

# **Psychosocial and Demographic Predictors of Transfer Desire in NCAA Student-Athletes**

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Victoria Grayson Huggins

May 2026

Copyright © 2026 by Victoria Grayson Huggins

All rights reserved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members for their continuous support throughout this process. Dr. Levy, my advisor and thesis chair, thank you for your guidance and collaboration throughout every stage of this project. Your insight and passion for the field are inspiring and I am deeply grateful for your mentorship. Dr. Hyfantis, a clinical compass and unwavering source of support across all domains of the program, thank you for your tireless contributions to my growth as both a clinician and a researcher. Dr. Miles, thank you for your leadership and enthusiasm in supporting my research development. I sincerely appreciate each of your roles within this committee and the opportunity to grow through your insight, expertise and guidance.

I would also like to thank the participants in this study, as well as their coaches, athletic trainers, and administrators, for their role in improving the collegiate athletics environment. I am deeply grateful for their time and engagement in advancing our understanding of the current state of collegiate athletics and the transfer portal. This research would not have been possible without their participation. I would also like to acknowledge the role of my own collegiate athletics department, Emory University Athletics, in setting a cultural standard for excellence in collegiate athletics and in furthering my passion to to better the student-athlete experience.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their unwavering support throughout my time in graduate school. It is a privilege to begin my career within a cohort of such incredible individuals and I am so grateful for the community we built together. Delaney, Jacob and Zayna, thank you for always being just a phone call away. To my grandparents, thank you for your constant support and encouragement over the years. Lastly, and most importantly, to my mom, thank you for instilling in me a strong foundation and deep passion for education. Your support means everything to me and I could not have done this without you.

## ABSTRACT

Student-athletes represent a core population within collegiate institutions, contributing substantially to campus life and the broader community as leaders and ambassadors of the universities they represent. Despite these positive contributions, student-athletes face elevated risks to psychological wellness due to the chronic and intensive demands of collegiate athletics. In recent years, student-athlete transfer rates have increased substantially, particularly following NCAA policy and legislative changes that allow immediate eligibility upon transfer. These trends have produced adverse effects for student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and institutions, reflecting a shift away from the traditional four-year collegiate experience and toward a more transactional athletic culture characterized by multiple institutional transitions prior to graduation. Guided by Relational-Cultural Theory and the Social-Ecological Model, this study examines psychosocial and demographic predictors of student-athletes' desire to transfer among a sample of 242 current NCAA student-athletes. Using a hierarchical regression for analysis, predictors included psychological well-being, perceived social support, psychological sense of community, racial and ethnic majority–minority status, sexual orientation majority–minority status, age, year in school, socioeconomic status, sex assigned at birth, distance from home, and perceived importance of name, image, and likeness (NIL) support. Measures included widely used instruments with strong psychometric properties, such as the World Health Organization-Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and the Psychological Sense of Community Scale. Results indicated that age, year in school, and racial and ethnic majority–minority status were significant predictors of transfer desire. Psychological sense of community emerged as the strongest predictor in the model, highlighting the critical role of connection and belonging within the

collegiate athletic environment. These findings provide important insights into the evolving culture of collegiate athletics and offer practical implications for reducing transfer rates while enhancing student-athlete well-being, connection, and institutional retention.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Student-Athlete Well-Being.....	3
Perceived Social-Support.....	13
Psychological Sense of Community.....	15
The Transfer Portal.....	17
Relational-Cultural Theory Framework.....	23
Purpose of the Current Study.....	25
CHAPTER TWO: MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	27
Participants.....	27
Procedures.....	29
Instrumentation.....	29
Data Analysis.....	32
CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	33
Exploratory Examination of Predictors of Desire to Transfer.....	33
Discussion.....	36
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	39
Practical Implications.....	39
Limitations.....	40
Conclusions.....	42
REFERENCES.....	44
VITA.....	60

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Collegiate athletics is a highly visible, prominent and powerful establishment within the United States. Participation in university-sanctioned sport provides an abundance of opportunities for growth, connection, personal development and success while simultaneously offering access to a variety of financial, educational, material and social resources (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Collegiate athletics can facilitate prosocial engagement, positive identity development, perseverance, empowerment, intellectual stimulation, decision-making ability, character development, a strong life balance, improved holistic health, financial support and career development, among other benefits (Armstrong et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2010; Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Kegelaers et al., 2022; Watt et al., 2001; Weight et al., 2014). However, there are also many associated risks and threats to psychological health within this environment that may put intrapersonal factors such as positive affect, personal development, self-acceptance, autonomy, self-actualization, motivation, purpose and life satisfaction at risk (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; Kegelaers et al., 2022). The student-athlete population is generally understudied and research on student-athletes is dearth in comparison to the salient impact this population has on both the collegiate environment and the general public (Etzel et al., 2006; Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Tran, 2021).

