experience of role exit fit Ebaugh's (1988) initial stage of *first doubts* in that the athletes begin to see all the factors of sport that could shorten their careers, such as the possibility of injury, the competitive nature of sport, and the cut-throat business of sport. In the *seeking alternatives* stage, the athlete chooses to either plan for their future after sport or ignore the inevitable end. In the *turning point* stage, the formal decision is made to retire. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) note that this decision can either be voluntary, with the athlete making the choice to leave sport, or involuntary, with the athlete being cut. Finally, the retired athlete attempts to form a new identity in the last stage of *creating the ex-role*. This final stage is the most challenging for the athlete, and is never completely fulfilled.

Along these same lines, Grove, Lavelle, Gordon, and Harvey (1998) attempted to use the account-making model of Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) as an outline for understanding the psychological distress that results from the retirement process of an athlete. In their account-making model, Harvey et al. (1990) describe account-making as the formation of a narrative about the traumatic event experienced, and see the ability of the individual to develop this narrative as the essential element in their therapeutic process. In their application of the account-making model, Grove et al. (1998) viewed retiring from sport as a traumatic and stressful event in the lives of retired athletes. They collected data qualitatively through structured interviews over the areas of *Traumatic*

Event and Outcry, Denial and Intrusion, Working Through, and Completion and Identity Change.

Grove et al. (1998) described the areas above as a sequence representative of the retirement process, beginning with the *Traumatic Event and Outcry*. Here, the retired athlete undergoes a gauntlet of emotions, starting with feeling stunned and overwhelmed and leading to panic, hopelessness, and anguish. The next phase of the retirement sequence involves *Denial and Intrusion*, where the retired athlete fights through feelings of alienation and confusion to begin his or her first attempts at account-making to describe their retirement experience. This account-making by the retired athlete finally comes to fruition when he reaches a productive state in the *Working Through* stage. The *Completion and Identity Change* stages mark the retired athlete's achievement of finishing their account-making story, leaving the retired athlete with the coping skills and therapeutic emotional release needed to gain closure on their retirement experience. Individuals undergoing a stressful situation who do not achieve the therapeutic change that is the goal of the account-making model are vulnerable to prolonged sorrow and anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and may endure a recurring negative stress pattern (Grove et al., 1998).

Grove et al. (1998) focused on the retirement experience of ex-Olympic Australian swimmer, Shane Gould Innes, to further illustrate the applicability of the account-making model to sport retirement. In the 1972 Olympics, at the age of fifteen, Innes won three gold, one silver, and one bronze medal, only to retire from sport less

than a year later. The following quote from Innes is one which Grove et al. (1998, p. 58) used to illustrate *Traumatic Event*:

I was pretty vulnerable in 1973 to 1975 and had a very difficult time adjusting...I didn't talk much about my retirement experiences...It was like I was running away from it at first. I was very angry, and I know I was placing the blame on other people a lot. Initially, I was angry with people for not protecting me and not telling me what was going to happen...It was very difficult.

Grove et al. (1998) used the method of placing quotes from participants' interview transcripts under each theme in order to depict the experience of the retirement process. Upon completion of this analysis, Grove et al. (1998) concluded that the account-making model by Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) was applicable to the retirement process of athletes.

Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) investigated the retirement experiences of elite, female gymnasts using an open-ended qualitative interview approach. Following inductive analysis, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) found the themes of retirement to be *The Transition Process*, *Nowhere Land*, *New Beginnings*, *Voluntary vs. Involuntary Retirement*, and *The Pursuit of Identity*. In *The Transition Process*, athletes described their reasons for retiring. During the *Nowhere Land* stage, retired athletes described feeling a void and uncertainty, feeling disoriented without sport. In *New Beginnings*, the retired athletes said they took the first step toward putting their athletic careers behind them and beginning a new life. *Voluntary vs. Involuntary Retirement* distinguished athletes who chose to retire and athletes for whom the decision to end their careers was made for them by injury or deselection. Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) reiterated research findings stating that those who retire voluntarily have an easier adjustment than those who retire

involuntarily. However, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) identified a new group of retired athletes, the “reluctant dropouts,” who retired voluntarily after seeing that the odds of their careers continuing were slim. These “reluctant dropouts” experienced many of the same negative symptoms in their retirement as those who retired involuntarily from sport (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). In their last stage, *The Pursuit of Identity*, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) described the strain that retired athletes endure in trying to find out who they are.

Finally, Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente, and Cruz (2004) used grounded theory to study elite athletes’ image of retirement. Upon performing a content analysis of the data, Torregrosa et al. (2004) found that the athlete’s retirement represented the three stages of *initiation/training*, *maturity performance*, and *anticipation-realization of retirement*. In the *initiation/training* stage, athletes are beginning to compete in their sport. Here, the athletes are focused on performance outcomes and do not have a clear image of retirement. In the *maturity performance* stage, the athlete places the greatest emphasis on their sport careers and achieving their athletic goals. In this stage, the athlete’s image of retirement is limited to a sad experience that happens due to injury. In the *anticipation – realization of retirement* stage, the athlete begins to see his or her performance as dormant or decreasing. Here, the athlete begins for the first time to develop a clear image of retirement. The athlete’s focus shifts from sports to family, friends, and getting a job. Torregrosa et al. (2004) described the varied experiences of athletes in this final stage, ranging from a sudden retirement plagued with negative feelings to gradual and planned retirement from sport.

Phenomenology and Sport

Some research has been done in the field of athletics, using the existential-phenomenological/hermeneutic approach to describe the experiences of athletes in a wide variety of sports. The athletic experiences of playing soccer, playing women's basketball, being coached, and having a peak performance experience have been described.

Hughson and Inglis (2002) phenomenologically described the experience of playing soccer in the three major themes of *Player-Body-Subject*, *Practical knowledge and actions*, and *Form of soccer field space*. Johnson (1998) used the existential-phenomenological method to portray an athlete's experience of being coached, finding the three themes of *There for me/Not there for me*, *Knowing and being known personally*, and *Authority/Power*. D'Anniballe (1996) used the approach to depict elite female college basketball players' experiences, finding the three themes of *Relationships*, *"I" in team*, and *Play*. These three themes took on meaning in the context, or ground, of *Team*. Finally, Privette (1981) used phenomenology to find that the experience of peak performance has the six themes of *Prior interest*, *Involvement*, *Clear focus*, *Intention*, *Spontaneity*, and *Peak experience*.

While researchers in the four studies above used the phenomenological method to study topics associated with sport, others have discussed the appropriateness of the use of phenomenology to explore sport-related issues. Fahlberg, Fahlberg, and Gates examined the use of the existential-phenomenological method to describe the experience of exercise, concluding that phenomenology's focus on "how...exercise is experienced

rather than on variations in how it can be observed” (1992, p. 182) is essential in order to improve research on exercise behavior. Dale (1996) advocated the effectiveness of using phenomenology to describe the athlete’s experience in sport psychology. Despite the many phenomenological studies of sport and the appropriateness of phenomenology as a method used to study sport, no research has been done using existential phenomenology/hermeneutics to describe the experience of retirement from high school athletics.

Phenomenology and Retirement

Muccio and Hector (2005) examined the experience of retiring from sport following a career in collegiate athletics, finding the themes of *Identity*, *The Game*, *Body*, and *Others*. The theme of *Identity* was based on retired collegiate athletes’ descriptions of feelings of void and strong emotion surrounding their retirement, while being faced with a life shift and redirection after leaving their collegiate sport. The theme of *The Game* included the retired athletes’ telling stories of their past athletic history, describing the difference between levels of sport, having a feeling of contentment in reminiscing on their past athletic career, and seeing retirement as a process. The theme of *Body* included the athletes’ descriptions of their fitness level and struggle to stay in shape during retirement, the role of speed in their athletic career and their assessment of their current lack of speed, and their struggles with injuries. Finally, the theme of *Others* depicted how friends, family, coaches, and teammates influenced the retirement experience of the athlete research participants.

Other research has been carried out using phenomenology to describe retirement, but without focusing on sport as the career being terminated, or athletes as the population retiring. Schafler (1996) used the ontological hermeneutic model to obtain an understanding of the retirement experience of senior citizens, focusing on those senior citizens who used computers regularly in their daily lives. Themes identified in this research included the retiree's *Need to be useful*, *Desire for artistic expression*, and *Desire for relationships* (Schafler, 1996). Fudge (1998) used phenomenology to learn about the retirement experience of non-professional men. Her research yielded four themes, in which retirement was viewed as an *Anticipated life stage*, a *Time of freedom*, *A time of activity, especially as practical support to others*, and a *Time to consolidate relationships*.

These studies were unique due to the fact that the researchers collected data qualitatively, contrasting with the majority of research studies done in the field that have used quantitative approaches and Likert-type scales. This quantification of data and use of Likert-type scales has left the field of sport psychology with a relative lack of qualitative research on the topic of athletic retirement. Examples of recent quantitative studies include those done by Abbot, Weinmann, Bailey, and Laguna (1999), Erpic, Wylleman, and Zupancic (2004), Grove, Lavalee, and Gordon (1997), and Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick (1998).

Abbot et al. (1999) gave questionnaires to 159 college baseball players measuring the areas of identity salience and choice behavior, finding a significant difference in the choice behavior between participants with high sport salience and those with medium or

low. Abbot et al. (1999) concluded that this relationship between sport salience and choice behavior among athletes is the reason that many athletes undergo distress during their retirement from sport. Erpic et al. (2004) administered the Sports Career Termination Questionnaire and the Non-athletic Transitions Questionnaire to 85 former elite, Slovene athletes. Erpic et al. (2004) found that the satisfaction experienced in retirement from sport depends upon the ex-athlete's level of education, ability to choose to retire, feel good about their athletic accomplishments, the impact of athletic identity on the individual, and the presence of maladaptive non-athletic transitions. Grove et al. (1997) examined the retirement experiences of 48 former, elite athletes over the areas of athletic identity and coping strategies along with adjustment to retirement in the areas of finance, occupation, social interaction, and emotional state. Grove et al. (1997) found that retired athletes with high athletic identities experienced a more negative retirement experience. Webb et al. (1998) did a correlational study with 93 retired athletes exploring their retirement experiences in the areas of athletic identity, reason for retiring from sport, and psychological functioning during the retirement process. Webb et al. (1998) found that participants with high athletic identities had a more difficult experience of retiring from sport than those with low athletic identities, and that athletes forced to retire due to injury had the most difficult retirement experiences.

Furthermore, Hayslip et al., (1997) used a Likert-type measure to study the traditional form of retirement from work. They used the Retirement Anxiety Scale to assess the anxiety that academicians had towards the retirement process.

Impact of Retirement on the Athlete

Identity

Every year, thousands of athletes become ex-athletes, enduring the process and the effects of retirement from sport. As noted by Isaksson and Johansson (2000), retirement brings about a number of stressors in the life of the ex-worker. For the athlete during retirement, the stress experience is compounded, however. This transition period holds more stress-related significance to the athlete due to the lifelong process of socialization into sport that athletes experience (Baillie & Danish, 1992). As noted by Baillie and Danish (1992), this socialization begins as early as elementary school, with children being reinforced for participation in sports by family, friends, and teachers. Over the years of development, this socialization, combined with success in sports by the athlete, leads to feelings of prestige and ultimately, an ego-driven creation of self-identity/image centered upon the role of athlete.

An unfortunate consequence of this socialization and athlete-centered identity is that many athletes focus almost exclusively on developing their physical skills and undergo what Baillie and Danish (1992) describe as role foreclosure. In this process, athletes focus so much time and energy on sports that little is left for other aspects of their personal development, causing their education/academics to suffer and their self-esteem to hinge upon their athletic performance (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish, and Murphy (1997) describe the identity development process of young athletes as a process in which individuals give labels to themselves based on the opinions of others. These labels often are products of successful

achievements by the young athlete and are positive reinforcement for continuing to perform their sport. Petipas et al. (1997) identify this process as dangerous for young athletes since these young people make identifying labels of themselves without knowing much about their values, interests, needs, and skills outside of athletics. Given a self-identity concentrated on athleticism that is built up through the socialization process that the athlete experiences, along with the lack of development of other roles by the athlete, the stage is set for a stress reaction in retirement when the role of athlete is no longer available.

This issue has been emphasized by Drahota and Eitzen (1998), who point out that retirement is a particularly difficult time for ex-athletes leaving a career in sport because they lose what has been the focus of their being and identity for the majority of their lives. Once they have left sport, the retired athlete is then forced to re-associate his or her personal identity (Stankovich et al., 2001). Other possible losses for the retired athlete leaving sport include the camaraderie with teammates, physical prowess, adoration of fans and peers, and the intense rush and highs of competition (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998).

The athlete who retires from sport following a career in high school football faces many of these same identity-based issues. This high school football identity socialization process can be observed in *Friday Night Lights*, H. G. Bissinger's (1990) national best selling book in which he followed the Permian High School football team in Odessa, TX during the 1988 season. In his book, Bissinger describes his experiences of witnessing how the high school football players in the town are treated like gods. This god-like worship and socialization into the "football player role" begins in youth football when

the player is seven or eight years old, and ends following his last game during his senior year of high school. Bissinger described how the loss of the football identity made the retirement experiences of these high school football players difficult.

Athletes retiring from sport following careers in high school football have lived as “a football player” for as many as ten years, representing the majority of the individual’s life to that point. Thus, due to socialization, “football player” is most likely the dominant and only identity role that the individual has known. When it ends, the high school football player is likely to experience the same negative affects in retirement outlined by the research discussed previously.

Age and Career

As Drahota and Eitzen (1998) assert, athletes retiring from sport are doing so at a very young age (typically 18 through 23). This young age comes into play when the retired athlete has to start a new life and career differing from the sport-role identity that they have had all their lives. As Drahota and Eitzen (1998) report, over-focusing time and effort on this sport-role identity leaves college athletes without the skills of many college students, leaving these young, retired athletes with less of the skills needed to survive financially (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998). This skill deprivation found in college athletes is further emphasized by Stankovich et al. (2001), who assert that college athletes risk being deficient in career-related developmental tasks normally accomplished by their peers in the university community. Finally, Blann (1985) described these college athletes as being less capable of forming educational and career goals than other college students.

These same academic disproportions exist for high school athletes and are defended by school administrators. When criticized about the amount of emphasis placed on football in his Texas high school, principal Brad Williams referred to the attendance at his high school's football games and replied, "Look, we don't get 10,000 people showing up to watch a math teacher solve X " (McCallum, 2003, p. 41). Thus, like their college counterparts, young ex-high school athletes have the majority of their lives ahead of them after sport to attempt to overcome the educational, economic, and self-developmental obstacles that sport has created.

Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) emphasized the role that young age had in the experience of elite female gymnasts retiring from sport. These female athletes often begin their gymnastics careers at the early age of eight, and retire between the ages of 15 and 19. As noted by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000), these female gymnasts are children and adolescents for the majority of their athletic careers, and retire at the end of their teenage years. This young age for retirement is lower than athletes ending their elite athletic careers following professional or even college sports, which may make retirement more difficult. Baillie (1993) supports this assertion, noting that younger athletes have a more difficult time adjusting to the emotional stressors of retirement than do older athletes.

Athletes retiring from high school football experience a similar set of circumstances to the gymnasts described by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000). Like the gymnasts, many began their careers in youth and peewee football leagues as early as age eight. They spend their entire athletic careers as children and young adolescents, and retire following high school, placing them between the ages of 15 and 19. Thus, athletes

retiring from sport following their high school football careers are equally susceptible to the same negative experiences of retirement as the elite female gymnasts described by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000).

Control

Research by Hayslip et al. (1997) investigated control in making the final decisions regarding if and when to retire from a career in academia as a prediction of psychological stress. In their study, Hayslip et al. (1997) found that those who had control in making the final decision of when to retire were happier and more satisfied in retirement than those who were forced to or told when they had to retire. The relevance of this finding to the retirement of an athlete is strengthened by the fact that many athletes end their careers because they are no longer wanted due to injury, lack of ability, or diminishing physical skills. Thus, the majority of athletes leaving sport would fall into the Hayslip et al. (1997) category of being forced out of their job. As a result they would be expected to experience less satisfaction in retirement than someone who had control over their decision to retire.

Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) divided retired athletes into two categories, those who chose to retire and those who were forced to retire from sport. Inherent in the ability to choose the circumstances of one's retirement is the issue of control (Webb et al., 1998). Taylor (1983) and Thompson (1981) found that those who had the control to choose the circumstances of their retirement from sport were more able to cope with the maladaptive events that retirement involves. A pattern of experiencing a lack of control, in both their personal and athletic lives, has been found in elite athletes retiring from sport (Svoboda

& Vanek, 1983; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Having control over the circumstances of retirement would allow the athlete to prepare and plan, giving the athlete a better chance to be psychologically healthy in their retirement (Webb et al., 1998).

Lapchick (1996) and Henning and Carter (1945) note that many high school athletes, football players in particular, do not plan for their retirement from sport and instead plan on continuing their athletic careers into college or even professionally. Given this lack of planning, these retired high school athletes might be more prone to have a negative psychological experience of retirement than athletes in other sports or at other levels.

Deselection

Deselection is the biggest reason for high school athletes not continuing their sport careers into college. In the “survival of the fittest” sport environment, the deselected athletes are those who are deemed unfit and quickly neglected and forgotten (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). When athletes are deselected, they are not chosen to be a part of a team because they lack the skill level needed to play. This fact forces deselected athletes to face their lack of or diminishing athletic skill more than any other group of retiring athletes (Webb et al., 1998). Faced with the harsh reality of their lack of athletic ability, deselected athletes are more at risk to experience low self-esteem and low self-confidence (Webb et al., 1998). This blow to their self-esteem and self-confidence makes deselected athletes’ transition into retirement the most psychologically challenging. Finally, deselected athletes often leave sport before meeting their personal goals, leaving them more vulnerable to emotional difficulty (Petitpas, Danish,

McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992). Given the high rate of high school football players aspiring to continue their careers at the collegiate level and eventually into the professional ranks (Lapchick, 1996), along with the slim chance of playing college or professional football (NCAA, 2004; Stankovich et al., 2001), deselection is inevitable.

The story of Jason Bainum is an example of a high school football player who was deselected despite performing at an elite level (McEntegart, 2002). Bainum, a running back at Williamsburg High School in Ohio, became the all-time leading rusher, gaining 8,216 yards, in a state where football tradition is rich with talent (McEntegart, 2002). However, despite his record-setting achievement, Bainum was not recruited by colleges for a football scholarship due to his perceived below average speed (4.6 seconds in the forty-yard-dash). This deselection put Bainum in a situation where his only opportunity to continue playing football in college would be to enroll at a Division III university and pay high tuition costs. Thus, not even the elite performers at the high school level are immune to deselection. The ex-high school football player may have a more difficult time adjusting to retirement than other athlete populations because of the high probability that he will be one of the deselected.

Stressors

Potts (2001) reiterates the numerous stressors faced by athletes leaving sport, and describes the phenomenon as post-athlete syndrome, stating that it affects most athletes at the end of their careers. Stankovich et al. (2001) include “loss of appetite, weight fluctuation, skipped menstrual cycles, insomnia, mood changes, a sense of being out of control, sadness about the loss of teammates, decline in motivation, and a lack of trust in

others,” (p. 82) as common effects of retirement from sport on college male and female athletes.

Further research on the psychological manifestations of the retirement process of ex-athletes is needed. Such research should improve sport psychologists’ understanding of the retirement experience and possibly enable them to help athletes develop better coping strategies for the retirement experience.

Applied Models to Help Athletes in Retirement

Some researchers have proposed models helping professionals might use in assisting athletes with their adjustment to retirement. Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on retirement and retirement from sport. *Coping Skills, Social Support, Pre-Retirement Planning, and Intervention* were identified as areas where counselors and sport psychologists could assist the retired athlete.