The decision to transfer institutions within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is complicated. Transferring uproots student-athletes, displaces them from their existing support systems and creates significant changes to their everyday lives. The mere consideration of transferring also has consequences, especially for student-athletes who decide to enter the transfer portal (Benson et al., 2023; Fuller, 2023; Reese, 2023). The transfer portal is an online

system that allows student athletes to connect with prospective teams and coaches while still enrolled at their current university. However, entering the transfer portal involves declaring one's intent to transfer, requiring each student-athlete to notify their current athletic department of their desire to explore other institutional options (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2026). A decision to enter the portal puts a student-athlete in jeopardy of having their athletic scholarship immediately terminated, regardless of their actual decision to either depart or remain at their current institution once they explore the available options within the portal (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2026). However, despite the risks and costs, thousands of student-athletes enter the transfer portal each year and around 12 percent of student-athletes decide to transfer institutions at some point in their career (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.; Swingle & Salinas, 2020). Transfer student-athletes are at greater risk for a variety of psychological well-being issues and often face challenges adjusting to a new environment (Swingle & Salinas, 2020). However, despite the increasing popularity of the transfer process, transfer student-athlete well-being is an understudied domain of the student-athlete experience (Kramer, 2023; Swingle & Salinas, 2020).

Because of the high rates of transferring and the new age of NCAA transfer rules and regulations, understanding factors behind the desire to transfer is more important than ever. This study is the first of its kind known to the author to examine the unique role of psychosocial and relational factors as potential predictors of NCAA student-athletes' desire to transfer institutions. The findings of this study will hopefully contribute to the literature to better understand student-athlete transfer decisions and the role of relationships and community in the desire to transfer or stay at an institution. This information can hopefully contribute to increased retainment rates of student-athletes and assist coaches and administrators in creating better

support networks for student-athletes. This study begins with a review of the scholarly literature on student-athlete well-being, followed by an examination of research on perceived social support. Next, the study provides a review of the literature on psychological sense of community and the transfer portal. Finally, the literature review concludes with an examination of Relational-Cultural Theory.

### **Student-Athlete Well-Being**

Psychological well-being is a concept used to describe a person's subjective rating of their experience of mental wellness across all domains of life (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Diener et al., 1998). Psychological well-being may encompass a wide variety of elements such as relationships, engagement, vocation or career, health, life events, recreation, autonomy, social support, affect, cognition, altruism, personality traits and other realms of the human experience (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Diener et al., 1998; Huppert, 2009; Ryff, 1995). Higher well-being is typically associated with more satisfaction within four specific domains across the lifespan: sociality, work and income, health and longevity and societal benefits (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Huppert, 2009). A higher degree of well-being is also associated with positive life outcomes such as higher social support, better health, increased happiness, increased life satisfaction, higher self-esteem, higher income, increased career success and more successful marriages (Bowman, 2010; Diener & Ryan, 2009; Howell et al., 2007). While negative affect may disrupt an individual's short-term satisfaction, psychological well-being is generally stable unless negative affect creates an intense or long-term interference (Huppert, 2009). While external environments affect an individual's degree of psychological well-being, they are not a sole determinant (Huppert, 2009). There are many internal and external elements that play a significant role in the development and maintenance of one's experience of psychological well-being (Huppert, 2009;

Ryff, 1995). Student-athletes are no exception, as they are prone to both the benefits and consequences of interactions between situational and dispositional factors.