Taylor and Ogilvie’s (1994) research mirrored the findings of Petitpas et al. (1992), who outlined techniques for adjusting to retirement in their *Career Assistance Program for Elite Athletes (CAPA)*. Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) targeted roughly 1,800 Olympic and Pan-Am Games athletes who were transitioning from active athletic performance into retirement. CAPA was developed by surveying retired Olympic and Pan-Am Games athletes to determine their specific needs. Six areas of development were identified through this information gathering survey and were implemented into the CAPA workshop (Petitpas et al., 1992). The first area of CAPA was to teach retired athletes coping skills in order to better handle the difficult emotions of their retirement. Second, CAPA aided retired athletes in finding a support system outside of their sport.

As noted by Petitpas et al. (1992, p. 385), “Most of (the athletes’) support system was geared to help them compete, not retire.” The third area identified by CAPA involves the retired athlete coming to terms with their self-image. The reality of having to change their identity from “elite athlete” to something else caused much anxiety in the participants surveyed, and demanded attention from CAPA. Retired athletes’ emotions were addressed in the fourth area of CAPA, where the ex-Pan-Am and Olympic athletes were given the opportunity to vent their feelings about their careers coming to an end. CAPA’s fifth area focused on athletes still competing. These athletes identified fears that planning for their retirement would hinder their current athletic performance. Thus, CAPA attempted to contradict these irrational fears and assist athletes in balancing both the demands of competing with sufficient retirement planning. Finally, the retired athletes illustrated a fear of being behind their peers in their new careers, which lead the retired athletes to have doubts about their ability to succeed (Petitpas et al., 1992). Both counseling and vocational assistance may benefit retired athletes at this stage.

Wolff and Lester (1989) outlined a three-step therapeutic model for coping with athletic retirement that includes *listening/confrontation*, *cognitive therapy*, and *vocational guidance*. In Wolff and Lester’s (1989) *listening/confrontation* stage, the athlete realizes that his or her abilities are no longer good enough to continue competing, leaving the athlete with doubts similar to those described by Drahota and Eitzen (1998). Wolff and Lester (1989) emphasize progressing through the mourning that occurs in this stage, being particularly careful not to get overwhelmed by it. This progression is best achieved by encouraging retired athletes to talk about the emotions they are experiencing

in dealing with their athletic retirement. Dealing with emotions is also stressed in the *cognitive therapy* stage. Here, the therapist attempts to illustrate to the retired athlete that the depression and negative emotions they are experiencing are temporary. The therapist attempts to instill the belief that the ex-athlete was once successful on the field, and will continue to be successful off it. Once the emotions of the retired athlete have been addressed, the therapist can move into the *vocational guidance* stage and assist the retired athlete in finding and transitioning into a new career (Wolff & Lester, 1989).

Teaching retired athletes cognitive coping skills, such as goal setting, reframing (Lazarus, 1972) self-instructional training (Meichenbaum, 1977), and mental imagery (Smith, 1980), can help them establish a more optimistic outlook in their post-athletic lives (Bruning & Frew, 1987). Relaxation training and diet and exercise training is also prescribed to assist with the emotional and physiological pressures of retiring from sport (Bruning & Frew, 1987). Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish, and Murphy (1997) advocate that current athletes examine the impact that sport socialization has played on their identities by asking these athletes to partake in an exercise in which they describe themselves using terms other than those related to sport or athletics. Finally, Taylor and Ogiwie (1994) state that utilizing assertiveness training (Lange & Jakubowski, 1976), time management, and skill development (Bruning & Frew, 1987) can also assist the retired athlete in overcoming behavioral deficits. Enhancing the cognitive skills of retired athletes through these techniques will enable them to be more prepared to cope with upcoming transitions in their lives (Petitpas et al., 1992).

Given that the primary social support for athletes comes from their teams and other individuals in the area of athletics, retirement from sport can be an isolating experience (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). As noted by Petitpas et al. (1992), this athletic support system can help athletes participate, play their best, and win, rather than retire. Counselors can help retired athletes in this social support area by encouraging them to personally explore ways to widen their social identity (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). This exploration includes expanding one's interests and relationships into areas outside of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Social support for athletes can also be provided by pre-retirement planning (Schlossberg, 1981). Activities included in this planning are continuing education, career and financial training, and social networking (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) assert that athletes who participate in pre-retirement planning are more likely to have a positive self-identity, increased perception of control, and a more balanced social-identity, which in turn can improve the retired athlete's socioeconomic status and career/financial potential (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) summarize these steps by stating that the most important intervention for retired athletes is to build their self-identity and maintain their feelings of self-worth. Counseling can also be beneficial in that it provides athletes with an opportunity to express their emotions and share their feelings (Petitpas et al., 1992). Utilizing athletic models of retirement would benefit high school football players who are leaving sport and increase their chances of experiencing a positive transition.

Literature Summary

This review of the literature on retirement from sport distinguishes retired athletes as a population worthy of study due to the psychological/emotional adjustment difficulties associated with the transition period. Due to the unique characteristics and circumstances of their retirement, high school football players may be more susceptible to the hardships of retirement than other athlete populations. However, very little research has been done on high school athletes retiring from sport, and no research has focused on them solely. Given their relatively young age, the likelihood of deselection, the lack of coping skills, and the lack of a balanced self-identity and social-identity created by sport, high school football players' experience of retirement represents a potentially fruitful area of investigation.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This section addresses the course taken to investigate the effects of retirement from sport on athletes. Included in this methodology are descriptions of Existential-Phenomenological Theory, the phenomenological interview approach, the bracketing interview used as a validity measure, the retired athletes participating in the study, and the procedure followed, including the interview method.

Existential-Phenomenological Theory

Existential-Phenomenological theory spawned from the early philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard and Edmund Husserl (Polkinghorne, 1989). Underlying these philosophies is the idea that experience is the basic and essential foundation of knowledge. Furthermore, these philosophies assert that behavior is an expression of an individual's being in the world. Valle, King, and Halling (1989) state that understanding the world in which a person lives is the key element in understanding their life experience. "It is through the world that the very *meaning* of the person's existence emerges both for himself or herself and for others" (Valle et al., 1989, p. 7). The connection between the person's world and their ability to share it with others is language. Through language, a person can share their own experience of their world to someone else and allow that other person to gain an understanding of their experience (Giorgi, 1985). Phenomenological research aims at understanding the experience of an individual through the qualitative interview, thus giving the individual the opportunity to share their own experience of their world through language. Moran (2000) outlines the

five fundamental tenets of phenomenological theory as the presuppositionless starting point, the suspension of the natural attitude, the life-world and being in the world, the achievement of knowing, and intentionality.

Using the concept of the presuppositionless starting point, the researcher attempts to move through the research process without any preconceived notions about the participant or the phenomenon being investigated. Furthermore, the researcher aims to listen to the participant without using a theoretical perspective. Thus, the aim of the presuppositionless starting point is to create an environment where the researcher can understand the experience of the participant from his or her perspective without outside influence (Moran, 2000).

Moran's (2000) second tenet of phenomenology is the suspension of the natural attitude. Here, Moran calls on the researcher to be aware of his or her own biases regarding the research question during the interview itself and to make a conscious effort to not allow those biases to impact the interview. In order for this to occur, the researcher must take the effort and time to identify his or her own biases on the research topic. This self-bracketing is essential to having successful phenomenological research and hinges upon the researcher's ability to be honest and aware of his or her biases.

The life-world and being in the world is Moran's (2000) third element of phenomenology. This concept focuses on the phenomenologist's aim to understand the experience of the participant in real life circumstances and situations. It is important for the researcher to take the view of the participant rather than focusing on an objective view.

Moran's (2000) fourth tenet of phenomenology is the achievement of knowing. This piece of phenomenology revolves around the idea that the participant is the only one who can be the expert of his or her experience. Thus, the only way to gain knowledge of that experience is by allowing the participant to describe it. The meaning of the experience is achieved by describing it in the participant's own words.

The final component of Moran's (2000) phenomenology is intentionality. Intentionality refers to the idea that all conscious experiences are characterized by aboutness, and that consciousness serves a particular motivation or purpose. The participant may be able to gain insight about their conscious experience through the phenomenological research interview and process if the interviewer fosters a detailed account of the experience from the participant.

Phenomenological Interview

As indicated by Polkinghorne (1989), and Romanyshyn and Whalen (1989), expanding psychological research to incorporate a phenomenological method increases the span of understanding available to the psychologist by allowing for the examination of the total human experience from the perspective of the participant. This phenomenological examination enables the researcher to comprehend more fully the experiences of the individual than would be possible using other qualitative or quantitative methods, given the limitations inherent in questionnaires or the standard interview guide. These methods can restrict the participant's responses (Markson & Gognalons-Caillard, 1971). Phenomenological research is conducted through the phenomenological interview, in which participants are asked an open-ended question

and, in responding, have the freedom to explore, be spontaneous, and have total control of their response (Pollio et al., 1997). This freedom enables the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participant's experiences than other methodologies such as questionnaires or structured interviews (Markson & Gognalons-Caillard, 1971).

Bracketing Interview

In the bracketing interview, the researcher is interviewed using the same question that he or she will ask the study's participants in order to help the researcher become aware of his or her thoughts, biases, and hypotheses concerning the research question (Rosenbaum, 2000). Pollio et al. (1997) suggested that a bracketing interview:

is done to provide the researcher with some feel for what it is like to be interviewed on the present topic and to provide a thematic description of his or her present understanding of the phenomenon...The intention is...to have (the researcher) become more attuned to (his/her) presuppositions about the nature and meaning of the present phenomenon and thereby (sensitize him/her) to any potential demands (he/she) may impose on (the) co-participants either during the interview or in its subsequent interpretation. (p. 48)

Thus, the bracketing interview allows the researcher to gain knowledge of his/her opinions on the research topic before he/she interviews participants in the study. This knowledge makes it possible for the researcher to make a conscious effort to remain unbiased and impartial while conducting the interview process.

Participants

According to Dale (1994), participants in phenomenological research are selected based on their ability to describe their own unique experience with a certain incident, thus providing the researcher with a better understanding of that occurrence. Following this logic, participants in this study were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the participants had retired from high school football following their career playing for an elite high school football team, and 2) they were willing to discuss their retirement. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain anonymity throughout the study. Participants chose their own pseudonyms. Some pseudonyms chosen by the participants were changed to better protect their anonymity. Participants were also asked for their age and noteworthy football stats in their careers. Table 1 illustrates the participants' pseudonyms, ages, and statistics as they reported them.

Procedure

Upon receiving approval to conduct the study from the University of Tennessee's Office of Institutional Research, email solicitation via the snowball method was used to find participants for research on retired athletes. The snowball method consists of a two-phase process (Huck, 2000). First, participants are gathered who are easily accessible to the researcher, and who have had the experience being studied. Second, the participants gathered are then asked if they know anyone else who has had the experience being studied and who might like to participate.

Table1
Participant Profiles

	Pseudonym	Age	Statistics
1.	John	19	Two-year starter at QB, Senior captain, 14 TD's senior year, two-time play-off qualifier, starter on state final four team
2.	Bob	18	Three-year starter at 4A school with 1600 students, play-off qualifier, defeated #1 seed
3.	Steve	19	Defensive captain at 5A school, two-way starter
4.	Donovan	28	Team leader in tackles, league defensive player of the year, first team center and punter in the league, player of the week six times, all county and all district selection, honorable mention all state
5.	Jay	19	Team leader in tackles, player of the week three times, competed in state championship game
6.	Luke	28	Two-year starter, winner of conference player of the week award
7.	Karter	24	Starter on state final four team, coach's award winner, player of the week two times
8.	Brad	18	Two-year starter, play-off qualifying team
9.	Nick	23	Starter on state final four team, team captain, team offensive player of the year, third team all-county, player of the week 12 times
10.	James	18	Scored 19 varsity TD's, two-time first team all district, second team all state, team MVP, competed in state championship game

Once contact was made, the retired athletes were informed of the specific expectations of the study and asked to sign the informed consent documents (See Appendix A). After receiving the signed consent forms from each participant, a time and place was established to conduct individual interviews with each participant where the researcher began each session by asking the question: “Describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of retiring from sport following your career playing high school football.”

Each interview session was recorded using an audiocassette. The cassette tape was then listened to and transcribed by the researcher. Each interview transcription was then read and reread by the researcher, with the researcher and a research group of graduate students and professors using a phenomenological hermeneutic analysis to find qualitative themes of the participants’ experiences of retiring from sport (Pollio et al., 1997).

Interview Method

The phenomenological interviews were conducted using the approach prescribed by Dale (1996). Steps were taken to ensure that the interviewee was the person in control of the interview and was fully able to express his expertise on the subject. The first step used to achieve this interview setting was by beginning each interview by asking the same, open-ended question, which allowed the participant to determine the course taken in the interview. This open-ended approach thus gave the participant control over the interview. The question asked in this study was: “Describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of retiring from high school football.” Periodically, the

interviewer, would ask participants questions, such as, “Could you tell me more about that?” in order to gain more specific details to aid in explaining their answers.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of all the interviews and their transcription, the primary investigator first read and re-read the interview transcripts to ensure that they were accurate. Once the accuracy of the interview transcripts had been confirmed, the primary investigator met with a phenomenology research group consisting of sport psychology and counseling psychology graduate students and professors to begin identifying common themes and to verify those themes (Pollio et al., 1997). The research group consisted of a core base of members who attended group meetings regularly. However, group attendance was not mandatory and the group was not static. The research group members achieved theme verification by reading each transcript as a group and discussing the commonalities that existed among them. A thematic structure was then developed by both the primary researcher and the research group based upon these commonalities to represent the experience of retiring from high school football. After thematization had been finalized, participants were asked to read them and verify that the themes were accurate descriptions of their experiences.

Chapter 3

Results

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to explore the experience of retiring from high school football. Pollio et al. note that in phenomenological research, analysis of “three to five interview transcripts” (1997, p. 51) is generally sufficient in obtaining the range of conditions needed to thematize. Thomas and Pollio (2002) also submit that further interviews are not needed once the researcher observes redundancy in the transcripts. The primary investigator in this study followed the model of participant selection outlined by Pollio et al. (1997) and Thomas and Pollio (2002), interviewing participants until a duplicative pattern about the experience of retiring from sport became evident in their narratives. Ten participants were interviewed, rather than the suggested three to five, in effort to gain the most accurate, qualitative description of the experience of retiring from high school football.

The following section reflects the thematization done by analyzing the ten phenomenological interviews that were conducted. Each of the ten participants involved in the aforementioned interviews are described using pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. The following thematic structure was the result of this thematic analysis. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the experience of retiring from high school football. In Figure 1, the ground and the main themes are organized in a spatial manner so as to illustrate their intertwined relationships that made up the participants’ experience of retiring from high school football. Each of the main themes and the ground have many sub-themes, which are all presented in outline form on page 40. The large outer



Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the Experience of Retiring from High School Football

square represents the **Missing & Reminiscing** experienced by participants in the present study. This serves as the ground of the study, giving context to the three main themes that were found. The ellipse within the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** was split into two halves which represent the themes of **The High School Football Player** and **The Others**. Finally, the last theme of **The Spotlight** is represented in the smaller, center circle of the graph, as **The Spotlight** of playing high school football brought the individual participant, **The High School Football Player**, and all the other people in their lives, **The Others**, together. In order to understand the experience of retiring from high school football, one must understand the impact of both the individual (**The High School Football Player**) playing the game in **The Spotlight** and the role of those (**The Others**) who are shining **The Spotlight**. The graphical intersection presented in Figure 1. also serves to illustrate the constant overlap that occurred among the ground, main themes, and sub-themes in this study. A detailed explanation of the ground, each main theme, and each sub-theme is presented in outline form below.

Thematic Structure

Upon analysis of the participants' interview transcripts, a ground and three major themes with sub-themes emerged. The ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** included the sub-themes of **Void, Memories, and Time**. The first theme was **The High School Football Player**, with the sub-themes of **Identity, Body, Emotions, Shoulda Coulda Woulda's, Reason: Deselection or Decision, and Life Transition**. Appearing as the second major theme of the present study was **Others**, which included the sub-themes **Team Camaraderie, Family, and Community**. The third and final major theme was

Spotlight, which included the sub-themes of **Friday Night, The Play, Hitting, Excitement, Competition, Work, Staying Close to Sport**, and **No Comparison**.

Each theme and sub-theme are presented in detail according to the thematic structure outline on page 40. Themes and sub-themes throughout this study were found to overlap. This overlapping is displayed in many of the participants' quotes and the descriptions of those quotes. Themes and sub-themes that overlap are pointed out when the overlap occurs, but are also explained in greater detail according to the order of the thematic structure outline.

The Ground for the Experience: Missing & Reminiscing

The ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** was discussed by each participant during their interviews describing their experiences of retiring from high school football. **Missing & Reminiscing** provided a context for each of the participants' experiences of retiring from high school football. Thus, each of the subsequent themes and sub-themes of the experience of retiring from high school football were based in some way on both the loss that each participant felt due to no longer having high school football in their lives and the years of remembering their playing days. The participants missed and reminisced about being **The High School Football Player** that they once were. The participants missed and reminisced about **The Others** who were influential in their lives during both their playing days and their retirement from high school football. Finally, the participants missed and reminisced about their days of playing high school football and being in **The Spotlight**. Quotes from the participants illustrating this Missing & Reminiscing are presented in the following paragraphs.

Ground.**Missing and Reminiscing**

- A. Void
- B. Memories
- C. Time

Theme I.**The High School Football Player**

- A. Identity
- B. Body
- C. Emotions
- D. Shoulda Coulda Woulda's
- E. Reason: Decision or Deselection
- F. Life Transition

Theme II.**The Others**

- A. Team Camaraderie
- B. Family
- C. Community

Theme III.**The Spotlight**

- A. Friday Night
- B. The Play
- C. Hitting
- D. Excitement
- E. Competition
- F. Work

G. Staying Close to Sport

H. No Comparison

All of the participants used the phrase “I miss” when describing their experience of retiring from high school football, indicating that some type of loss had occurred. Here Bob simply stated how much he misses high school football, using kinesthetic tone to emphasize the significance.

I really miss it. Bob

Jay also clearly stated how he misses high school football, indicating his passion for the game and the terminal nature of the sport.

I miss the game. The love of the game...That’s something that I miss and that’s something that I can’t go back to. Jay

Steve also described missing football. In his quote Steve described the team and the **Spotlight of Friday Night** as sources of his **Void**.

I really miss football...I miss the team aspect of it, the responsibility also, and the deal of, “hey, football team’s undefeated this year. Hey, big game Friday night.” You know. Steve

Jay stated how he wishes that he had someone to warn him about how much he’d miss high school football. Jay went on to describe how he makes a point to warn current high school football players about how much they will miss playing the game.

So I try to go and help out the oldest kids who are younger than me with that decision cause I wish I had an older brother tellin’ me “hey, you’re gonna miss the crap out of this when you’re done. You better love every minute of it.” But you don’t realize what you have until it’s gone. Jay

Karter listed what he misses about high school football, touching on many of the major themes found in this research. In listing these areas of loss, Karter acknowledged that he misses all of it, or the whole experience of playing high school football.

Well, I miss playing. I miss the people, like your teammates. Karter

I miss the games, teammates,...I miss it all mostly. Yeah. Pretty much all of it. Like I miss, you go to practice everyday for months. Karter

The ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** presented in the paragraphs above was comprised of three sub-themes: **Void**, **Memories**, and **Time**. The **Void** described by participants gave further description of how and what the participants missed about high school football. The participants reminisced using **Memories** of their days playing high school football. These **Memories** provided much of the narratives of the experience of retirement from high school football described in this study. Thirdly, the research participants used **Time** to establish context. This was done with participants describing times in their life that they missed, as well as participants reminiscing about times passed in their lives. Further descriptions of the ground and each of its sub-themes along with quotes from the research participants illustrating their significance are presented in the following section.

Void

The first sub-theme of the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** was **Void**. Many of the participants used the word “void” to describe what they lost when they retired from high school football. The research participants experienced a **Void** in their individual lives, describing how retiring from high school football led to their feeling like they had lost a part of themselves as illustrated in the main theme **The High School Football**

Player. This **Void** was also evident in the research participants' relationships with **Others**, as retiring from high school football caused separation from teammates, family, and community members. Finally, the participants described how being in the **Spotlight** was a major part of playing high school football. Thus, leaving the game in retirement meant that the ex-high school football players would no longer be on center stage and in the limelight, creating a natural **Void** in their lives.

Donovan described the **Void** he experienced in retiring from high school football. Also evident is the sub-theme of **Life Transition** that Donovan went through after retiring, as it took him four to five years to adjust to life without high school football.

And for all that to be taken away was just like, *man*, life was just really empty. There was just a void. And it took me probably four to five years to get over it.
Donovan

Donovan went on to further describe his experience of **Void** and **Life Transition** brought on by retiring from high school football. In the quote below, Donovan emphasized the **Void** he felt along with the sub-theme of **Emotion** in his description of feeling empty and unappreciated. Donovan continued to describe his process of taking on a different personality, illustrating the sub-theme of **Life Transition**.

Well, that's part of the emptiness. Not being appreciated as a football player I've had to fill with other things. Learning how to be a good person, I guess fun to be around, generous, caring, and all those things. I've had to re-devote my energy and my character to developing those things to fill that because I'm not a football player anymore. So why would people want to be around me or care about me or respect me? Cause people did at one point because that's what I did. Now people respect me because of my personality, who I am. I really had to devote energy to develop those things after football was over. Donovan

Luke also described the **Void** he experienced in retiring from high school football in terms of the amount of heart and effort he put into it. Also evident in this quote is the

role of the feelings of the participant leaving high school football, as Luke described the hurt and loss he experienced.

And as much effort as you put into football, you put your entire heart into it, so when things don't go your way it hurts more than ever. And then all of a sudden you don't have it anymore you feel like there's a void in your heart to not put in that kind of effort and not caring about something that much. Luke

Even the participants who themselves did not report experiencing a **Void** following retirement from high school football acknowledged that **Void** is a part of the retirement experience for many. Here, John described how he observed many ex-high school football players experiencing this **Void** by losing a piece of themselves in the retirement process while also emphasizing the significance of this loss.

...some guys it's a real big deal like a whole part of them is gone. John

Luke described the **Void** he experienced in retiring from high school football by touching on the sub-theme of **No Comparison**. In this quote, Luke stated how he will always have a **Void** in his life from not having high school football. He went on to describe the root of his **Void** as stemming from not having the type of **Competition** that he had only found in high school football.

I'll probably have that void the rest of my life. You know I'll always feel like nothing comes close. That's why I'll probably play softball until I'm like 50 or 60 years old, you know. Just looking for some sort of competition. Luke

Participants did not limit what they missed to the stereotypically positive aspects of high school football. Jay exemplified this in his quote detailing how he even now misses the hard two-a-day practices.

I wish I had two-a-days. I'd do anything to go back to two-a-days. Back then I hated it, but now I'm like "that was nothing. What are you complainin' about?" You didn't realize how great you had it. Jay

Participants in this study used the sub-theme of **Void** to illustrate their experience of undergoing the loss of high school football in their lives, describing what they lost, the emotions the loss triggered, and the coping strategies they implemented to deal with the loss. In the next section, the second sub-theme of **Memories** is described.

Memories

The second sub-theme of the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** was **Memories**, accounting for the reminiscing piece of the ground. An interesting finding in this research was that the participants used a considerable portion of their interviews about retiring from high school football to discuss descriptions of their playing days. These descriptions were all told in the form of **Memories** recounted from past experiences playing high school football. Participants used **Memories** to describe what they had lost due to not having high school football in their lives, setting the stage for them to miss high school football and experience a **Void**. Karter and John both stated how memories played a role in their experience of retiring from high school football.

You remember it all...It's just memories upon memories. Karter

I have a lot of memories and all of that and I'll always remember that... John

Jay acknowledged that the **Memories** that are a part of his experience of retiring from high school football are ones that will be with him for the rest of his life.

It's something you're gonna think about, well I know I'm gonna think about for the rest of my life. Jay

James reinforced the endurance of memories of high school football, describing how they will live forever in conversation.

There's countless memories.... I don't know, just all kinds of memories. Conversations about football will last forever. James

Many of the participants used **Memories** to describe highlight moments of their high school playing days. In the first example, Nick described a great play that one of his friends made and how exciting it was for him to see his friend succeed, thus including the sub-themes of **Team Camaraderie** and **The Play**.

I just remember one play in particular, like our quarterback was flushed out of the pocket and he just threw this 'no chance in heck' pass to the receiver, my one friend (name) who's been my friend since like fifth grade I would say. But it was just a crazy play. (Name) fell down and like caught the ball on his back, like I was just amazed by that. And I don't know what connection him being my friend is but I just looked at it a little bit differently. It was kinda like I caught the ball, you know. Nick

Karter recalled the enjoyment that he and his teammates experienced during a game in which they were winning by a large margin. The sub-themes of **Team Camaraderie** and **Emotion** are also evident in his words.

I remember we were up by 30 points on a team. We were talkin', we were laughin' with each other on the field. We know this team can't do anything. We were laughin' at 'em. We were talkin' garbage to the team. Gettin' in their face and we were just havin' a good time. Karter

Steve had **Memories** of a personal accomplishment from his playing days. The sub-themes of **The Play** and **Hitting** are illustrated.

I guess I remember when we played _____ specifically. They had this fullback and linebacker who was just ridiculous. I mean he was just mowing our guys over. And I'd never really played on the offensive line until that point. It was like our second or third game of the season. I'd practiced on offensive line but I hadn't been in on game situations. But our guy was just getting demolished and so coach put me in there. He was like, "I don't care what happens, you hit that guy." Steve

Luke took a different approach to **Memories**, recalling the details of the environment that reminded him of high school football. In the quote below, Luke focused on the smell that he remembered from his playing days. The sub-theme of **Friday Night** is also present in Luke's statement.

Right. I'll tell you about the first, well maybe not the first but one of the most vivid times I remember that smell. It was the first time I was going to have a big part in a varsity game. It was my junior year and I remember coming out and I can still when I think about it I can still smell that smell in my nose. It's one of those smells that like you'll never forget. When you think real hard about it you can kinda, you can still smell it. Luke

The quotes from participants listed above described the role of **Memories** in the experience of retiring from high school football, including descriptions of game highlights, the team, and the fun that was had while establishing the feelings of loss and **Void** that came from no longer having those experiences. In the next section, the third sub-theme of **Time** in the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** is described.

Time

The participants used the measure of **Time** to temper their **Memories** of their days playing high school football. Certain times of year that fostered memories of the game, the **Time** spent playing the game, and the **Time** once used up by high school football were emphasized. They illustrated the **Void** caused by retiring from high school football. John described the times of the year and particular situations that triggered **Memories** of high school football.

like when you come back for the holidays and see the guys. Someone's gonna bring up football or something like that. Like when you're watching an NFL game and someone will be like "oh you remember when this guy did this." Stuff like that is when you start thinking about it. I guess that time in the summer when

3-a-days start up again, it's like "ahhh I don't have to go to 3-a-days." You know what I mean. John

Luke reiterated John's statements above, describing how it feels wrong for him to not be playing high school football at certain times of the year.

in late August, early September and what not, that first Friday night when you smell that smell that's in the air and you know it's football season and it's Friday night and you don't have anything to do. You're not trying to strap up and hit somebody. And it's like "I feel like I should be doing this." I'll never forget that after that first year. Luke

Luke continued to describe this point, illustrating how this **Time** of year still impacts him in this way and how this memory is triggered by the smell in the air.

Like right after the time change and it's dark at like 6:30 or 7 and you can smell that fall smell in the air. It's like "everybody should be in my stadium and I should be on the field warming up right now getting ready to play football and I'm not." I've thought about that every year. Every time that time of year hits I've thought about it. That was '94 the last time I played so that was, it'll be 12 years this fall...since the last time I strapped up and played football. But it never goes away. Luke

Karter described the times he played high school football with his friends and teammates as some of the best times of his life, also representing the sub-theme of **Team Camaraderie**. He then went on to describe how the relationships with his teammates have lasted through **Time**.

I played with a bunch of guys since seventh grade and we're great friends. I see those guys today and it's five, six years later and we still talk about those times we played on the field and moments on the field and laughin' and that kind of stuff. It's probably why I enjoyed it the most. Karter

Karter continued to describe his **Time** playing high school football as some of the best times of his life. Here, the sub-theme of **Work** was evident in Karter's description of the

times he and his teammates would stay after practice, spending extra **Time** together to become better football players.

That's probably some of the best times was when we, the entire group, like eight seniors. We'd stay after practice and play two on two drills, pass the ball, run sidelines, all that stuff. And then we'd probably stay a couple hours in the gym. The coaches would probably be gone. Karter

Steve reinforced Karter's quote above, discussing the **Time** devoted to working to become a better high school football player.

Cause it's a major time commitment, football. Most of the year, you play 3 or 4 months of the year. Well, the other 8 or 9 months you spend your time, in the morning you get there at 6 o'clock for workouts and weightlifting. Steve

Another piece of the sub-theme of **Time** is that which is now vacant and a **Void** was once filled by playing high school football. Below Jay stated how his life has changed from high school to college as he now has much more free **Time** than he did when he was playing football.

I didn't have too much time on my hands in high school. It's totally different from now in college. College you've got a lot more free time. I don't have practice at 3:30 anymore Monday through Friday. You've got a lot more free time on your hands. Jay

Steve also described how having more free **Time** since leaving high school football changed his life and the attempts he made to fill that **Time**, including focusing on school and drinking.

I didn't have time to drink before and now all of a sudden I have all this time...To fill time, yeah. Definitely started to focus on school. Quit taking electives like gym and stuff like that. Took all business electives and I graduated early from school. Steve

A career playing high school football will often contain both good and bad times. Here, Jay described how he will remember the good and bad times, and the winning and losing times for the rest of his life.

“And something I’m gonna think about every so often, think about the good times, think about the bad times, the winning times, and of course the losing times. Those are things that are gonna stick with you the rest of your life. I’m a firm believer of that.” Jay

Finally, Karter described how the **Time** of his high school days playing football are over and how life has now forced him to go to work and pay bills, leaving him no more **Time** for the sport.

I’d like to play football again or get involved in flag football or something like that, but time, life takes it away from you. Gotta go to work. Karter

Lastly, Karter recalled the high moments of playing high school football, a **Time** he described as the best of his life, expressing a longing to have those moments in **Time** back.

You want those moments. Karter

Missing & Reminiscing Summary

Retiring from high school football led participants in this study to miss the game deeply and reminisce about their playing days. Missing high school football was represented by the significant **Void** that not having the game anymore caused in the lives of the participants in the present study. As the retired high school football players reminisced, their feeling of **Void** was present in their **Memories** of days passed playing the game. The sub-themes of **Void**, **Memories**, and **Time** seemed to work together to ignite feelings of nostalgia and loss for the retired high school football players. The

research participants described how certain times of the year triggered their **Memories** of high school football. They gave detailed accounts of the **Time** spent playing the game, discussed how the game filled **Time** in their lives, and how that **Time** is now unoccupied in their lives.

Figure-Ground Juxtaposition

Existential-phenomenological research often yields results with a thematic structure containing a figure and a ground. The figure represents the main themes from the participants' transcripts describing their experience, while the ground represents the underlying thematic foundation. May and Yalom (1989) describe the relationship between salient issues, or figure, and the overall context, or ground, as the key ingredient in determining the meaning of an experience. In this study, the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** described above served as the context of the experience of retiring from high school football. The following sections outline the remaining themes representing the salient figural piece of the participants' experience of retirement.

Theme I. The High School Football Player

The first major theme that emerged from the phenomenological investigation of the experience of retiring from high school football was **The High School Football Player**, focusing on all the individual issues encountered by the research participants leaving the game. These individual issues are further detailed in the sub-themes of **Identity, Body, Emotions, Shoulda Coulda Woulda's, Reason: Decision or Deselection, and Life Transition.**

Identity

The game of high school football had a significant influence on the individual identities of the research participants in this study. For these young men, retiring from high school football not only meant that they were leaving a game they loved, it also meant they would have to redefine their identities that had been built on being athletes who were part of a team and high school community. In the first quote, Donovan described how he had to change his **Identity** from a football player to someone else since he would no longer be looked upon as a football player after retiring.

I think you have an identity as a football player. Then all of a sudden, that's part of the being reborn is that you have to re-establish yourself as someone other than a football player. Cause people aren't gonna look at you as a football player anymore. Donovan

Karter noted the investment he gave in his life to football, describing how he was always doing something related to football.

I was always playing and involved in football my whole life. Karter
Steve's quote complements this statement by describing how being invested in his high school football team created his **Identity**, something he didn't realize until it was over.

Yeah, 'cause your team was your identity in a major way...something else you don't necessarily recognize when you're part of it. Steve

Many of the quotes focused on the way that the participants were able to stand out among their peers by playing high school football and how their participation in the sport separated their identities from **Others**. Here, Jay described the different feeling he experienced going to school after football was over and only being a *student*, rather than a *student-athlete*.

That's definitely something you're gonna miss out of the situation of just going to school and not playing a sport and just going in as a *student*, not an *athletic student*. So you're an athlete I guess you'd say...People looked at you not as a student but as a student-athlete who was representing their school. Jay

Steve reinforced Jay's comments, describing in the quotes below how important what he did was to his **Identity**. Since what he did was football, when it was over he experienced a difficult adjustment period.

Even going into classrooms and talking to teachers, it's like "oh what do you do?" "Oh, I'm a football player." "Oh, you're on the football team..." It's an easy way for you know distinguishing yourself. Like "yeah, I'm (name). I play football for (high school)..." "What do you do?" "I play baseball." Or, "what do you do?" "I play football on the team. I'm a football player. That's what I do." There's no question about what you do. Everyone knows what you do...Ok, then all of a sudden it's "you used to play football, now what do you do?" "Oh, well I do school." What else do you do cause you have a crapload of free time? What do you do? There's no major, there's no single thing that you can say that you do. Steve

Donovan described the impact that retiring from high school football had on his **Identity**, comparing it to being divorced and being reborn. Donovan used the metaphor of being reborn to describe how he was able to leave his **Identity** as an athlete and high school football player in order to become a new person. Also present in this quote are the sub-themes of **Void** and **Life Transition**.

It's kinda like you die as one person and come back as another. I honestly can compare it to being divorced since I've been able to go through both. That it's just...complete life rebirth. Being reborn as a different person. Cause you're an athlete and your constantly focused on being mentally prepared to go compete in this violent sport and in society you're not allowed to be like that. You have to just change the way you live your life. If you live your life as a football player in everyday life you don't get along well with people so you gotta change it. I think that's the void I'm talkin' about. Donovan

Finally, Nick explained how he has successfully changed his **Identity** from that of an athlete playing high school football to a student in college and a musician playing in a band.

...school and like band stuff. Yeah. That's just more of who I am now. Nick

Body

The second sub-theme of the main theme of **The High School Football Player** was **Body**. In their interviews, each participant referred to their **Body** as either a reason for their retirement due to injury or deselection, as a vessel that still wants to play the game, or by describing the changes that have occurred to it in the years following their retirement from football. In the first quote, Steve described how a knee injury he suffered ultimately led to his retirement from high school football.

Retiring from high school football really sucked cause I retired cause of an injury...Tore a meniscus. Had it repaired. Was on crutches for a month, tried to come back. Was in therapy for about a month or so. I tried to go back, I tried to go back three times. Steve

Bob also referred to his **Body** while describing how his shoulder injury impacted him.

This same injury would later result in college coaches terminating their recruitment of Bob to play at the next level.

I had a shoulder injury that I had to have surgery on in between my junior and senior year and I lost about 20 pounds of muscle and I wasn't able to workout for a little over a year. It was pretty bad. Bob

The ex-high school football players interviewed in this study were aware how their bodies would limit and prevent their opportunities of advancing to play college football. Here, Steve described how his small size and his skin color would make it

unlikely for him to compete in college football, a game dominated by larger, black players.

I recognized that I was five nine, white, and 180 pounds and I was not gonna play college ball, not anywhere that I would want to play. Steve

Karter also gave his height and weight, describing how his small size made him aware that he would have to retire before reaching the college ranks.

It was something that I knew was gonna happen cause what am I? Five eight, 150 pounds? Karter

Karter also told how his father warned him that he would not be big enough to play football in college when he was a young child, illustrating one of the roles of the sub-theme **Family**.

He was like, “you’re gonna have to grow so much. You’re gonna be short. It’s in your genes.” Karter

Some participants described how their bodies have changed after retirement from not having the rigorous workouts and dietary habits they maintained while playing high school football. In the quote below, Nick joked about the weight he has gained after his retirement.

I see myself 25 pounds heavier (ha ha). Nick

Bob also discussed the changes his body has undergone by explaining the difficulty he has had staying in shape without football to motivate and structure his workouts.

So that makes it harder to keep in good shape. I still consider myself in good shape but not the same kind of shape that I was with football. Practice after practice after practice. Bob

Finally, Luke took a different approach to focusing on the theme of **Body** by describing how the smell of the air in the fall made his **Body** feel like it did when he was playing high school football, re-igniting his desire to put the pads on and play again.

I'll never forget that after that first year, smelling that smell in the air on a Friday night and being at (university) and being like "dude, I should be playing football right now." And it wasn't, you knew you weren't gonna, but it's like all of a sudden your body's geared up and you can feel that same feeling about going out and playing football. Luke

Emotions

The third sub-theme of the main theme of **The High School Football Player** depicts the strong **Emotions** that the participants experienced during their retirement from high school football. These **Emotions** were recollected by the participants, focusing on events from both their days playing the game as well as the days after their retirement. Below are some quotes from the participants detailing the role that **Emotions** played during their experience of retiring from high school football.

In this first quote, Luke described the peak emotional experience that occurred on the night of a game, also illustrating the sub-theme of **Friday Night**.

Well, the Friday night thing, it's such an emotional high, to know that everybody's coming out. Luke

Karter also noted this emotional apex, describing the exhilarating feeling of victory. However, Karter also referred to the depressing low point experienced in losing. Since every game is assured to have a winner and a loser, all participants in high school football may be forced to undergo this polar emotional experience.

You win, you lose. You win, you feel like you're the best. You lose, you feel like *shit*. Karter

Finally, Luke emphasized the strong emotional experience he had after his last game, detailing the finality of the end of his high school career. In Luke's experience, the emotion brought on by retirement from high school football was so strong that it stirred tears for both him and his teammates. Also evident in this quote are the sub-themes of **Memories** and **Team Camaraderie**.

“The one thing I remember most about it was after the last game, I got like real emotional after the last game, when it was over. There was a huge build up going into your last game and you know that's going to be your last game. You know you're not going to play in college anywhere...It didn't really hit me until the end of the game. Then in the locker room after the game I saw guys crying. People were real emotional about it. Then all of a sudden it kinda hits you all at once that that'll be the last time you ever put pads on and play football. And it's like, I started bawlin'. Like right then.” Luke

A large piece of the experience of playing high school football was the feeling of respect that these players achieved through their participation and accomplishments in the sport. John described how he enjoyed both earning respect as a team leader and giving respect to others while playing high school football.

You can get a lot of respect and show respect back, be a leader. John

Participants expressed the feeling of pride they experienced while playing high school football. Nick described the pride he gained through high school football, detailing how playing the game in front of his **Family** and friends made him feel proud. Also evident in this quote are the sub-themes of **Family** and **Community**.