Student-athlete well-being is a complex and dynamic construct that is affected by a diversity of distinctive contextual factors within the collegiate athletics environment. Student-athletes experience a variety of unique challenges and intense stressors, such as balancing an athletic and scholastic workload, managing a high number of social obligations, habitual pressure from coaches, athletic administrators and teammates and experiencing a higher degree of media and public scrutiny (Etzel et al., 2006; Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Kegelaers et al., 2022). Collegiate students already face complex developmental challenges and an increased risk for psychopathology compared to the general population, meaning that collegiate athletes often face even more stress, pressure and responsibility than their non-athlete peers (Etzel et al., 2006; Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Kegelaers et al., 2022). Student-athletes must cope with the increased psychological demands while also functioning within a culture that prevalently stigmatizes mental health and associated help-seeking behavior (Etzel et al., 2006; Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Kegelaers et al., 2022).

The structure of the student-athlete experience commonly requires the prioritization of the athletic role over the student role. Student-athletes frequently commit over 40 hours a week to their respective sport or team for practices, team meetings, strength and conditioning sessions, recovery and rehabilitation sessions, film sessions, media appearances, travel and team-based community service events, leaving little time for additional campus responsibilities (Etzel et al., 2006; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Additionally, collegiate athletics culture often encourages overtraining, which can lead to a combination of physical and psychological exhaustion that creates counterproductive performance outcomes (Etzel et al., 2006; Greenleaf et al., 2009;

Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Social burnout is also a risk. Student-athletes spend an average of 20 to 30 hours per week with their teammates, often live together as roommates, are commonly discouraged to engage in sport-distinct socialization and are expected to build relationships with coaching staff, training staff and athletic administrators (Bell, 2009). The constant social interactions and expectations within the athletics sphere can be draining for student-athletes.

Attaining a healthy balance of academics and athletics can be challenging and overwhelming, especially while existing in a social environment that implicitly favors the over-consolidated and unrestricted focus of energy into athletics (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). This consistent dilemma may create role conflict and overwhelming feelings about simultaneously navigating responsibilities as a student and upholding responsibilities as an athlete (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Watt et al., 2001). The demands of athletics may also lead to isolation from the greater academic community, resulting in one-dimensional identities and a lack of diversified social support (Etzel et al., 2006; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Watt et al., 2001). Student-athletes may also experience negative judgements, such as the “dumb jock” stereotype, from non-athlete peers or faculty about their scholastic caliber despite demonstrating strong work ethics, high levels of self-discipline, effective time management skills and high academic aptitude (Gayles, 2009; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Weight et al., 2014; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). While leadership, academic and social roles distinct from the collegiate athletics domain may be helpful in bolstering a student-athlete’s holistic sense of identity and self-concept, these roles often feel logistically impossible to obtain.

The student-athlete population is commonly affected by a variety of different factors, including clinical and sub-clinical levels of psychopathology, harmful patterns of substance use, mental health and help-seeking stigmatization, a loss of enjoyment of sport and an intense focus on the body (Chen et al., 2010; Etzel et al., 2006; Hodges, 2022). They commonly experience exhaustion, sleep deprivation, susceptibility to illness, frequent pain from injuries, poor nutrition, isolation and other intrapersonal challenges that reduce their overall sense of wellness and satisfaction (Etzel et al., 2006; Hodges, 2022; Knettel et al., 2021; Kroshus et al., 2019). Additionally, their mental health is prone to fluctuations that occur in response to athletic demands and the embedded nature of a student-athlete within the high-pressure collegiate athletics environment. This means that environmental factors can make significant and immediate impacts on their well-being (Kegelaers et al., 2024). Common precipitating events for a diminished quality of mental health include challenging life events distinct from athletics, the death of a teammates, athletic retirement, the loss of a starting role, the loss of membership on a team's travel roster, being cut from a team roster, the loss or reduction of a scholarship and any injury, regardless of injury severity or the duration of recovery before the return-to-play period (Etzel et al., 2006).