“So like just to see, or just to have like all your friends and their parents and stuff see you and your team do a good job, it just gives you like a proud feeling...Makes you feel proud.” Nick

The simplicity of just having fun playing a game emerged as a major **Emotion** experienced by the participants in this study. In this section the statements by the players

are brief and to the point, reflecting the fun they had in high school football. The sentiments of John, Bob, Brad, and Karter are listed in the quotes below.

It's fun. John

That was fun...I just really enjoy organized football. Bob

Yeah, it's just fun. Brad

I had fun. It was never like "this sucks. It's not where I want to be." I was just havin' a fun time. Karter

Although Karter described never having a bad experience playing high school football, other participants did not share his one-sided, positive feeling. The results of this study revealed that although the participants had fun and enjoyed playing high school football, many experienced the feeling of relief when the last game was over and it was time for them to retire. Bob described his relief that his high school football playing days were over.

...it's a relief that I don't have to worry about that kind of thing. Bob

Nick outlined all the things he disliked about high school football, suggesting his relief that it was all over. In the last sentence of his quote, however, Nick stated that he'd like to go back and play.

Sometimes I think that just because the coaches would be pissed they'd condition you more than you needed to just as like punishment. That's like the kind of stuff I don't agree with. But the other stuff about practice I didn't miss is just standing around like sweating, like waiting to do something. Especially when I was a sophomore and you had to wait your turn to even get on the scout team. Playing scout team defense and getting run over by the first team offense wasn't that fun. In a way it was but compared to senior year it wasn't as fun. But I mean I wish I could do that now, you know. Nick

Luke reiterates this inner-conflict between the sadness of leaving the game and the relief of no longer having to experience its negative characteristics. Also present in Luke's interview are the sub-themes of **Team Camaraderie** and the **Void** left by retiring from high school football.

But then, you know for four years you do that and all of a sudden it's over and you're never gonna do anything like that again, that just drains you. I was ok until I looked around and saw all my buddies that I had been doing that with for four years and it's like you know they're hurt. They're broken up. Then you start thinking about everything, like all the stuff you did, all the practices, all the blood, all the sweat, all the tears, everything you've done up to that point. And it's like "holy shit, I'm never gonna do this again." And you just, you just, you break down. It's like a relief and a sadness all at the same time. Cause you're sittin' there thinkin' "aw man, I never have to go to 2-a-days again," which you're happy about cause they suck. But then you're sad cause as bad as it sucked you still loved it. Luke

Shoulda Coulda Woulda's

As stated in the description of the ground above, each player used **Memories** to describe their experience of retiring from high school football. However, these **Memories** were not limited to the positive experiences. The sub-theme of **Shoulda Coulda Woulda's**, which is basically regret, emerged as the participants described the negative **Memories** they experienced while playing high school football. These high school football players have taken their regret with them into retirement.

In the first quote, Donovan described all the things he thinks about that he could have done better while playing to help his team win.

Just thinking about all the things I could've done better. Like I could've run a certain play better. I could've executed on a block better or made a tackle, made a big play I didn't make to help my team win the game. Donovan

Karter's feelings of regret centered on wishing he could go back and change the outcome of his last high school game in the state final four.

I wish that we could go back to that time and someone could say something or, I don't know. It seemed like we were out of it. Maybe when I feel that I could've done more in a game where I played bad. When I feel like I didn't contribute or somethin' like that, when I made a bad play... There's a lot I wouldn't change. But that last game... I'm not just disappointed in myself, I was disappointed like as a team. There's games that I wish that I, like now thinkin' about it I'm like "I shoulda did that." But, you know, it's hard to think like that. You're how much older, you're mentally different, you're like "what was I thinking?" Karter

Karter's sentiment outlined above is reiterated by Jay's quote in which he details his yearning to go back to his final game in the state championship and feel more certainty about the amount of effort he put into it.

And to walk off that field losing by 6 points with a chance to win the game really put that thought in my mind where I had to think "did I really do everything in my realm of possibility to win this game? Did I put in 110%?" And you can't blame it on one play or one player, but it gave me an aspect of "you wouldn't be thinking this unless you went out and you were sure you did that." So whatever I need to do from now on in the future I need to make sure I put in 110%. I need to make sure everybody around me puts in 110% cause I don't want to walk off the field or out of the office or anything involving life unsure of myself like I did when I walked off the field for the last time. Jay

John's regret focused on the mistakes he remembers making and the responsibility he had to the team as the quarterback, pondering what might have been if things had gone differently.

...we all make mistakes and I think about "well, what if I'd have done this differently or maybe thrown that ball a little better." You know you're always thinking. "What if I'd have thrown a better block instead of standing"... You know I played QB so you're always thinking how everything is gonna be affected. You know, I should've told the coach "hey I want to do this," instead of something else. But you know there's always something like that. Everyone is always thinking something like that. Basically I'll like look back at games we lost and think of something, small things you know what I mean? Like "if this guy would've done this." Stuff like that. John

Jay's regret was not limited to memories of his playing days. In the quotes below, Jay described the regret he feels over making the decision to retire after high school football and not continuing to play at the NCAA Division II or III level.

“If it doesn't work out, you can always transfer. At least you tried.” That would be my thing. I wish I did. I wish I tried. Cause I don't know now what could've been. Jay

Any player that didn't go into college sports and goes to another school, basically their chance is gone. You can go later, but it's not as easy. That'd be the one thing I'd look back at and reconsider. Jay

Finally, John summed up the feeling of regret experienced by players in this quote where he named the sub-theme. Also evident here is the element of **Time** and the long lasting impact that regret has had on John, as it is still present for him today.

I still...think about the 'coulda shoulda wouldas' kind of things. John

Reason: Decision or Deselection

Each of the participants in this study retired from high school football. The act of retiring from the sport was prompted by a particular reason for each participant, and these reasons were mentioned in their interviews. Each **Reason** for retirement came either through a **Decision** the individual made to leave the game or through the individual's **Deselection**. **Deselection** is defined as not being good enough to be on the team and thus not being chosen to play by the coaches.

In the first quote, Steve described the frustration of being deselected from his football team. Steve's **Deselection** however came while still in high school after he experienced an injury that hindered his play. This **Deselection** is obviously related to the sub-theme of **Body**.

Well it was definitely something I had never experienced before. I had never been in that situation before. I was always good enough to make the team, to be on the team. I had never tried out for a team and not made it before. Steve

Injury and the sub-theme of **Body** were also present in Bob's description of experiencing **Deselection**. In Bob's case, injury caused college recruiters to lose interest in him leaving him with no scholarship offers.

I had a chance to go on at the next level and play at (Division I University), but I had a shoulder injury that I had to have surgery on in between my junior and senior year and I lost about 20 pounds of muscle and I wasn't able to workout for a little over a year. It was pretty bad. So the letters just stopped coming and the phone calls. Bob

Donovan's retirement contained both **Decision** and **Deselection** aspects. In his quote below, Donovan explained how he was not offered scholarships by NCAA Division I institutions, the level at which he wanted to play. This **Deselection** occurred due to Donovan's lack of size and speed compared to other Division I football players. At this point, Donovan then made the **Decision** to retire rather than playing at a lower level.

Well, just cause I wanted to go to a Division I school and my size and speed wasn't going to allow me to start right away and that's what I was concerned about. I didn't want to sit around and wait to play. And then when I came to the conclusion that it was going to be way too much work and no rewards what so ever. There was a good possibility that I was never going to step on the field. And it probably didn't have much to do with my athletic ability, but just what the coaches thought of me. Saying I'm too slow and too small so they won't take a chance on me playing. So then I thought, "well, I'll go to Division III." And then I came to the conclusion that I'd just be paying to play football and that I had better things to do with my time. Then with the whole eligibility thing with the NCAA, you have five years to get four years of eligibility in, I just didn't have time. It wasn't worth it. I wouldn't be able to prove myself to get the playing time that I thought I deserved. I just decided to move on. Donovan

Jay shared Donovan's desire to play at a large school and made a similar **Decision** to not continue playing football in college when he was deselected by major colleges. Inherent

in Jay's **Decision** was his desire to shift his focus from football to school and his future career in business.

But, back then, coming out of high school in (state), you used to (name of big football college), big time football. So those small, Division III schools, they don't even apply. But if you were in a different town I think it'd be different. You know, to play for any small school would be great. But you come from (region) you only want to play for (name of big football college) and I think that was something bad that I looked at...I got a bunch of offers and my thought at the time was you know, "hey, I'm not gonna play on Sundays. My job is not going to be to play football so I need to go and prepare myself for the world and what job I'm really going to have Monday through Friday." So that was why I didn't go. I decided to go and get my business degree at (university) cause it has a better business school instead of going and playing football somewhere less comparable.
Jay

The process of making the actual **Decision** to not continue playing football in college was discussed by the participants in this study. Here Nick described how feeling burnt out on football led him to choose retirement over playing at the NCAA Division III level.

Plus I started out so young I kinda got burnt out on it...I just needed to not play anymore. Nick

Finally, Jay recollected his experience of making the **Decision** to not continue playing football in college. This was a very stressful and difficult decision for Jay, costing him sleepless nights and prompting him to seek the advice of his coaches and **Family**. In the end, Jay chose to retire so he could stay closer to his **Family**.

You know, sitting in bed thinking "what do I want to do?" Especially as it kept getting closer and closer and you had to make that decision. You did a lot of soul searching. You had to sit down and you had to think "what was the point?" And I talked to my counselors and I talked to my football coaches, it seemed like I was in there everyday just talking about what I need to do. I got the same answer, "what's your heart telling you? You need to do what you think you need to do."...You're just like, "what's more important?" You have to sit down and

decide “do I want to play college football or do I want to be there for my family? My brother?” It wasn’t no comparison. Jay

Life Transition

The last sub-theme under the main theme of **The High School Football Player** that emerged from the participants’ interviews was the **Life Transition** that each was forced to undergo upon retiring from high school football. In this section, participants’ quotes described how their lives changed from focusing on football everyday to having to find other things to do. Participants went on to discuss how their goals changed and how they had to find new passions in life to pursue.

These ex-high school football players recognized the large role that high school football represented in their lives during their careers, setting them up to experience a major loss when it was over. In the first quote, Jay described how playing high school football for a big time program consumed the majority of his life.

I was fortunate enough to come from a school with big time athletics, you play that sport nine out of twelve months of the year. You don’t really know much to do other than that sport. Jay

Steve continued to emphasize this theme, elaborating on how difficult it was for him to adjust to life without football after being in that environment for so long.

It’s definitely a huge adjustment cause you go from having something everyday and knowing you have something everyday to “no, I don’t really have anything going on today.” Steve

James also stated how the inevitable end of high school football marked the beginning of a difficult transition in his life.

I won’t enjoy that again and I know that’s over and I can’t have it. So that’s what’s hard. James

While describing this sub-theme of **Life Transition**, the participants described their awareness that their high school days were over and that they would have to move on to new things. In this first quote, Bob describes how he no longer has any association with his high school now that he has retired from high school football, a stark contrast from the commitment and allegiance required to be a member of the team.

...my association with the high school itself is pretty much non-existent now.
Bob

John described how he had to move on in life away from high school football and on to other things.

Yeah it's like a part of my life that's over so I kinda gotta move on. Take the next step I guess you would say. Work towards that, whatever your goals are now.
John

Karter depicts how for him, moving on in life and leaving high school football meant a transition from playing to working. Working and hard labor to earn a paycheck and financial responsibility became his daily norm.

You know, and I wasn't, when you graduate it's like a big deal. Life like hits you. Football's not the only thing you gotta worry about. You gotta make a living too. You have like bills and stuff like that. Karter

Donovan summarized how much high school football impacted his life, setting him up to endure a difficult adjustment, or **Life Transition**, when high school football was over and he had to do other things with his life.

Basically it was a complete life transition. To me, losing high school football was a complete life transition. It's what you focus your life on everyday. It's what I wanted to do. It's all I did for four years of my life. Everything I did was for football. I had to be on the honor roll to play football, so I was on the honor roll. I ate, I dieted for high school football. I ran, worked out. I lifted weights to play high school football. I wrestled to improve my ability in high school football.
Donovan

Clearly, those participants who were able to shift their interests and passions to things other than football had an easier time with the **Life Transition** caused by retirement. Nick described how replacing the **Time** and passion he once gave to football with a band he now belongs to helped ease his transition out of football smoothly.

I've kinda had like replacements in other aspects of life. Like, not sports... This band that I'm in. You get kind of the same feeling after playing a live show you would get like scoring a touchdown... Just accomplishment and being proud of yourself and members of your team or band. It's just like scoring a touchdown and hearing those cowbells when you finish a song you wrote and practiced and you hear the crowd erupt. Same feeling. Nick

Bob echoed these sentiments, describing how doing new things has helped him deal with not having high school football.

Overall it's been all right cause I've been getting into new things. Pretty much when football ended I had about a month and I was moving out of the house into (university) so a lot of the, my mind is really just trying to get into the new surroundings instead of missing the old. Bob

Finally, Donovan described how playing intramural sports and focusing on other things in life aided him in his **Life Transition** during high school football retirement. The main sub-themes of **Memories**, **Time**, and **Staying Close to Sport** are also evident in his words.

“Just basically I knew that it was time to make that transition. I guess I can look back with happiness now with fond memories cause it was a part of my life. You know, I was done holding on. It was time to go. And that's when I really started getting into coaching, playing intramural type sports. That kinda helped me get through that.” Donovan

The High School Football Player Summary

Participants in this study described a number of individual issues that they encountered while experiencing retirement from high school football. **Identity** as a sub-

theme represented the changes that each participant underwent regarding the type of person that both they and others saw in themselves. The sub-theme of **Body** illustrated how the participants' physicality impacted their reason for retirement. Also included under this sub-theme was the participants' descriptions of how their bodies changed during retirement from high school football. The sub-theme of **Emotions** detailed the range of feelings experienced by these retired high school football players, including respect, pride, fun, and relief. **Shoulda Coulda Woulda's** were used by the research participants as a sub-theme to express the regret they felt looking back at their football careers. Under this sub-theme, participants portrayed their desire to give more effort or go back and fix the mistakes they made in big games. **Reason: Decision or Deselection** referred to the instigating factor causing the individual to retire from football as discussed by each participant in terms of a choice they made to stop playing or as being forced to retire due to not being chosen by a coach. Finally, the sub-theme of **Life Transition** was used by the participants to illustrate the changes that they were forced to make in their lives when they retired from high school football.

Theme II. The Others

The second major theme that emerged from the research participants' transcripts was **The Others**. This section focuses on the different roles and influences that other people had on the research participants' experiences of retiring from high school football, and is broken down into the sub-themes of **Team Camaraderie**, **Family**, and **Community**. Quotes from the participants illustrating each of these sub-themes are presented in the following paragraphs:

Team Camaraderie

The first sub-theme under the main theme of **The Others** was the significance of **Team Camaraderie** for the participants, not only in their experience of retirement from high school football, but also in their lives. For many of the participants, their high school team consisted of their close friends, with football providing an opportunity to strengthen those relationships. John illustrated this point, including the sub-themes of

Memories and Time.

...something happens and you got a bunch of guys, you know, those are gonna end up being your closest friends after four years being around them and everything. They're gonna be the ones that help you when you're down or be with you when you're happy I guess you could say. My best friends all played football with me. Our memories aren't just from football; football just brought us closer together. John

In the quote below, Nick stated how being around his teammates and feeling that camaraderie is what he misses most about high school football.

What I miss about it is obviously the camaraderie, being with all your friends.
Nick

Brad reiterated Nick's sentiment, also voicing that the thing he missed most about high school football was the camaraderie he felt with his friends during the time spent playing the game, while also alluding to the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing**.

I miss, the biggest part I miss is just being out there with all the guys...I guess the fancy word, you miss the camaraderie. Brad

Luke asserted that the strong camaraderie felt in high school football is due to the hard work that teammates must endure together. The main themes of **No Comparison** and **Work** were also evident in Luke's statement.

Like no other sport has that and that's why I think no other sport builds camaraderie like football does cause you go through hell. Luke

Luke continued to compare high school football to other situations. In the quote below, he described how the camaraderie experienced in high school football is stronger than that experienced in the work world.

Like at a job or anywhere out in the workforce, you don't see that. People don't help each other out. Everyone's more about number one than they are about team out in everyday life. It was all about team and doing what you had to do together to win the game, at least it was with my team. I don't find that camaraderie anywhere else in life like there was on the field....You never feel like you're on a team again. Luke

Steve described how the camaraderie of his team enabled him to get to know students of other races that he otherwise may not have met. Steve described how football brought him closer to his teammates, and how the relationships he formed in high school still remain years later.

Other than that, the camaraderie of the team, getting to know, especially like at (high school), we're less than 2% black and less than 5% minority. And the football team had 6 or 7 black guys and I probably would have never gotten to know them otherwise. It's not that I have something against black people, it's that (high school) has 3,000 people and I didn't know any of the black kids. I mean out of 3,000 there's probably like 13 or 14 black kids. And I got to know some really good guys and make some really good friends even though we don't necessarily hang out on the weekends I know if I needed something I could call them even still today just because we were on the team at the time. We played together. I still see some guys around here and we talk about football just like it was yesterday. Steve

Karter touched on all the premises mentioned above, describing how his team was made up of good friends who have all remained close since retiring from high school football, and how being around the team is what he misses the most. The ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** and the sub-theme of **Emotion** are also present.

I played with a bunch of guys since seventh grade and we're great friends. I see those guys today and it's five, six years later and we still talk about those times we played on the field and moments on the field and laughin' and that kind of stuff. It's probably why I enjoyed it the most. Karter

Jay added another example of how the bonding that occurs between high school football teammates is a unique experience.

Just being around the team...Just being part of that team aspect of it. Being part of that family and bonding, going through the routine with those guys. That's something special you gain in athletics, whatever sport it may be. So, that's what you miss out on. Jay

The research participants described how being a member of the high school football team was like being a member of an exclusive fraternity. This fraternity was one that not everyone could belong to due to the demands of the sport, and was one that held a very close bond. In the first quote below, Jay asserted the similarity between a high school football team and a fraternity.

In a way I think it's kinda like a fraternity. Jay

Donovan went on to describe the fraternal bond that exists between high school football players which sets them apart from all others, serving to strengthen the **Team Camaraderie** that existed.

And that's the beautiful thing about high school football, cause once you've played it and you know someone else who's played it there's a bond you have. It's almost like you're all soldiers. You're all part of the same fraternity. And there's always that bond that you all have, no matter how good or how bad you all were. Donovan

Nick and Karter continued to express the special closeness experienced as a member of a high school football team, using the metaphor of a family instead of a fraternity.

...it turns into like kind of a brotherhood in a way. Nick

You're a family...it takes a certain kind of person. Karter

While the participants described the special bond that existed on their high school teams, they also specified that not everyone could be a member of this team. The second part of Karter's quote above illustrated his feeling that football was exclusive and was not for everyone. Below, Brad further described how everybody was not able to be a member of a high school football team.

You know, it's not for everybody. Everybody can't do it. Or do it well, might I say. They might be able to do it, but might not be good at it. Brad

Jay touched on the sub-theme of **Work**, insinuating that high school football is not for everybody due to the rigorous **Work** and commitment it takes to be a part of the team.

And if everybody could do it I think everybody would do it but not everybody can do it. And it's a lot of work. Like I said, if everybody could do it I think everybody would do it. But, you gotta decide "this is what I want to do." You can't have any ifs, ands, or buts questions about it. If you're gonna be in it you need to be 100% in it. Jay

Steve used simple numbers to describe how the members of a high school football team are a special minority in the school community. As Steve explained, the special minority that is the football team becomes even more special when the rest of the school community fills the stands to watch them play on Friday nights.

Everybody's looking to you and cheering you on, saying "hey, so and so did this," or "good job the other night." You know. Cause in a school of 3,000 you can either be one of those 50 guys on the football team or you can be one of those 2,900 in the stands...everybody's paying attention to those 50 guys in the uniforms playing the game... Steve

Luke provided further assertion that not everyone can play high school football.

In his quote below however, he took an additional step, stating that those who have not

played high school football cannot understand the **Work** that goes into being a member of the team.

So it's like nobody, you don't appreciate that unless you've done it. Like, you can hear how hard it is and you can be like "yeah man, that's hard." But unless you've done it you don't know how bad that sucks. Luke

Finally, Brad reinforced Luke's notion that not everyone can understand football, making a very definitive statement that playing high school football was such a unique and special experience that those who have not played the game will never be able to understand the experience of it.

I guess that no one will know what it's like except for guys like us. No one will know how it feels. I guess just people like me will be the only ones who feel and actually understand it, and are actually interested in it. I guess if you've never done it you'll never understand it. Brad

Family

The second sub-theme under the main theme of **The Others** is **Family**. In the section below, quotes from the research participants describe the role that their families had in both their playing careers and their experiences of retiring from high school football.

In the first quote, Steve described how his initial motivation to play football came from his parents' desire for him to do so.

Well, my parents are huge sports fans. They always wanted me to play. That's why I played from the time when I didn't even know what sports were. I would just go out there because my parents wanted me to be." Steve

Nick also provided a description of the early influence that **Family** can have on an individual's playing career, as he described how his father had him lifting weights and bench pressing at an early age to prepare for football.

My dad had me on a bench routine the summer after I was in fifth grade I think.
Nick

John described the importance of football in his **Family** and how watching him play brought the **Family** closer together.

Oh, we're a big football family I guess. I guess I was the first football player. I guess it's like they watched me when I was a football player in seventh grade and watched me kind of develop over the years...My family, that's just another way to bring us closer I guess. You know. Talk about (football) or that type of thing.
John

Jay also discussed how football was a way for his **Family** to stay close with each other, as he and his brothers all shared in the experience of playing the game in high school.

My family always stressed being close and football really brought me and my brothers close. There's four of us, there's four boys so I think that's just one of the best things we got is that bond. And we're gonna be best friends for the rest of our lives cause we all grew up doing the same things, playing sports and high school football. I think when we're 45, 50 years old we're all gonna be at the (name of high school) football games, being there cheering them on cause we've all been there and experienced it. Wore that same jersey at one time in our lives.
Jay

Luke described the pressure he felt from his parents and **The Others** to play well under **The Spotlight** in games every **Friday Night**.

There's pressure everywhere, from your peers, parents. Even if your parents don't pressure you you still feel pressure to not screw up so they don't look like an ass. Luke

Luke went on to describe how the felt pressure he felt to win games and not let people down linked his **Family** with his **Community**.

And I think they're intertwined cause you want to beat the other team for everybody that's coming out to watch you play. You want to be able to make the people that are coming out, like your parents and everybody that knows you, proud for what you're doing...When you do lose to somebody it's a big letdown.
Luke

Nick provided a lengthy description about the role his **Family** played in both his playing days and retirement. This description centered around his father, who spent his life playing and coaching football. Nick explained how his father was most understanding about his decision to retire from football after high school, more so than his mother and grandparents.

My dad like was huge in football. He coached for like 20 some years in high school. He played for a Division I school. But I never felt like pressure from him about anything. He coached our team freshman year but after that, he could've went on like after that and coached us, but he wanted to just let me be. He didn't want me to be the kid that like, whose dad was coaching the team and stuff like that. He thought it was fine freshman year but after that, I mean he was still around and helping with like lifting and stuff. But like my decision to play after high school was understood more easily by him than the rest of my family, because he knows what it takes and he knows everything you have to go through in playing in college compared to high school. He also knows me better than anyone in the world, so he could see why it wouldn't be for me. But some of my other family was real pissed. Like my grandparents and mom because, "oh, now we're not gonna get to see our son's name in the paper for scoring a touchdown" or something like that. Stuff like that, you know... I mean eventually my family was supportive of it. I think it was just the initial shock. To them it wasn't that clear, but to me it was clear." Nick

Karter described how his **Family** was very supportive of him while he went through the difficult process of retiring from high school football.

My family, my mom, there were big parts, and with the team. Everyone was real supportive. Karter

Jay's **Family** also played an integral role in his decision to retire from football, as his main reason for not playing in college was so that he could stay closer to his **Family**.

Sometimes you gotta realize what's more important, and I thought family at the time was more important. That was the final decision for me. Jay

Finally, Karter and Steve both emphasized how important high school football was in their lives by stating that they want their children to play someday, allowing the

experience of high school football to continue in their families through their children in the future.

If I had a son I'd want him to play high school football. Karter

My kids will definitely play football. Steve

Community

The third sub-theme under the main theme of **The Others** was **Community**. In this section, quotes from the research participants illustrate the function that their communities played in their experience of retiring from high school football.

Luke expressed the important role that high school football played in his community, with everyone in the town going to the games on Friday nights. Also apparent in this quote is **The Spotlight** placed on high school football players by the **Community**.

I lived in a small community so on Friday night in the fall everybody went to watch the football game. Luke

John reiterated the importance of high school football in his **Community** while also presenting the sub-theme of **Excitement**.

I mean football around here it's just really exciting because I don't know, when you actually know the people playing it makes it that much more exciting I guess. John

James described how football in his **Community** was so important that it was tradition.

My community, it's kind of a big deal at school. Football is kind of a big sport. We have a lot of tradition. James

Nick stated how going to high school and being part of a **Community** are intertwined.

Like when you're in high school you're basically part of a community, especially with how our Catholic school was. Nick

Karter described the great pride he took in representing his **Community** while playing high school football.

The pride is who you are. It's where you come from. Karter Donovan echoed Karter's sentiment, discussing how the fame he achieved in the **Community** while playing high school football made him feel proud, mixing in the sub-theme of **Emotion**.

Oh yeah, in high school I would have my youth minister come up and tell me how little kids would go up and tell him how they want to be like me or grow up and play like I did and things like that and it's just like, "holy crap." It's just huge, it makes you feel awesome. And ah, kids stopping, busses stopping by practice fields for you, school-wide pep rallies, people in the community noticing you and acknowledging you, it just feels so great. It feels like you're wanted and appreciated. Donovan

Brad also described the fame that playing high school football gave him in his **Community**. The main theme of **The Spotlight** was also evident in his statement.

Like, you get a little more recognition when you play football, in the community. More people recognized you. It was kind of a way of standing out. And now you don't have that. Brad

With the fame of playing high school football in **The Spotlight** of the **Community** came pressure. Here, Luke described the pressure he felt to play well for his **Community** and **Family**.

And there's pressure to not let the school down, not let the community down, not let your peers down...You feel like you're letting people down. You feel like you're letting community down, your parents down, your school down. You know, and it sucks to not win. Like I said, you feel like you're letting everybody down. Luke

The Others Summary

Participants in this study emphasized the role that others played in their experience of retiring from high school football, focusing on **Team Camaraderie**, **Family**, and **Community** as the sub-themes. The sub-theme of **Team Camaraderie** emphasized the closeness that the participants felt with their teammates while playing high school football. This closeness was strengthened by the unique, fraternal bond that developed by playing the sport together over the years, a closeness that was greatly missed during retirement. The research participants went on to describe the importance of **Family** and **Community** in their experiences of retiring from high school football, outlining how playing the game brought their families and communities together. Participants also described how high school football was extremely valued by both **Family** and **Community**, and how playing the game in front of both was a source of fame, pride, and pressure. Lastly, research participants described how their families and communities factored into their decisions to retire from the game.

Theme III. The Spotlight

The third and final main theme to arise in this study was **The Spotlight**, with the sub-themes of **Friday Night**, **The Play**, **Hitting**, **Excitement**, **Competition**, **Work**, **Staying Close to Sport**, and **No Comparison**. **The Spotlight** is a unique theme in this study as it represented the joining point for the themes of **The High School Football Player** and **The Others**, as the individual participants and other people met under **The Spotlight** of high school football games on **Friday Night**. The participants used the sub-

themes listed above to describe what it was like being watched by everyone in their school, **Family**, and **Community** both on and off the field.

In the first quote, John described how game day gave him a chance to show off his talents and have fun under **The Spotlight** with everyone watching him. This quote perfectly illustrated the overlapping of themes and sub-themes in this study, as **The Spotlight**, **The High School Football Player**, and **The Others** are all present.

It was like my chance to like I don't know, my chance to show my stuff. The spotlight was on me. It was just something to have fun with. People would watch and I'd have my family come and be proud. John

Karter described how much he enjoyed playing football with **The Spotlight** on him and the rush he felt hearing his name called on the loudspeaker after making a big play.

Well, I'm one of those people that like to be in the spotlight... There's nothing like when you make a play and you hear the crowd when you hear "tackle by (name)." And they say your name." Karter

Brad compared **The Spotlight** received by a high school football player to that of a movie star, stating that he felt famous during his playing days. The exclusivity discussed under the sub-theme of **Team Camaraderie** is also present in this quote.

Ahh, it's kinda like you're famous. You're like a movie star or something cause you've done that and no one else has. Brad

Nick used the sub-theme of **Memories** to describe the rush he experienced as a high school football player in **The Spotlight**, recalling the feeling he had when he heard the eruption of the crowd watching him make a big play. The sub-theme of **Emotion** is also present in this quote.

I was a running back so from my standpoint, if I would like start to break a run and just start going down the sidelines you just hear the crowd erupt and you hear like cowbells goin' and air horns goin' and stuff. Like you hear it, but it doesn't

distract you. It kinda motivates you to run faster. You're aware that everyone's there, like the whole crowd's behind you and your team. Makes you feel proud.
Nick

Jay described how as a football player **The Spotlight** was on him both on and off the field given the importance of the sport in his **Community**.

Everybody's focus was on football. You walked on campus, you were that symbol. Everybody looked at you and they were ready for that game. Jay

Brad further depicted the constant presence of **The Spotlight** for a high school football player on and off the field, telling how people he didn't know would approach him in public to congratulate him on his performance.

Well, I mean it feels good. Especially when you're a starter and all the people are at the games. Like when they see you in public or something, like see you in a restaurant or something. You don't know them, but they come up. They may know your name or something. They know that you played and congratulate you on a good game or good effort or something. It's just a good feeling to know, you know, you don't know them, they know you. Brad

Karter shared his concern about the temporary nature of being under **The Spotlight** in high school football, describing his fear of no longer being acknowledged and complimented in life when the game is over.

If you're a real proud person, and you like to be heard that you're good, to hear people say that. It's one thing I fear, you know people fear failure, but I like acknowledgement. Karter

Finally, Donovan described the reality of leaving **The Spotlight** when retiring from high school football, describing how he is no longer acknowledged or appreciated. For Donovan, his value as a person was clearly less when he could no longer play high school football. The sub-theme of **Void** is also evident in his words.

Yeah, it's like you're not appreciated as much...No one knows me. I'm not acknowledged. It doesn't necessarily always feel like I'm wanted. Donovan

The quotes above described the fame and rush the participants' experienced as a high school football player under **The Spotlight** in their communities, as well as the harsh let down when that spotlight no longer shined upon them. In the sections below, the participants further expound on the theme of **The Spotlight** using the sub-themes of **Friday Night, The Play, Hitting, Excitement, Competition, Work, Staying Close to Sport, and No Comparison.**

Friday Night

The major time and stage for high school players to be under the spotlight was during games on every **Friday Night**. In the section below, participants describe this sub-theme, providing a blend of **Memories**, descriptions, and insights about all the detail that comprise the thrill of playing high school football on Friday nights. Jay's statement illustrating the importance of games and Friday nights begins this section, with his tone adding emphasis to his words.

I mean Friday nights were *huge*. Jay Donovan echoed the importance of Friday nights, bringing in the sub-theme of **No Comparison** in his statement that there's nothing better.

There's nothing better than being on the sideline on Friday night. Donovan **Friday Night** served as the pinnacle of football filled lives led by the participants in this study. Given this importance, all the work, commitment, and focus put in by the high school football players and communities described in this study came to fruition on game days. Karter eluded to this importance in his quote below, describing how **Friday Night** was all that mattered in the world of high school football.

It was all about playing football and waiting for Fridays...You get ready, you go to battle every week. Karter

Steve emphasized this importance of Friday nights in the **Community** who expects victory every week.

On a Friday night every time you go out to play an opponent you could win that game. And you're expected to win that game. Steve

The spectacle of **Friday Night** was more than just the importance of winning. Here, Luke describes all the details that comprised the atmosphere on Friday nights playing games under the lights. For Luke, playing games on Friday nights was an experience he'll never forget.

And it's all about the atmosphere. Like it's a mix of like the concession stand, the trees, like my high school was in a field and you could smell the field, and the grass. All that kinda mixes together. And you smell everything. And the people, you hear all the noise and the people in the stands and everything. And it's just, it's just something that you'll never forget. Luke

Luke goes on to give a detailed description of the events that occurred on a typical game day, emphasizing the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing**.

I miss Friday as a whole. I miss going to school, wearing your jersey to school on Friday. And having everybody know that you're a part of the football team. You miss, I used to leave school early on Fridays, as early as I could, get out of school and go to the locker room and start getting your shit ready for the game that night. I miss getting dressed. I miss putting the pads on. I miss going out of the locker room and going to stretch in front of everybody that was at the game. You miss the opening kick off. You miss everything. That's Friday. You miss everything you do to get ready for the game. I miss the after-parties after the game. We used to always go up to the same pizza place after the game was over and everybody got there from the school, all the parents and everybody. I miss Friday as a whole. I miss the action from the game, just the whole feeling from the game. I miss the hitting, physical contact, blowin' some people up. I miss the big plays, celebratin' the big plays after they were over. You know, everything. I just can't say there's one thing I miss about it cause I miss the whole experience. I miss the experience as a whole. Luke

John summarized the notions described by Luke above, concisely stating how much he misses everything that encompassed high school football game days while touching on the sub-theme of **Excitement**.

I really miss like basically just game days. It's just really cool. The whole thing, getting ready, a lot of excitement during school. John

Brad illustrated the importance of game days by describing how his mind was focused on nothing but the game that was to be played later that night. This focus caused Brad to not be listening in class or even to people trying to talk to him on game day.

Well, on game days. On game day I'd be in class and they could be talkin' I wouldn't be listenin' to 'em. I wouldn't care. They'd say somethin' I wouldn't care, "I have a game today." If it was up to me I wouldn't even have school on those days as a football player. I'd just give 'em the day off cause you know they ain't concentratin' on school all day. They're sittin' around thinkin' about what they have to do that night, who they're gonna play. They're not thinkin' about math or anything like that. They don't care. Brad

Finally, Jay showed the importance of being a part of high school football games on Friday nights through his decision to not continue his football career playing in college in order to be able to watch his younger brother play high school football on Friday nights.

The sub-theme of **Family** is also present.

I made a promise to him that I'd be here for every game his senior year. So if I went and played college football I couldn't be out Friday nights going to see my brother play. Jay

The Play

One of the reasons that those interviewed for this study participated in high school football was the intrinsic joy each took from playing the game. In this section, the participants described what it was like to play football, detailing their experience of

making a big play. In the first quote, Nick expressed his love for just playing the game of football while also illustrating the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing**.

I just like the sport so I miss just going out and playing football on a regular basis.
Nick

Brad illustrated this same point, describing how much he loved playing.

I loved playin' games. I loved game day. That was my favorite time cause I loved playin' against somebody different... Brad

Donovan described the exhilarating feeling he had making a big play in a game.

To make a big hit or a big tackle or a sack or interception it was just like totally exhilarating. It was just AWESOME! It was fun. Donovan

Luke brought in the elements of **Family** and **Spotlight** in his description of playing the game, describing the consequences of either making or not making the play on **Friday Night**.

...you didn't want to be the guy in school on Monday that screwed up and lost your team the game. You know, you wanted to be the guy that made the play and helped your team win the game. Or at least didn't screw up so you got called out one way or the other (ha ha). You know. You wanted to be the even player or the guy who didn't screw up or the guy who made the good play (ha ha). Luke

Bob detailed the experience of **The Play**, breaking down all the intricacies that are involved in making a play properly.

Umm, just the experience of the play. Cause there are so many different aspects and you always have something you can improve on in your own play. You never do one play perfectly. I mean you can step with the right foot and use the right angles but you always have something else to work on. And I like that kind of feeling, but also just the way to think about which play to call for the situation. Like if the offense is in 3rd and five on the 35 then what kind of blitz would you run? You have to predict on what they are gonna run cause their style. Bob

In the final quote, Karter summed up the general feeling of the participants, stating that he wished he could keep playing once his final high school football game was over and have another opportunity to make **The Play**.

As soon as you get done with like your final game you're like, you just want to keep playing. Karter

Hitting

Another element of the game of football that garners **The Spotlight** and is lost in retirement is the physical nature of the sport witnessed through the **Hitting** that takes place on the field. Jay described this physicality in the first quote below.

...football in itself is very physical. Jay

The participants in this study portrayed both the enjoyment they took from **Hitting** while playing and how much they missed not being able to hit someone like they could during high school football games. Donovan's enjoyment of **Hitting** became evident as he was very animated and enthused describing the pleasure he took in laying into someone with a good hit during his playing days.

Ohh, that's the best thing about football. That was the best thing about football for me was just seeing someone with the football and my job was to put them to the ground. And it was just, *ahhh*, great to KNOCK THE PISS OUT OF SOMEBODY!! HA HA! And then to hear the crowd just screaming at you after you just laid somebody out. Donovan

James also emphasized the enjoyment he took in **Hitting** opponents on the football field, with the sub-themes of **The Play**, **Excitement**, and **No Comparision** also evident in his words.

But after the first hit, the first contact, after the first play you get in the groove and it's the best thing in the world...After you tackle someone or lay someone

out, or make a big run or big play, then all of a sudden you see the excitement or, it's all worth it James

Karter acknowledged the enjoyment that can be taken in **Hitting**, describing how he liked the physical nature of football.

I like the physicality of football... Karter

Bob described how **Hitting** was a part of what he did as a football player.

I've been knocking heads all the time either on the line hitting with the fat boys or being a linebacker and filling the hole. Bob

Steve went one step further, describing through his **Memories** a play where he made a big hit, also elaborating on how **Hitting** made him feel.

And I just remember like I went out there, I hit him the first time and knocked him on his ass. And I know that's the greatest feeling in the world... It's kick ass. And then every play after that I was on that guy knocking him on his ass...It's just fully satisfying every time you do it. And knowing that you scored that touchdown because you stopped that guy or that they didn't score a touchdown because you stopped that guy... I mean just that feeling of power, like "I'm on top of the world right now," you know. Steve

The participants also described longing to be able to go back to their days of playing football, put on their equipment, and hit an opposing player again. Here, Nick expressed this longing, wishing he could do it again one more **Time**.

Just to get the pads on and hit people again, properly. Nick

Finally, Steve described how the satisfaction he gained from studying hard and doing well on a test didn't compare to the satisfaction he experienced when **Hitting** someone on a football field, touching on the sub-theme of **No Comparison**.

You work 12, 14 hours on a unit and make a 96%. That's pretty awesome. But even that does not compare to that immediate satisfaction of just knocking someone on their ass... It's something you can't do somewhere else. Steve

Excitement

Participants recalled the **Excitement** they had while playing high school football in **The Spotlight**. Jay described his emotional build-up before games, detailing the **Excitement** and anxiety he felt while mentally preparing for the game in anticipation of kick-off.

Yeah I'm excited about the game. Let me keep my excitement to myself and let me worry about what I need to do. Jay

Bob also noted his feeling of **Excitement**, describing the rush and power he felt while playing the game.