Injuries are a common occurrence within the collegiate athletics population and lead to a significantly increased risk for a variety of psychopathological concerns (Armstrong et al., 2015; Etzel et al., 2006). Injuries may trigger depressive symptoms, anxiety, substance abuse, fear of reinjury, self-esteem concerns and social isolation, among other harmful symptoms (Armstrong et al., 2015; Etzel et al., 2006). While many student-athletes face injury recovery with feelings such as frustration, sadness, loss and anger, the adjustment towards the rehabilitation process usually transforms this intense affect into resilience and coping-related behavior (Armstrong et

al., 2015). However, injuries that are severe and are accompanied with long-term recoveries often precipitate a grief response to the situation (Armstrong et al., 2015). A student-athlete's perception of their own injury plays a big role in the student-athlete's overall outlook on their recovery process, as does the overall injury severity and duration of the recovery process (Armstrong et al., 2015). Additionally, student-athletes need to be frequently monitored and supported throughout their recovery process in order to manage the psychological distress that commonly accompanies a serious athletic injury within the collegiate athletics environment (Etzel et al., 2006).

Student-athletes may also experience harmful messaging in relation to their weight and bodies based upon the intense bodily emphasis within the sporting environment. Collegiate athletes experience a heightened risk for eating disorders and disordered eating compared to non-athletes, likely based upon the chronic demands of the athletic environment despite demonstrating a higher degree of nutrition knowledge than their non-athlete peers (Blair et al., 2017). Different coaches may create expectations for student-athletes to lose, gain or maintain a certain weight, sometimes even enforced with mandatory weigh-ins that are backed by punishments for failing to meet certain standards or goals (Etzel et al., 2006, p. 530; Galli et al., 2017). The culture of athletics, with a preoccupation on bodily function and composition, may disguise problematic eating habits or attitudes of student-athletes, making disordered eating even more of a challenge to identify and eliminate within this environment (Etzel et al., 2006; Greenleaf et al., 2009).

Many student-athletes demonstrate subclinical levels of eating disorders, often manifesting as superstitious eating or routine-based food restriction, behaviors or patterns which go undetected by others (Chen et al., 2010; Greenleaf et al., 2009; Wells et al., 2015). Some

common weight control behaviors within the student-athlete population include bingeing, self-induced vomiting, utilizing laxatives, fasting, dieting and engaging in additional exercise on top of required team training with the intention of weight reduction or control (Greenleaf et al., 2009; Tacket et al., 2016). Bodily dissatisfaction is extremely common within this population, with both male and female athletes experiencing bodily dissatisfaction at a rate as high as 50 percent (Blair et al., 2017; Wells et al., 2015). Social encouragement of dysfunctional eating behaviors significantly increases the risk and prevalence of weight control behaviors, which can be problematic within a team setting (Wells et al., 2015). There are very consequential outcomes associated with disordered eating including dehydration, dental erosion, hormone imbalances, hypertension, amenorrhea, electrolyte imbalances, organ system dysfunction, bradycardia and osteoporosis (Etzel et al., 2006; Tacket et al., 2016; Wells et al., 2015).

The collegiate student-athlete population has a very high prevalence of psychopathology, experiencing depressive symptoms at rates around 16 to 40 percent, anxiety at rates of 25 to 50 percent, alcohol abuse at rates of 15 to 34 percent and sleep disturbance at rates of 42 to 60 percent (Etzel et al., 2006; Kegelaers et al., 2024; Knettel et al., 2021; Kroshus et al., 2019; Sullivan et al., 2020; Tran, 2021; Weber et al., 2023). However, it is likely that these reported rates are lower than the actual rates. Additionally, some of these disorders within this student-athlete population are associated with consequential outcomes. For example, anxiety is associated with increased cannabis use, a higher risk for the incidence of a sport-related injury and higher levels of pain when an injury is actually sustained (Knettel et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2023). Another example is that student-athletes who engage in problematic patterns of alcohol use, such as episodic or heavy binge drinking, are more prone to drinking-related risky behavior and are more likely to face alcohol-related consequences or problems despite believing that their

non-athlete peers engage in more risky drinking behavior (Etzel et al., 2006; Knettel et al., 2021). These rates of psychopathology and their associated outcomes are problematic and difficult to control within this environment because of mental health stigma and associated help-seeking behaviors (Edwards et al., 2023).