It just makes you feel...(ha ha) sounds funny but it makes you feel strong. It gets you really excited when you fire off the ball and just push the other guy back.
Bob

Bob went on to further detail the **Excitement** he felt making a great play, describing how his adrenaline would be pumping even after the game was over. In this quote, the sub-themes of **Friday Night** and **Emotions** are evident, displaying the polar emotional experience had by high school football players.

And that just, the feeling of 'I'm doing this part to stop this person from doing this' is adrenaline. Exciting. And just to feel that and then when you lose a game to feel the anguish that you put so much into it physically and mentally and your adrenaline is still going cause you've been going for the last 2 and a half hours. You can't stop because the buzzer sounds. Your adrenaline is still going. Bob

James described the **Excitement** of winning high school football games, with the sub-themes of **Friday Night** and **No Comparison** also evident in his words.

But people say that nothing is as fun as high school football, winning on a Friday night. Nothing is ever that exciting or ever that much fun. I won't enjoy that again and I know that's over and I can't have it. So that's what's hard. James

Competition

The amount of **Competition** that the participants were able to experience while playing high school football in **The Spotlight** left a major **Void** during retirement. This lacking of **Competition** led the participants to seek out other opportunities to compete and fill the **Void**. The research participants compared other sports and activities to high school football based on the amount of **Competition** they had experienced. Here, Bob described the competitive nature of football.

It's a very competitive sport in every aspect. Bob

Luke described how he felt a **Void** from not having football and **Competition**.

Also evident in Luke's quote is the need to find a replacement for football to fill the **Void**, most often done through the sub-theme of **Staying Close to Sport**.

Well, I don't think there's any sport as competitive as football that I've played. You know, pads, full on, high school football. Like I'm a very, I love competition. So I've played intramural basketball; I've played intramural flag football; I've played intramural softball; I've played in softball leagues; I've played adult baseball; like I've played everything and I've never come across any kind of competition like that. Like nothing has come close to the same amount of competition as that. It's not something that you realize is part of your life until it's gone. And then all of a sudden you don't have that competition. You don't even have it to look forward to. And then you're like "what's the chance that I'm gonna put pads on and play football again?" Like, "I'm not gonna." So it's just gone out of your life and you're just always missing that competition. Always. It's like a void that nothing fills, no matter what you do. Intramurals, leagues, adult leagues, there's nothing that feels like that. There's nothing that fills the void like that. Luke

Steve attempted to explain why the level of **Competition** found in high school football is lacking in other sports, making a comparison by stating that those playing other sports aren't as invested as those who play high school football. The sub-theme of **Team Camaraderie** is also present.

The level of competition isn't really there. They don't care like they care on a (football) team. Steve

Karter expressed the difficulty he's had living without the element of

Competition in his life. For Karter, competing was part of his **Identity**, making his transition to not having it even more difficult while also touching on the **Identity** sub-theme.

It definitely sucks. Because I think of myself as a natural born competitor. And that's somethin' where you're competin'... You get people hype, gettin' your team goin'. You don't have that anymore. You're lookin' for something to take the place of that pretty much. Karter

Finally, Donovan touched on the sub-theme of **Void** and the sub-theme of

Staying Close to Sport while describing his desire to still have **Competition** in his life.

I think I had a void in my life cause I hadn't been competing in any type of sport at all. I really would like to get back into doing that. Even if it's just some kinda recreational co-ed stuff. I'd still like to compete. Competing, doing something and coaching are the ways I've filled that void. Donovan

Work

The hard **Work** required by the members of a high school football team was one of the factors leading to being in **The Spotlight**, separating those on the team from others in the **Community**. **Work** also facilitated the bonding of teammates, with participants describing how they became closer after enduring grueling practices together. Karter illustrated how this bonding occurred during the hours of **Work** in the multiple, daily practices held in the preseason. The sub-theme of **Team Camaraderie** is also present.

Your with your friends you see everyday, working together. You're at three-a-day practices. You have bonds with them. You become great friends. Karter

Participants also described all the additional **Work** they did outside of football practice to prepare themselves for the season. In this quote, Donovan explained how all the additional **Work** he did to make himself a better football player consumed his life.

Ahh, lifting weights everyday. Every chance I got. Running, doing plyometrics, jumping and explosion type exercises, running track, going to football camps, watching film, going to football practice, going to two-a-days. *A lot of time, a lot of time was devoted.* And to be honest, the program that I played for was so below average I could've dedicated more time. But I did dedicate a lot. So, yeah, almost everyday just waking up thinking about it. Those four years of your life, and even after that it was rough thinking about it. Donovan

Jay stayed with the idea that **Work** for high school football is a life-consuming task, portraying how at his school one had to devote themselves to **Work** year-round in order to play. This **Work** included practicing hard, lifting, and running “suicide” sprinting drills. Once this **Work** was accomplished, Jay described how satisfying it was for him to see the results of his and his team's **Work**.

Seeing the results. Basically when you are just working out all summer. Now in high school, my high school especially and I know in other big schools football and any sport is becoming a year round sport. I mean there's a lot of pressure to just play that sport and focus all your attention on that sport. When you focus all that attention on that one sport and spend all your time there's not a better feeling at the end to say all that work came into hand and it all worked out to compete for a championship, do somethin'... But if you work out and go your hardest and everything comes through and you're competing for a championship, well, hey, every minute, every suicide, every whatever was worth it. It might not have been then, but in the end it all comes together. Jay

Nick's quote about the amount of **Work** in high school football re-addresses the sub-theme of **No Comparison** as he illustrated the difference in effort required for high school football compared to intramurals.

Probably just all the work you put into high school sports and high school football. I don't know, I think I had maybe one or two practices for an IM team compared to three practices a day for a football team. Nick

Luke continued the comparison of high school football to other life situations using the sub-theme of **Work**. He compared the **Work** environment in football to other environments in real world jobs.

Well, just to experience it for however many years that you did you miss out. To have something in your life for a long time and then not have it, you always miss it. Everybody's working towards a common goal. Everybody on the team is working towards a common goal: to win games, to win games, to win games. So all of a sudden you don't have that anymore and you graduate high school and everybody's working to help themselves and nobody really looks out to help the other guy too. Luke

Steve described the **Work** done throughout the year as a team that is necessary to improve.

You've worked the entire year to get where you are and you've worked not by yourself but as a 50-person team. You work with every person on that team to get better every day to go out and perform for one season. Steve

James believed in the value of hard **Work**, explaining how everyone appreciates the fruits of their labor even though it all seemed difficult at the time.

All the hard work pays off in the end. And everyone, like no one likes practices. No one likes two-a-days. No one likes camp, like weightlifting in the off-season, or running, getting in shape. No one likes that. At least on our team no one did. But, on a Friday night you win, guarantee you ask everyone, they will go to work, exactly what they did they'll do all over again. It was all worth it. James

Finally, Luke described how the **Work** done by a high school football team enabled its members to stand out in **The Spotlight** of the **Community**, stating that everyone was aware of the **Work** that the team was doing and illustrating the sub-themes of **Team Camaraderie** and **Community**.

It just shows everybody that you worked your fuckin' tail off. Everyone knows that people who play football work. Everybody knows, everybody sees you out there before school starts in two-a-days. Luke

Staying Close to Sport

When it was inevitable that high school football was no longer going to be a part of their lives, the participants in this study began looking for things to do to replace football, remain in **The Spotlight**, and fill the **Void** created by not having football. The sub-theme of **Staying Close to Sport** depicted the participants desire to continue being active in sports. They attempted to achieve this feat by playing intramurals, coaching, and watching games as spectators. Jay described this desire to stay close to football, expressing his yearning with a tone of near desperation.

And you want to do anything you can now to be a part of the game, whether it's intramurals or anything like that, coaching, or whatever it can be. Jay

Donovan expressed this same sentiment, stating that **Staying Close to Sport** was the reason he chose his current profession of coaching football.

And um, that's probably part of the reason that I coach now. I just loved being a part of high school football. Donovan

Luke described needing to stay close to sport so he could fill the **Void** of **Competition** in his life, opting to try other sports so he could have that **Competition** even if it didn't measure up to football.

With other sports, I try to stay active and competing. In intramurals and summer leagues and area basketball leagues and stuff like that, just trying to keep the competition active. Gotta keep doing, just keeping sports part of your life. So that's basically how I try to do it. Luke

Donovan described how being active by playing other sports helped him get through the difficult transition and depression of retiring from high school football rather than sulking and wishing he could return to the past. Also evident in this quote is the complete **Life**

Transition that Donovan had to go through during his retirement from high school football, as well as the roles of work and school in his life after the game.

Just trying to stay active in sports. Really tried to, one way or another tried to play college football but it didn't work out. So that's one way I was trying to fill that void. Then when I was unable to I just found working, you know, trying to go to school. Keeping myself constantly busy to fill that void. Trying to play sports, hanging out with friends. Just constantly being busy and not sit around and just think about, "man, I wish I could still be playing." So I guess that was one way I handled it. Donovan

Karter also described how other sports gave him an outlet for his competitive nature. In his quote, Karter detailed how he tries to raise the level of **Competition** in other sports to that which he once had in high school football. He talked about his use of alcohol and possibly binge drinking as compensation for the loss of football in his life.

Me, I boxed for a while. I go out and competitively drink (ha ha). I don't know, I try and, if I play a video game I'm gonna jaw at ya and get in your face. Every sport, I play like, if we play pool at the bar I play pool like it's a football game. I get in your face and all that stuff. Karter

Finally, Bob described how he enjoys watching football on television so he can read the plays as if he was still playing and speculate what he'd do in those game situations. The loss and finality of the game is also evident in Bob's words.

...like me I've been a defensive player and kind of read plays and so watching NFL or college bowl games or whatever it's really fun to just read the play and think "how would I react to that play?" But then I'm never going to be able to do that again unless I try to walk-on somewhere. Bob

No Comparison

Participants in this study often compared high school football to other sports or other facets of their lives. Upon making this comparison, the retired football players unanimously agreed that nothing in their lives has compared to playing high school

football in **The Spotlight** of their communities. The participants described these incomparable qualities of high school football, using the sub-themes of **Hitting**, **Competition** and **Staying Close to Sport** to supplement their descriptions of their experiences. Bob explained how he tried to play intramural sports to fill the **Void** that retiring from football left, only to find that nothing can replicate the experience of playing high school football.

I've dabbled some in intramural team play and it doesn't really compare. I've tried rugby and it's still not the same...It just, that really never comes up again...There's never really any situation that can be represented and repeated that you can on the football field. Bob

Jay attempted to describe why he sees high school football as an incomparable experience but has difficulty putting his **Excitement** into words.

So that's something that you can't reenact. You can't think about that. That's something that just happens. You can't describe that to somebody. That's between you and, that's just a feeling you can't describe to somebody else. That's just a feeling you have. So that's something, the excitement, the butterflies, the mental aspect of it is something that you miss and that you can't describe and that's just something that you take with you I guess. Jay

Donovan reiterated Bob's assertion that nothing compares to playing high school football after he too tried playing intramural sports. Donovan noted the lack of **Hitting**, structure, organization as the distinguishing factor between high school and intramural football.

It didn't compare to high school football. It was fun but it wasn't the same. You couldn't hit. You didn't have coaches. You didn't have practice... There was no structure to it. No discipline. Donovan

Nick continued the comparison between high school football and intramural sports, reaffirming the idea that structure and organization separate the two. Nick also

introduced the level of **Competition** and the idea that the games didn't mean as much as other distinguishing factors.

Well I mean like, I'll play like backyard pickup games which I mean they're fun, but like it's not organized, it's not timed, you don't wear pads so people get hurt a lot which is not fun. Just like the organization of it, to have the solid setup is basically what I miss more. Like you have like knickknack plays and stuff, but not like actual plays you have to think about and stuff. I guess the organization and stuff would be what I miss about the actual sport. I've done like IM racquetball, intramural softball, broomball... There wasn't as much like riding on it. It didn't mean as much. If you lost, like yeah you were upset cause of just the competitive spirit but... Nick

Jay explained why he still pursues intramural sports and other competitive opportunities to fill the football **Void** in his life. While the sub-theme of **No Comparison** still stands out, the sub-theme of **Staying Close to Sport** can also be seen in this quote, as Jay described playing other sports to try and recapture some of the experience he had as a high school football player.

You want to taste the game, but you're just getting appetizers. You're not getting, you get some fulfillment but it's not the same. You think back like "man, how great would it be to do some of the things you do. What would it be like to throw a pass again, just hit somebody?" That's something you can't do anymore. So whatever you do to satisfy that, to feel a part of the game is great. At the end of the day you're gonna sit back like "eh, it ain't the same." Actually, you probably miss it more." Jay

Luke continued to express the sub-theme of **No Comparison**, describing how no other feeling in his life compared to playing for his high school on **Friday Night** in front of his **Community**.

There's just no other, for a normal person there's no other feeling that compares to strappin' up on Friday night and going out and playing in front of your entire hometown. Cause 90 some percent don't go on to play college sports and whatever the minute percentage is from that that go on to play pro, so for the common man there's no other experience like it, to play high school football. Luke

Karter asserted that football is the best sport, and thus incomparable, due to the focus on the team and the degree to which team unity is needed to be successful. The sub-theme of **Team Camaraderie** is present in his statement.

Football is, it's by far I think it's the best team sport. I don't know anything that could compare to that cause as much as you need your teammates. You don't need your teammates as much as you do in that sport. Karter

Steve continued the emphasis on the team to describe the incomparability of high school football, using the feeling of achieving a perfect undefeated season as an example.

I mean there's nothing really that I guess compares to being part of a team that might be undefeated. Steve

Jay described high school football as the best experience of his life so far, using the **Family** atmosphere of the team as a rationale.

Ahhh, the best way to describe it, probably the best experience I've had to this date was playing high school football, to be part of that family, to be part of that tradition. Jay

Finally, Karter agreed with Jay, also stating that high school football was the best experience of his life to this point. Thus, all experiences he has had have been compared to high school football and have failed to measure up.

It was probably the best experience of my life at this point was high school football. Karter

The Spotlight Summary

The Spotlight was the third main theme to emerge from the transcripts in the present study and it represented the overlap between the themes of **The High School Football Player** and **The Others**. Both the individual, **The High School Football Player**, and other people, **The Others**, were joined when the research participants played

high school football in **The Spotlight**. The participants in this study described their feeling of being under a spotlight during their days playing high school football. The preceding quotes illustrate this Spotlight by giving examples of the attention and the fame the participants received both on and off the field. The sub-themes of **Friday Night, The Play, Hitting, Excitement, Competition, Work, Staying Close to Sport,** and **No Comparison** emerged from the participants' transcripts and further detailed their experiences. The sub-theme of **Friday Night** illustrated the importance of high school football games to both the participants and their communities while describing the events and atmosphere that comprise game days. The sub-theme of **The Play** portrayed the love that each participant had for playing the game of football and touched on the participants' **Memories** of great plays they made during their high school careers. The retired football players used the sub-theme **Hitting** to detail how much they enjoyed and missed the physicality of the game. **Excitement** was described as an integral part of playing high school football. Under this sub-theme, participants discussed how their **Excitement** would start to build before the game and reach its pinnacle when making plays in **The Spotlight** during the game. While discussing the sub-theme of **Competition** the participants described how a **Void** was created in their lives due to not having the incomparable level of **Competition** that they did while playing high school football. **Work** emerged as a sub-theme, with participants describing the long hours of labor they logged and how that **Work** created **Team Camaraderie** while separating them from the rest of their **Community**. The participants expressed the importance of **Staying Close to Sport** in their lives, something they most often accomplished by playing intramurals,

coaching, and watching football. Keeping involved in sport in some way helped the participants adjust to retirement even if it wasn't as good as their experience of playing high school football. Finally, the participants in this study constantly tried to compare other sports or even other aspects of their lives to their experience of playing high school football, coming to the uniform conclusion that there is **No Comparison** to high school football.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Introduction

The fundamental purpose of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of the experience of retiring from high school football through testimonial descriptions of individuals who have lived through that event. Ten retired high school football players described their experience of leaving the game in individual, audio-taped interviews. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed thematically using a phenomenological method. This phenomenological analysis resulted in a thematic structure for the study, consisting of three main themes: **The High School Football Player**, **The Others**, and **The Spotlight**. The phenomenological analysis uncovered one experiential ground, **Missing and Reminiscing**, which served as the context for the experience as a whole. The experiential ground as well as the main themes included sub-themes, all of which were described in detail in the previous chapter. Many quotes from the transcripts were presented in order to authenticate the overall thematic structure.

The following discussion of the results of this study includes a description of the bracketing interview and how it related to the overall results of the study. The validity of the thematic structure is also considered. Several elements of the experience of retiring from high school football are discussed in relation to previous research. Finally, suggestions for future research are considered.

Bracketing Interview

In the bracketing interview, the researcher responded to the same question that he subsequently asked the study's participants in order to help the researcher become aware of his own thoughts, biases, and hypotheses concerning the research question (Rosenbaum, 2000). The four themes of Culture of the Community, Identity, Shift, and Memories emerged from the ground of Traumatic Emotion in the bracketing interview. There is a similarity between the themes that emerged from the bracketing interview and the themes that emerged from the research participants' interviews. Each of the themes and the ground in the bracketing interview appeared as sub-themes in the results of the present study. Culture of the Community was similar to **Community**, there was Identity in the bracketing interview and **Identity** in the present study, Shift was similar to **Life Transition**, Memories and **Memories** were identical, and the ground of Traumatic Emotion was similar to the sub-theme of **Emotions**. Despite the similar content of the themes in the bracketing interview and those gathered from the research participants, every attempt was made by the researcher to bracket his experience of retirement so as not to lead the participants in any way. The researcher asked only the phenomenological research question: "Describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of retiring from high school football." The only other prompts from the researcher during the interview were statements such as "tell me more about that." Prompts were used when a participant's description was vague, terse, or unclear in order to obtain more detailed information about their experience. A sample of one of the interview transcripts

from this study is provided in Appendix C to illustrate how the research participant had control of the interview and was not led by the interviewer.

Verification of Themes

Each participant was given the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the thematic structure that was developed for him. All the participants concurred that the thematic structures were representative of their experiences of retirement from high school football. Below are examples of quotes from participants giving their feedback about the accuracy of the thematization.

That looks pretty good. I'd say it's an accurate display of my feelings since I retired. Bob

Most overall it sounds pretty applicable to my situation. You pretty much covered what I talked about. It's very applicable and valid. I absolutely agree with it. You're on the ball. Steve

I feel the themes that are presented in this paper are on point with what every high school football player misses about playing high school football, especially for those that were unable to play college football. Donovan

Referring to your Thematic Structure of the Experience of Retiring from High School Football, I really liked how the whole experience of high school football is enclosed in that circle of experience with the thoughts of missing and reminiscing surrounding the whole experience. Because the fact is that image is the exact representation of how I see things when I look back at the past. It really is a good visual representation of life during and life after high school football. Especially at the end, because when it's all said and done, all we have left is our memories of our experiences. As for the outline, I feel it focuses on the main aspects of the total experience, and gives the people that might not have experienced high school football a deeper look into all it has to offer. I know I participated in the research, but with that aside, coming from a former player, just reading the outline for the first time, gave me goose-bumps as I could visualize each and every point and could go back and think of a special specific moment for each one of those points. For an average person, that outline might seem like a research paper, but for the guys that went through summer lifting, went through two-a-days, and fought in the trenches for a pigskin, that outline sums up a passion that will never be forgotten. Jay

Everything looks good to me. You seemed to have covered all the bases from our conversation. Nick

I felt like the themes were a good representation of my experience of retiring. Just doing the interview for this has brought back so many memories for me. It has given me that old familiar feeling again of wanting to go out on the field and try to beat down the other team. It made me want to prove that I worked hard enough in the off-season to beat you. It made me want to do something in front of the whole town and try to win for all my classmates and teammates. Fall floods my mind with all kinds of memories of football. It pulls me in two different directions. One way is just remembering all of the fun and great times that I had in football. The other is a sad one, knowing that I can never go back and won't get to do it all again... ever. Luke

Sounds pretty good to me. Sounds about right. Brad

It sounds pretty good. The themes hit on just about every topic I experienced. Karter

Reflections of Previous Research

The results of this phenomenological investigation on the experience of retiring from high school football yielded several themes that are related to topics that are presented in the review of the literature in the first chapter. The topics in the literature that paralleled the results of this study include the ground of **Missing & Reminiscing** with its sub-theme of **Void**, the main themes of **The High School Football Player**, **The Others**, and **The Spotlight**, and the sub-themes of **Identity**, **Emotion**, **Life Transition**, **Reason: Decision or Deselection**, **Team Camaraderie**, **Family**, **Community**, **The Play**, and **Staying Close to Sport**.

Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) studied the retirement of elite female gymnasts. After retirement, the gymnasts had an experience that Kerr and Dacyshyn identified as *Nowhereland*. *Nowhereland* is similar to the sub-theme of **Void**, which was formed in

the present study. Athletes seem to experience a large gap after retirement from sport. This feeling of **Void** also spoke to the loss experienced by participants in the present study when high school football was over. The participants in the present study seemed to deal with this loss in a similar pattern to the grieving process outlined by Kubler-Ross (1969) in dealing with feelings of grief during the death of a loved one. This similarity illustrates how the participants dealt with the death of their high school football identities in retirement.

Other researchers have examined the role of **Identity** in the retirement process for athletes. Muccio and Hector (2005) found **Identity** to be a main theme of the experience of athletes retiring from sport following collegiate careers. The retired collegiate athletes described how their sport reflected their **Identity**, making statements like “It was who I was,” and “I was an athlete.” The theme of athletic **Identity** was also found by those retiring from high school football, when they said such things as:

I think you have an identity as a football player. Donovan

...your team was your identity in a major way... Steve

That’s definitely something you’re gonna miss out of the situation of just going to school and not playing a sport and just going in as a *student*, not an *athletic student*. So you’re an athlete I guess you’d say. Jay

Retired athletes, both in this study and in previous research, must re-create their personal identities as part of their **Life Transition** during retirement. The relationship between **Life Transition** and **Identity** found in Drahota and Eitzen (1998), Grove et al. (1998), Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000), and Muccio and Hector (2005) illustrates the overlap

between the two sub-themes that was discovered in the current study on the experience of retiring from high school football.

Life Transition was the area most discussed in the literature that was also found in the present study, with retirement from sport being viewed as a transition process (Carp, 1972; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Hill & Lowe, 1974; Hopson & Adams, 1977; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Schlossberg, 1981; and Taylor, 1972). Drahotka and Eitzen's (1998) application of Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory touches on the **Life Transition** of retiring athletes by outlining the process of adjustment these individuals experience. Through Ebaugh's (1988) stages of *first doubts*, *seeking alternatives*, *the turning point*, and *creating the ex-role*, Drahotka and Eitzen (1998) illustrate how the retired athlete transitions from a life centered on playing their sport to a life without it. This retired athlete transition is mirrored in the present study's theme of **Life Transition** expressed by the participants retiring from high school football.

Grove et al. (1998) also takes a procedural view toward retirement from sport. In this model, the retired athlete is able to achieve a life transition once he or she establishes the *Completion and Identity Change* stage. Also noteworthy is the assertion by Grove et al. (1998) that the athlete's ability to comprise a narrative regarding their retirement experience from sport is essential to their ability to successfully complete the final stage of the retirement process. Given this assertion, the retired high school football players who participated in this phenomenological study were assisted in going through the retirement process when they were asked to present the narrative of their retirement experience to the researcher.

The theme of **Body** in the experience of retiring from high school football is the next sub-theme discussed in previous research. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) described the loss of physical prowess that retired athletes experience. Muccio and Hector (2005) found **Body** to be a main theme of retirement from college sports. In their study, there were many qualitative accounts of retired college athletes' attempts to stay in shape, deal with injury, and watching their bodies change. Potts (2001) and Stankovich et al. (2001) described the physical strain on bodies experienced by athletes retiring from sport. Participants in the present study discussed sentiments that were similar to the sentiments that were described by participants in those earlier studies.

The next sub-theme to emerge from participants' experience of retiring from high school football that appeared in the literature review of retirement from sport was **Emotion**. Grove et al. (1998) emphasized the emotional aspect of retirement, describing it as a traumatic experience for athletes. Muccio and Hector (2005) also noted the role of **Emotion** in the process of retiring from sport. Some of the emotions identified by Muccio and Hector were pain, disappointment, sadness, fear, depression, relief, enjoyment, satisfaction, and fulfillment, illustrating the variety of emotions experienced. Potts (2001) and Stankovich et al. (2001) described the range of emotional experiences that retiring athletes have, which Potts labeled post athlete syndrome. Both researchers noted that there is a high amount of stress and depression felt by individuals leaving sport.

Finally, Isaksson and Johansson (2000) described the stress that retiring from a career has on a worker. This stress focused on the emotional experience of those who

were forced to retire from their careers and thus were deselected. These workers' experience of retirement was less positive than those who had control over their choice to retire. The emotional impact of retiring from football after high school seems to have some similarity to that of a person being forced to leave his/her job at age 65.

The retired football players in this study emphasized the notion that there was a specific **Reason** for their retirement, describing either the **Decision** or the **Deselection**. The Reason was either a **Decision** made by the athlete or a **Deselection** made by a coach. Torregrosa et al. (2004) described the *realization of the retirement* stage in which the athlete begins to see his career as coming to an end. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) also observed this realization by the athlete in their *first doubts* stage of retirement from sport. Hayslip et al. (1997) and Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) described the choice process of an athlete pondering retirement, with their focus often shifting away from sport to other areas of their life. Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) explained how those who are forced to retire from their sport via deselection often have more negative experiences in retirement than those who retire voluntarily. Finally, other researchers have noted the constant presence of deselection in sport due to the desire to always have the best players on the field. (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Petitpas & Danish, 1992; and Webb et al., 1998). The reasons for retirement from sport discussed in the previous literature were displayed by the participants experiencing retirement from high school football, either via **Decision or Deselection**.

Previous research has described how the main theme **The Others** and its three sub-themes of **Team Camaraderie**, **Family**, and **Community** were important in the

experience of retiring from athletics. In the present study, **The Others** was first emphasized via the sub-theme of **Team Camaraderie**. D'Anniballe (1996) noted the significance of *The Team*, finding it as the ground of elite female basketball players' experiences. Muccio and Hector (2005) reiterated this significance, noting the importance of lost relationships with teammates during the retirement process for intercollegiate athletes.

A notable theme that was absent in the participants' descriptions of **The Others** that played a role in their experience of retirement from high school football was their coaches. The coach or coaching staff emerged as a sub-theme in Muccio and Hector's (2005) work on the experience of retirement from college sports, and was a sub-theme in the bracketing interview for the present study. However, coaches were not emphasized, and in some cases not even mentioned, by seven of the ten participants in the present study.

The sub-themes of **Family** and **Community** that emerged in this study emphasized the role that the families and communities had on the participants' experiences of retiring from high school football. Movies and articles in the popular literature have documented the rabid fan support that has made high school football players famous in their own communities (Bissinger, 1990; Carlson, 2001; Hale, 1999; Iliff, 1999; Oppenheimer, 1991; Teaff, 1995; and Walters, 1992).

Movies and popular magazines provide vivid accounts of the **Hitting**, **Excitement**, **Competition** experienced by the research participants playing high school football in **The Spotlight on Friday Night** (Bissinger, 1990; Carlson, 2001; Hale, 1999;

Iliff, 1999; Oppenheimer, 1991; Teaff, 1995; and Walters, 1992). Drahota and Eitzen (1998) add the loss of the adoration of peers and fans to the list of situations that are negative for the athlete who retires from sport.

The main theme of **The Spotlight** was also reflected in other research studies' emphasis on **The Play** and **Staying Close to Sport**. D'Anniballe (1996) reported *Play* as a major theme of the experience of elite female basketball players, while Muccio and Hector (2005) described the many facets centering upon merely playing a sport in their theme of *The Game*. Previous research has also addressed the ways in which retiring athletes attempt to salvage their sport identities and prolong their time in **The Spotlight** in order to ease the transition away from organized sport. The athletes in other research (Muccio & Hector, 2005; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) and in the present study of retiring from high school football attempted to do this by **Staying Close to Sport**. Examples of **Staying Close to Sport** included playing intramurals and coaching.

Not every theme in the phenomenological experience of retiring from high school football for the present participants was found in the previous literature on retirement from sport. The three main novelties to emerge from this investigation were **Memories**, **Shoulda Coulda Woulda's**, and **No Comparison**. Participants described the **Memories** of past glory days of playing high school football. They described feeling regret when looking back at their high school football careers in the sub-theme of **Shoulda Coulda Woulda's**. And, they said that there was **No Comparison** between the experience of playing high school football and participating in any other sport.

Most all of the **Memories** recalled by the research participants focused on the times in which they were actually playing high school football. Interestingly, the research question was “describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of retiring from high school football.” This question focused on the participants’ experiences *after* their days of playing high school football had ended. In a sense the research participants responded to a different question. The participants consistently talked about their days playing high school football, often recalling their great moments making big plays, times spent with their teammates, the spectrum of feelings they had on game days, and the regrets they carried with them from big games in the past. The presence of these recollections in the participants’ experiences of retiring from high school football were grouped within the main theme of **Memories**. It appears that the participants felt it was necessary to place considerable emphasis on these memories of the past in order to explain to the listener exactly what it was that they were losing in their experience of retirement. This explanation plays a crucial role in the participants’ description of their retirement for the reader, as it seems necessary to have an understanding of their glory days of playing high school football in the past to understand their experience of retirement from the game in the present. This emphasis reflects the participants’ need to describe what it was that they were losing when they left high school football in retirement. The use of memories in the description of what was lost in retirement may be a new area of interest for future researchers who are investigating the experience of retirement in both sport and other career areas.

The sub-theme of **Shoulda Coulda Woulda's** provided a new focus area for research on sport retirement to explore, centering on the regret felt by the retired athletes. The consistent feeling of regret that emerged as a theme among participants in the present study suggests that it is one for both researchers and helping professionals to be aware of in the future. Researchers could look deeper at the regret felt by retired athletes as an effect of leaving their career in sport, while helping professionals can work to better understand the retired athlete's regret and work towards developing treatment plans to help them cope with it.

Another area for possible future research on retirement is the participants' accounts that nothing else in their lives could compare to high school football as described by the theme **No Comparison**. This finding could be significant and problematic for those retiring from sport in general, including high school football, given the substantial emphasis placed on finding a replacement in life for what has been lost in retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Drahotka & Eitzen, 1998; Muccio & Hector, 2005). Further research targeting the use of memories of a career in sport, the regret experienced by retired athletes, and the role of playing sport as an incomparable life event, is needed to learn more about the experience of retirement from sport.

Further Implications

The thematic structure that emerged from the interviews in this study has some similarity to Yalom's (1980) four main themes of existentialism: Freedom, Death, Isolation, and Meaninglessness. The main theme **The Spotlight** and the sub-themes of, **Memories, Emotion, Excitement, and No Comparison** describe the joy the participants

took in experiencing high school football. This joy mirrors Yalom's (1980) description of existential Freedom, as the participants unabated experiences of adolescence resonated throughout the interview transcripts. All things existential must come to an end, however, as is accounted for in Yalom's existential theme of Death. Participants in this study did not escape this death, as retiring from high school football represented the demise of their football playing careers. The sub-theme of **Life Transition** illustrated the death of the high school football player **Identity**, as well as the need to create a new **Identity** for each participant.

Yalom's (1980) theme of existential Isolation can also be seen in the main themes of **Team Camaraderie** and **The Spotlight**. While describing these themes as part of their experience of retiring from high school football, the participants noted how their lives had become more isolated when they lost the closeness they had with their friends and teammates while playing the game. Their isolation was further impacted by the loss of the acknowledgement and fame they once had in their communities when they were high school football players.

I miss the games, teammates,...I miss it all mostly. Yeah. Pretty much all of it. Like I miss, you go to practice everyday for months. Karter

What I miss about it is obviously the camaraderie, being with all your friends. Nick

I really miss football...I miss the team aspect of it, the responsibility also, and the deal of "hey, football team's undefeated this year. Hey, big game Friday night." You know. Everybody's looking to you and cheering you on, saying "hey, so and so did this," or "good job the other night." Steve

Meaninglessness as described by Yalom (1980) was closely related to the **Void** and **Missing & Reminiscing**, representing the ground of the participants' experience of retirement from high school football. Life without football in retirement certainly brought about a feeling of meaninglessness for the participants, as the sport provided a structure that filled their lives. This structure accounted for the **Time**, friends, passion, and **Identity** in each of the participants' lives, leaving many of them feeling lost in the initial stages of their retirement.

Another interesting finding that arose that did not fit into the thematic structure of the experience of retirement, was the aggressive language used by participants in their phenomenological interviews. The following quotes below are some examples of this aggressive language used by the participants:

“You don't want them to be the turd in the punch bowl where nobody wants to be around cause their son screwed up.” Luke

“It just shows everybody that you worked your fuckin' tail off.” Luke

“And it was just, *ahhh*, great to KNOCK THE PISS OUT OF SOMEBODY!!!”
Donovan

“It's kick ass.” Steve

“When you're against the jv in practice they're not that good so you get this idea that you're 'the shit.’” Brad

“It was never like ‘this sucks. It's not where I want to be.’” Karter

“...I wish I had an older brother tellin' me ‘hey, you're gonna miss the crap out of this when you're done.’” Jay

This language seemed to represent the jargon of the culture of high school football and provided a link to the roughness of the sport, as participants matched the physical

aggression they were describing with their own verbally aggressive terminology. Along with illustrating the culture of high school football, this aggressive language may also speak to the role of football in the masculine socialization of young men in America as described by Burton Nelson (1994). In this study, all the participants were male and all spoke of the impact of the loss of male relationships. While there are a relative few women who participate in high school football across the country, the game still remains a sanctified area for men.

Conclusion

The research outlined in the previous literature review provides support for the themes found in this study on the experience of retiring from high school football. Themes discovered in this study that were not found in past research on retirement from sport can be used by athletes, counselors, coaches, and those working in other areas related to sport or helping professions, to better understand the experience of retired athletes. Furthermore, the themes of this study demonstrated patterns similar to those found in previous research on the retirement experiences of professional, collegiate, and Olympic athletes (Abbot et al., 1999; Baille, 1993; Baille & Danish, 1992; Drahota & Eitzen, 1998; Erpic et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1998; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Muccio & Hector, 2005; Potts, 2001; Stankovich et al., 2001; Torregrosa et al., 2004; and Webb et al., 1998). This similarity provides support for the legitimacy of retiring from high school football as a significant life event for an individual.

Although methodology limits external validity or generalization, results from this study are valuable in that they begin to inform us, in depth, about the

experience of retiring from high school football. Findings reveal both effective and ineffective patterns of coping with retirement. Athletes in this study actively searched for a replacement for high school football. Their searches encompassed physical, psychological, and emotional aspects of their lives. In many cases, the participants chose unhealthy coping responses in these three areas, making their transition into retirement more difficult. These choices were in large part related to the lack of education and awareness of the retired high school football players, both during and after their playing days, regarding the challenges of retiring from sport.

Positive replacements for high school football include developing other areas and passions in one's life. Previous research, as well as participants in the present study, identified some of these positive replacements as putting energy into academics, career goals, new hobbies, relationships with family and friends, coaching, and/or participating in other sports or at the intramural level. Other important elements to achieving a positive transition from high school football include both planning for the end of the game and having an outlet for the emotional process that retirement may trigger.

School district administrators and staff, coaches, parents, helping professionals, and the athletes themselves are the major stakeholders in this event and can benefit from this research by gaining a greater understanding of the experience of retiring from high school football. School administrators and staff as well as coaches can take this better understanding to provide more frequent, timely, and effective education and counseling to handle this life change. Helping professionals can use the findings from this research to provide more effective counseling while being able to design interventions to support

the individual through the difficulties of this adjustment period. Finally, this research can assist parents and athletes in developing a dialogue about retirement from high school football so that the athlete can weigh his options and plan his life accordingly.

Helping professional have used the results of the present study to facilitate multiple areas of their applied work. The knowledge gained through this research has been used to help retired athletes cope with the adjustment of retirement from sport in both individual and group counseling settings, while also aiding the design and administration of workshops to help retired athletes understand and cope with the transition out of sport. Future research on retiring from sport should focus on effective measures in teaching coping strategies to athletes who are dealing with the loss of identity, camaraderie, and physicality that is inherent in retiring from sport.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM B

APPENDIX A:

FORM B

IRB# _____
Date Received in ORC _____THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE
Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

(In accordance with institutional assurance of compliance to DHHS)

Date Submitted: 11-11-05

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

Primary Investigator:
Douglas J. Muccio
410 Austin Peay
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
(865) 450-5158 home
(865) 946-1092 campus

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Mark A. Hector
416C Austin Peay
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
(865) 974-1984

Title of Project: The Experience of Retiring from Sport Following a Career in

High School Football: A Phenomenological Investigation

Department: Psychology

Starting Date: Upon IRB approval

Estimated Completion Date: May 2006

External Funding Agency and Identification Number: N/A

Grant Submission Deadline: N/A

II. OBJECTIVE OF PROJECT

The objective of this project is to describe the experience of retiring from sport following a career in high school football. The participants will be asked to describe their experience of retiring. The knowledge gained through a phenomenological investigation of retiring from sport after a career in high school football can help researchers develop more accurate assessments to further understand this specific experience and thus provide better aid to individuals enduring this life adjustment in the future.

III. DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS

The participants in this study will be no more than 25 male athletes ages 18+ who have had the experience of retiring from sport following participation in high school football. Race, gender, and ethnicity will not be factors, as all that is necessary is that participants have had the experience of retiring specifically from high school football. Former “elite” high school football players will be sought to gain more descriptive accounts of the experience of retirement. “Elite” high school football players will be determined based on game statistics, status as lettermen, and having played for high profile high school football programs.

IV. METHODS OR PROCEDURES

Qualitative research procedures will be used in this study. This study will rely on a specific technique of qualitative research: the existential-phenomenological approach. The goal of this research technique is to uncover and descriptively express themes of an individual’s experience. The ultimate goal of the researcher is to gain an understanding of the phenomena being studied in order to have a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the individual. Data will consist of the transcripts made from audio taped interviews that are held between the investigators and the participants. There will a maximum of 25 interviews with research participants in this study. The interviews will be held at a location and time at the convenience of the participant.

The interviews will be conducted through a three-step process. The first step will consist of recruiting potential participants. The investigators will recruit participants by the snowball method. This method begins with the researcher approaching individuals he already knows and asking them if they would be willing to participate in the study. The next step is to ask these individuals if they know anyone else who may want to participate. Thus, the first round of potential participants will be individuals already known to the investigators. If additional participants are needed, these first participants will be asked to make referrals of individuals they think might be interested in participating. The investigators will

approach them via email or in person to solicit their participation. A description of the study will be given to potential participants and will explicitly state the purpose of the research as a study of the experience of retiring from sport following a career in high school football. At the time of this initial contact with the participant, informed consent, audio taping, and confidentiality will be explained so the participant has time to consider their participation before the actual interview date. The contents of the informed consent are included in Appendix A. An interview time will be arranged at the participant's convenience in a private setting and a reminder phone call or email will be sent to the participant one day in advance of the interview. Two hours will be scheduled for each interview, however, participants can take less time, as they see fit. Most interviews will last between 45 and 60 minutes.