Mental health stigma is extremely prevalent within this environment and leads to underreporting of negative symptoms as well as a reduction of help-seeking behavior (Edwards et al., 2023). Student-athletes often avoid help-seeking behavior in order to avoid being seen as weak by teammates or coaches (Edwards et al., 2023; Wahto et al., 2016). Perfectionism may play a role, as higher levels of perfectionist concerns are predictive of higher levels of stigmatization towards mental health care (Watson et al., 2021). However, despite higher exposure to mental health-related psychoeducation than their non-athlete peers, student-athletes continue to demonstrate lower rates of positive help-seeking attitudes (Edwards et al., 2023). According to research done by the NCAA in 2021, only 47 percent of surveyed NCAA student-athletes felt comfortable going to a mental health provider on campus (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022). Additionally, only 53 percent of these surveyed student-athletes felt that their coaches take mental health concerns of their athletes seriously (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022). However, these rates are more problematic and consequential than they appear. Because student-athletes are less likely to engage in help-seeking behavior compared to non-athlete peers, they face an increased risk of suicide (Armstrong et al., 2015). Suicide was found to be the third leading cause of death for NCAA student-athletes with male and football student-athletes being at the greatest risk (Rao et al., 2015).

Student-athletes who are members of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups are more likely to experience mental health challenges and decreased well-being. First,

female student-athletes, in comparison to their male counterparts, report more mental health diagnoses and increased anxiety, depressive and stress symptoms while also struggling with disordered eating at higher rates (Armstrong et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2022; Storch et al., 2005). Racial and ethnic minority student-athletes also experience a higher risk for poorer mental health outcomes compared to other student-athletes by encountering mental health risk factors at a rate around 75 percent and experiencing a need for mental health support at a rate at around 78 percent. These student-athletes also have a higher prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempts compared to their White peers (Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Kroshus et al., 2023; Tran, 2021). Sexual and gender minority student-athletes also struggle compared to their non-minority peers. LGBTQ+ student-athletes experience greater risk for poorer psychological outcomes and discrimination compared to both heterosexual athlete and non-athlete peers at a rate of around 81 percent in males and 85 percent in females (Havey, 2021; Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022).

While first year and transfer student-athletes are not considered members of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups, they report poorer psychological wellness compared to their older and non-transfer student-athlete peers while facing unique environmental stressors in the collegiate athletics environment. Incoming first-years experience a higher rate of depressive symptoms, substance abuse and emotional disturbances such as homesickness, loneliness and grief compared to older student-athletes (Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Lubker & Etzel, 2007). Similarly, although the literature on transfer student-athletes is particularly sparse, research on transfer students more broadly indicates elevated rates of negative psychosocial outcomes including more frequent suicide attempts, suicidal ideation and self-injury. Transfer students are also more likely to experience anxiety, depression, stress and social isolation (Beiter et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2021). Lastly, both first-year and transfer

student-athletes are at an increased risk of psychological harm from hazing, with prevalence rates as high as 80 percent across the student-athlete population (Diamond et al., 2016).

Hazing is a prevalent and harmful tradition within the student-athlete population that typically uses either physical, psychological or alcohol-related methods (Chen et al., 2010; Diamond et al., 2016). Physical hazing includes experiences such as beatings, branding, forced consumption, head shaving, tattooing, paddling, burning, abandonment, forced exercise, sexual assault and kidnapping. Psychological hazing includes experiences such as name-calling, being screamed at, sleep or food deprivation, acting as a servant or slave, being tied, taped or confined, having to engage in humiliating acts or wearing humiliating makeup or clothing. Alcohol-related hazing normally comprises forced binge drinking (Diamond et al., 2016). Approximately 20 percent of student-athletes report the experience of illegal hazing activities, around 65 percent of student-athletes report the experience of personal humiliation during hazing and approximately 50 percent of student-athletes report the experience of alcohol-related hazing (Diamond et al., 2016).

A major issue within the collegiate athletics environment is the disparity between hazing behavior and hazing education. While 80 percent of student-athletes reported hazing behaviors, only 12 percent identified them as hazing (Diamond et al., 2016). Problematically, 60 to 95 percent of student-athletes that had experienced hazing communicated that they would not report hazing behaviors if given the chance (Diamond et al., 2016). Hazing rituals are often perceived as an opportunity to prove loyalty, dedication, commitment and self-worth to a team despite the clear harm and danger hazing may pose as well as the fact that hazing almost always breaks institutional and legal policy (Diamond, 2016). Hazing has led to individual and team

suspensions, cancelled seasons, psychological and physical harm, a reduction in team connectivity and even death in some extreme cases (Diamond, 2016).