Second, the researcher and the potential participant will meet for the interview. Upon meeting with the participant for the interview, the researcher will provide two copies of the informed consent document. The participant will be given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the procedure for the interview and taping. The researcher will explain that a pseudonym will replace their name in the transcripts and all identifying information will be removed, such as references to specific individuals, departments, institutions, cities, etc. Each participant will be given the opportunity to review the final transcript of their interview if they so desire. When the participant's concerns and questions have been addressed, they will be asked to sign the informed consent document. The participant will receive a copy of the document for their own use; it will include the researcher's contact information in case the participant needs to contact the researcher following the interview.

Third, the investigators will begin the actual interview by asking the participant the following question: "Please describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of retiring from sport following your career in high school football." As the participant describes his experiences, the investigators will ask follow up questions. Follow up questions will always be based upon the participant's previous statements. Examples of follow-up questions are: "Please tell me more about that." "Can you describe that in more detail?" The investigators will be careful to introduce no new concepts or phrases to the interview. The overall goal is for the participant to describe his experiences in as much detail as possible.

These interviews are expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes; however, the participants may choose to take as much time as needed (not to exceed two hours). The investigators will then transcribe the interviews.

Participants will be given the opportunity to review the typed transcripts for accuracy if desired. Pseudonyms for name, organization and exact title if necessary will be added to the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. However,

anonymity cannot be guaranteed. After the interviewing process and the transcription, the transcripts will be read with the goal being to identify common themes of information among the participants. Direct quotes and experiential stories may be used to illustrate a theme, but names will be identified only as pseudonyms. A team of qualitative researchers, who are either graduate students or faculty at The University of Tennessee, will also read the transcripts for verification of the researcher's analysis. This collaboration will allow for objectivity and a thorough interpretation of the data. All research team members will be required to sign a pledge of confidentiality. A copy of this pledge can be found in Appendix B.

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

Procedures used in this research are non-invasive. Participation in the interviews will be strictly voluntary and the participants will be advised that they may terminate the project at any time. Interviews will be conducted in a private room on The University of Tennessee campus or in a mutually agreed upon private location. The participants will be informed that a pseudonym will be used for their real names mentioned on the audiotapes and this pseudonym will be later used on the transcripts. The investigators will prepare the transcripts or will contract with another professional to transcribe the tapes. If someone other than the interviewer does the transcription he/she will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement. Once the transcript is completed and thematized, the audiotapes will be erased. Participants will be informed that they can request a copy of the transcript at any time as long as it is within three years, after which the transcripts will be destroyed. Other than the investigators and the participant, no one will have access to the audiotapes until such time as they are erased. The audiotapes, transcripts, and other demographic data on the participants will be kept in a locked file drawer in room 416C Austin Peay Building on the University of Tennessee campus. The record of correlation between pseudonyms and participant identities will be kept in a separate locked file drawer in room 416C Austin Peay Building on the University of Tennessee campus.

The participants will be specifically advised: (a) that the interviews will be audio taped for accuracy, (b) that they may refuse to be interviewed or stop the interview at any time, (c) that they may inquire about the procedures at any time, (d) that no royalties are due to the participant for any subsequent publication, (e) that copies of the transcripts will be provided for them to review upon request, (f) that the transcripts will be reviewed by the investigators and other researchers for identification of themes, and (g) transcriptionists who hear the audio tapes and research team members who read the transcripts to assist the primary investigator identify themes will sign a pledge of confidentiality.

VI. BENEFITS VS. RISKS

Participation in this study entails no unusual risks or discomforts. No emotional discomfort is anticipated. Names, titles and organizations will be coded with pseudonyms in order to provide confidentiality; however, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. If emotional discomfort should arise, referral to counseling services will be made.

VII. METHOD OF OBTAINING “INFORMED CONSENT” FROM SUBJECTS

Potential participants will be recruited by the researcher through the snowball method. It will be clearly stated that the investigator is a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology interested in interviewing individuals who have experienced retiring from high school football. If interested in participating, the potential participant may contact the investigator at dmuccio@utk.edu. The confidentiality of email contact cannot be guaranteed. If the potential participant agrees to consider participating, the informed consent statement will be given to the participant for review before the day of the interview. This process is intended to reduce pressure to sign the form on the day of the interview and to allow time for cancellation of the interview if desired. At the set interview time, the consent form will be reviewed with the participant and signed if he is in agreement. The investigators will collect the form and store it in a locked file drawer in 416C in the Austin Peay Building at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996. The participant will retain a copy of the informed consent form for their records.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR

Dr. Mark Hector, the advisor of the investigator, has been involved with numerous qualitative research projects in the past. He has practical, theoretical, and professional experience in interview techniques and qualitative design. Douglas J. Muccio is in his fourth year of the doctoral program in Counseling Psychology. Douglas has had coursework related to interviewing and research design, and has also participated in quantitative and qualitative research projects.

IX. ADEQUACY OF FACILITIES TO SUPPORT RESEARCH

Interviews will be held in a private room on the campus of the University of Tennessee. If meeting on the University of Tennessee campus is unfeasible for the participant, the interviews will be held in a private setting that is convenient for the participant. Email contacts will not be recorded, but notes including dates and times of the emails will be made, and will be accessible only to the primary investigator. They will be kept in a locked file drawer with the transcripts, audiotapes, and other confidential materials, as explained in Section V.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

In compliance with the policies established by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Institutional Review Board, the principle investigator subscribes to the principals stated in “The Belmont Report” and standards of professional ethics in

all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

- A) Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in the research project.
- B) Development of any unexpected risks will be reported to the IRB.
- C) Signed consent statements will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter.

XI. SIGNATURES

Douglas J. Muccio
3920 Lonas Dr. #M-123
Knoxville, TN 37909
865-450-5158

(signature)

(date)

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Mark A. Hector
416C Austin Peay
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
(865) 974-1984

(signature)

(date)

II. DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

Expedited Review – Meets criteria for minimal risk, Category(ies) _____

OR

Full IRB Review

Chair, Psychology Departmental
Review Committee:

(signature) (date)

Psychology Department Head:

(signature) (date)

Protocol sent to Compliance Section for final approval on _____
(date)

APPROVED: Coordinator of Compliance's
Office of Research
404 Andy Holt Tower
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
(423)974-3446

(signature) (date)

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Project: The Experience of Retiring from Sport Following a Career in High School Football: A Phenomenological Investigation.

This research is designed to investigate the experience of retiring from sport following a career in high school football. The investigation involves two parts:

- 1) Explanation of the study and gaining your informed consent, and
- 2) A discussion of your experience of retiring from high school football.

The length of the interview is anticipated to be approximately 50 minutes. However, you may take any amount of time you would like, up to two hours. The interview questions will be open-ended, informal and conversational in nature. The interviews will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place. Only group demographic information will be reported in the final manuscript to ensure your privacy.

Your participation in this study entails no unusual risks or discomforts. A manuscript based on this research may be prepared. The knowledge gained from this research may be presented to others through published works and/or presentations.

The only potential risk is your identification. While anonymity cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be maintained by replacing names, titles and organizations with pseudonyms to be used in the typed transcripts. The interview process requires audiotaping of the interview and subsequent preparation of a transcript of the interview. The audiotapes and transcripts will be retained in a secure location on the campus of the University of Tennessee. After the transcripts are completed, the tapes will be erased.

The transcripts and informed consent statements will be retained in a locked file cabinet for three years on the campus of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. If you so request, a copy of your transcript can be provided to you. Every precaution will be made to ensure confidentiality of records.

I have read the above statement and agree to participate in the research. In addition, I am aware that:

1. My name, audiotape, and transcript will remain confidential and the tapes will be erased after a transcript is prepared.
2. I am entitled to have any further inquiries answered regarding the procedures.
3. No royalties are due to me for any subsequent publication.
4. Participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. For further information about this study or your role in it, contact:

Douglas Muccio
410 Austin Peay Building
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
865-946-1092
dmuccio@utk.edu
4. The primary investigator and other researchers who are graduate students or faculty at The University of Tennessee will review the transcripts for themes.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Primary Investigator Signature _____
Date _____

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER'S PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

APPENDIX B:

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER'S PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

The Experience of Retiring from Sport Following a Career in High School Football: A
Phenomenological Investigation.

As a member of this project's research team, I understand that I will be reading transcripts of confidential interviews. The information in these transcripts has been revealed by research subjects who participated in this project in good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcripts with anyone except the investigator of this project, Douglas J. Muccio (406-3914); the research advisor, Dr. Mark Hector (974-1984); or other members of this research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I pledge not to do so.

_____	_____
Research Team Member	Date
_____	_____
Research Team Member	Date
_____	_____
Research Team Member	Date
_____	_____
Research Team Member	Date

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

APPENDIX C:

Interview with Donovan, age 28

Stats: the last two seasons we went 17-5 playing games against much larger schools. I lead the defense both years in tackles. My senior season I was the best defensive player in the league. I was also the best punter in the league and the best center in the league. Other teams game-planned offensively to make sure I was blocked. So, I guess those were the things that I was most proud of. I was player of the week six times. I was first team All League, All County, and All District. I was honorable mention All State. I was third team (name of a newspaper), and (name of a player) didn't even get that....yeah. I lost my train of thought...oh, one game I had 25 tackles. That's about it.

I: Ok. Well, can you describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of retiring from high school football?

P: Basically it was a complete life transition. To me, losing high school football was a complete life transition. It's what you focus your life on everyday. It's what I wanted to do. It's all I did for four years of my life. Everything I did was for football. I had to be on the honor roll to play football, so I was on the honor roll. I ate, I dieted for high school football. I ran, worked out. I lifted weights to play high school football. I wrestled to improve my ability in high school football. All my closest friends were football players. And for all that to be taken away was just like, *man*, life was just really empty. There was just a void. And it took me probably four to five years to get over it. It really did. And um, that's probably part of the reason that I coach now. I just loved being a part of high school football. There's nothing better than being on the sideline on Friday night. Just trying to allow them to have fun and enjoyment like I had.

I: Ok. So it was a complete life transition for you. It was a big part of your life. Everything you did served the purpose of high school football somehow. And when it was taken away it was really empty and it took four to five years to get over it. And you coach it to stay close to it. Let's start with the first thing that you said, complete life transition. Can you say more about that?

P: I guess it be kinda like an individual in a career, and all of a sudden, say they were a professional, a lawyer or a doctor, and all of a sudden something happened and somehow they're not allowed to do that anymore. You have to completely change the way you live, change the way you think.

I: How did you do that?

P: Just trying to stay active in sports. Really tried to, one way or another tried to play college football but it didn't work out. So that's one way I was trying to fill that void.

Then when I was unable to I just found working, you know, trying to go to school. Keeping myself constantly busy to fill that void. Trying to play sports, hanging out with friends. Just constantly being busy and not sit around and just think about, “man, I wish I could still be playing.” So I guess that was one way I handled it.

I: You said void and you said emptiness when it was taken away. And you said it took four or five years to get over it. Can you tell me about that void, say more about that void you felt and what that process has been like to get over it?

P: It’s kinda like you die as one person and come back as another. I honestly can compare it to being divorced since I’ve been able to go through both. That it’s just...complete life rebirth. Being reborn as a different person. Cause you’re an athlete and your constantly focused on being mentally prepared to go compete in this violent sport and in society you’re not allowed to be like that. You have to just change the way you live your life. If you live your life as a football player in everyday life you don’t get along well with people so you gotta change it. I think that’s the void I’m talkin’ about.

I: So the void is about changing the way you live.

P: Yeah.

I: Anything else that causes that void?

P: I think you have an identity as a football player. Then all of a sudden, that’s part of the being reborn is that you have to re-establish yourself as someone other than a football player. Cause people aren’t gonna look at you as a football player anymore.

I: You said identity there but what was it that causes that emptiness?

P: Not being able to play. Not being able to put on the pads and smack somebody in the mouth.

I: Say more about that.

P: Ohh, that’s the best thing about football. That was the best thing about football for me was just seeing someone with the football and my job was to put them to the ground. And it was just, *ahhh*, great to KNOCK THE PISS OUT OF SOMEBODY!! HA HA! And then to hear the crowd just screaming at you after you just laid somebody out. To make a big hit or a big tackle or a sack or interception it was just like totally exhilarating. It was just AWESOME! It was fun.

I: And not having that...

P: Yeah, it's like you're not appreciated as much. And I think that's why a lot of professional athletes have a real real hard time.

I: Say more about that, not being appreciated as much.

P: Well, that's part of the emptiness. Not being appreciated as a football player I've had to fill with other things. Learning how to be a good person, I guess fun to be around, generous, caring, and all those things. I've had to re-devote my energy and my character to developing those things to fill that because I'm not a football player anymore. So why would people want to be around me or care about me or respect me? Cause people did at one point because that's what I did. Now people respect me because of my personality, who I am. I really had to devote energy to develop those things after football was over.

I: Ok. You said earlier that football was the focus of everything you worked for and everything you did. Say more about that and what that was about.

P: Ahh, lifting weights everyday. Every chance I got. Running, doing plyometrics, jumping and explosion type exercises, running track, going to football camps, watching film, going to football practice, going to 2-a-days. *A lot* of time, *a lot* of time was devoted. And to be honest, the program that I played for was so below average I could've dedicated more time. But I did dedicate a lot. So, yeah, almost everyday just waking up thinking about it. Those four years of your life, and even after that it was rough thinking about it.

I: Yeah, say more about that, how it took four or five years of your life to get over it.

P: Just thinking about all the things I could've done better. Like I could've run a certain play better. I could've executed on a block better or made a tackle, made a big play I didn't make to help my team win the game. Get more praise and acknowledgement. Everyday you think about it. I guess any sport you have to be mentally prepared. You have to go through mental preparations, thinking about making those plays. You just sit and think about it. Daydream about it. I used to get in trouble for not paying attention cause I was thinking about it in class. It was an awesome experience. Everyone should do it.

I: What makes it such an awesome experience? One that everyone should do?

P: Cause you have purpose. You're not lost. You know, you wake up everyday and you know what you want to do. You want to go lift weights. You want to be in the best shape you can be to be the best football player you can be. And I think a lot of kids today don't have that and they get lost. That's why we have such a messed up society. That's why I think sports are so important, especially football cause it's such a team sport. 30-40 kids work together for a common goal.

I: So you were lost without football and you kinda found yourself in coaching.

P: Yep, coaching.

I: Anything else, or...

P: Coaching and competing. I think I had a void in my life cause I hadn't been competing in any type of sport at all. I really would like to get back into doing that. Even if it's just some kinda recreational co-ed stuff. I'd still like to compete. Competing, doing something and coaching are the ways I've filled that void.

I: You said earlier that you tried initially to play college football and it didn't work out. Can you say more about that?

P: Well, just cause I wanted to go to a division I school and my size and speed wasn't going to allow me to start right away and that's what I was concerned about. I didn't want to sit around and wait to play. And then when I came to the conclusion that it was going to be way too much work and no rewards what so ever. There was a good possibility that I was never going to step on the field. And it probably didn't have much to do with my athletic ability, but just what the coaches thought of me. Saying I'm too slow and too small so they won't take a chance on me playing. So then I thought, "well, I'll go to division III." And then I came to the conclusion that I'd just be paying to play football and that I had better things to do with my time. Then with the whole eligibility thing with the NCAA, you have five years to get four years of eligibility in, I just didn't have time. It wasn't worth it. I wouldn't be able to prove myself to get the playing time that I thought I deserved. I just decided to move on.

I: What was that like to make that decision?

P: Really hard. There was sadness from not having football initially. Just basically I knew that it was time to make that transition. I guess I can look back with happiness now with fond memories cause it was a part of my life. You know, I was done holding on. It was time to go. And that's when I really started getting into coaching, playing intramural type sports. That kinda helped me get through that.

I: You've talked about competing and intramural sports. What's that been like?

P: It was awesome, flag football, softball. It's just a chance to prove, not necessarily to anyone else but to yourself that you're still capable of competing and being able to perform well and win and be a champion. Some people might think "it's intramurals and it's pathetic" or "it's no big deal," but it's for you. For me as an individual it was just fun. It allowed me to fill that void of not being able to compete. It didn't compare to high school football. It was fun but it wasn't the same. You couldn't hit. You didn't have coaches. You didn't have practice.

I: What did all that mean?

P: Structure. There was no structure to it. No discipline.

I: What was better about structure and discipline?

P: High school football was much better because you had that structure. You knew, you never questioned where you stood. Playing intramurals you never knew what was going to go on. You never knew who was going to show up, who was going to be intoxicated or whatever and not be able to play. You would have a coach looking out for the best interest of the team rather than a group of guys trying to individually achieve goals and try to possibly win. The structure of having a coach and essentially the whole community supporting you was just awesome. You didn't have that in college intramurals. You'd have maybe five or six people show up to watch and no one really cared except the two teams that were playing, the guys who were participating.

I: Say more about that, you said the crowd and you said that earlier.

P: Oh yeah, in high school I would have my youth minister come up and tell me how little kids would go up and tell him how they want to be like me or grow up and play like I did and things like that and it's just like, "holy crap." It's just huge, it makes you feel awesome. And ah, kids stopping, bussing stopping by practice fields for you, school-wide pep rallies, people in the community noticing you and acknowledging you, it just feels so great. It feels like you're wanted and appreciated.

I: So what's it been like to not have that?

P: Ah, it allowed me to grow up a lot as an individual. It makes me as a coach want to enable kids that I coach to have that same feeling. I don't know, it's been different for sure.

I: Can you say more about it being different?

P: The difference is that I live in a completely different state. No one knows me. I'm not acknowledged. It doesn't necessarily always feel like I'm wanted. So I've had to become a strong individual and realize that I don't need other people's approval to be happy. You know, I don't need those things. I can be happy being who I am and that's why I find happiness. I'm enjoying life because of who I am and what I do and what I'm capable of doing, not so much what other people think. I think that's been a huge change for me as far as becoming an adult and getting over that whole teenage football mentality. Because it is, it's just a mentality and so many kids I coach have that and they struggle with the same thing. And it takes some time.

I: Ok, well, do you have anything else you'd like to add?

P: I just know that a lot of people have tried to and have helped me make that transition in retiring from high school football and I have helped people in the same position I was once in. And that's the beautiful thing about high school football, cause once you've played it and you know someone else who's played it there's a bond you have. It's almost like you're all soldiers. You're all part of the same fraternity. And there's always that bond that you all have, no matter how good or how bad you all were. Like, I've always respected anybody that's told me they competed in high school sports because it does take a lot of effort and dedication. That's about it.

I: That reminds me, you said earlier, you talked about playing with your friends and now this bond. Can you say more about that?

P: Some of my closest friends still to this day I played high school football with. It just really brings you close. You're out there, it you and your friends against the world. You're competing together, having fun together, nothing else can beat it. That's it man.

I: Ok, thank you very much.

VITA

Douglas J. Muccio was born and raised in Warren, Ohio, a small, working class city in the northeast corner of the state. Douglas went to parochial schools during his formative years, and graduated from John F. Kennedy High School in 1996.

After high school, Douglas went on to Kent State University, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. Douglas stayed at Kent State for his Masters degree, which he earned in 2001 in Sport Studies with a concentration in Sport Psychology. He then remained at Kent State University for one semester to teach Sport Psychology and Sport Sociology courses to undergraduates.

In 2002, Douglas moved to Knoxville, Tennessee to begin the doctoral program in Counseling Psychology. While developing his counseling psychology skills, Douglas continued to build a specialization in Sport Psychology through coursework, research, teaching, consultation, direct counseling with athletes, and providing outreach services.

Douglas is currently completing his pre-doctoral internship at the University of Akron Counseling, Testing, and Career Center. He will receive his Doctor of Philosophy degree in August, 2007.