In the face of such high mental health stigma and the plethora of psychosocial challenges within the student-athlete population, athletic departments must consider the existing support structures within the collegiate athletics environment. One key resource is the natural rapport between student-athletes and athletic training staff (Beasley et al., 2022; Eckenrod & Kossman, 2025; Edwards et al., 2023). Standard referral processes for mental health services can reinforce student-athletes' tendencies to avoid formalized mental health support, so internal processes of referrals through trusted and embedded personnel, such as athletic trainers, are likely to be more effective (Beasley et al., 2022; Eckenrod & Kossman, 2025). Athletic trainers typically know their student-athletes well and can serve as trusted confidants to facilitate the mental health referral process (Beasley et al., 2022; Eckenrod & Kossman, 2025). They also might be able to identify mental health concerns that a student-athlete might not be aware of and provide informal psychoeducation about the benefits of mental health support (Beasley et al., 2022; Eckenrod & Kossman, 2025). Athletic trainers are extremely important liaisons between student-athletes and mental health care resources.

Additionally, related to the referral process, is the need for standardized and frequent mental health screening procedures within the collegiate athletics environment (Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022). Present mental health risk factors can significantly affect a student-athlete's overall functioning and frequent screenings may be helpful in mitigating the build-up of psychological challenges. The quality of student-athlete mental health often fluctuates during the school year, commonly in tandem with changes in their sport season status so one annual screening may not be adequate (Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022). More screening is necessary to

prevent worsening psychopathology rates within the student-athlete population. Additionally, important personnel within athletic departments must recognize their responsibility in the realm of student-athlete wellness and support. In order to create a better collegiate athletics culture, current athletic department administrators, coaches and other key athletics personnel must develop a higher level of critical awareness in how their decision-making and influence shapes the organizational climate of their collegiate athletics department and the associated experiences of their student-athletes (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016).

### **Perceived Social Support**

Perceived social support is an individual's subjective assessment of the availability and quality of assistance from their interpersonal network of friends, family and trusted others (Hailey et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2018). The degree of one's perceived social support is more directly associated with an individual's quality of mental health than their actual received social support, making perceived social support a better construct in the realm of individual wellness (Gülaçti, 2010; Malinauskas, 2010). Perceived social support has been found to be associated with a variety of important and positive entities, such as quality of life, relational fulfillment, reduced psychopathology, and overall life satisfaction across a wide variety of different populations and age groups, including college students (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018; Bukhari & Afzal, 2017; Cahuas et al., 2023; Hooker et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2016; Mahanta & Aggarwal, 2013; Şahin et al., 2019; Sammarco, 2001; Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023; Wang et al., 2018). A higher degree of perceived social support has also been found to improve student adjustment to the collegiate environment, demonstrating the especially critical role of perceived social support for first-year and transfer students (Awang et al., 2014).

A person's perception of social support is especially important during experiences of adversity or hardship, as social support provides coping resources to an individual and can increase one's sense of autonomy, empowerment, health and well-being in the face of challenging, distressing or hopeless life circumstances (Graupensperger et al., 2020; Hailey et al., 2023; Hooker et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2016; Simons & Bird, 2023). Perceived social support plays an important role of moderating psychopathology and symptomology severity within the collegiate population and is also associated with recovery outcomes in adult populations (Bukhari & Afzal, 2017; Cahuas et al., 2023; Çivitci, 2015; Osman et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2018). The diversity of support available to an individual is also important. Different individuals within someone's support network are able to provide unique types of social support, such as esteem-based, emotional or informational support, which can uniquely align with an individual's needs when facing different types of intrapersonal challenges (Simons & Bird, 2023). An individual is best equipped to overcome adversity when they can tailor their received support to best fit the specific challenge or adversary that they are facing.

Perceived social support is a critical component of student-athlete well-being because it serves as a protective factor for psychological health while buffering the negative effects of stress, adversity and burnout within the intense collegiate athletics environment (Malinauskas, 2010; Simons & Bird, 2023, p. 194; Sullivan et al., 2020). Chronic stress within this environment may lead to hormonal imbalances, psychopathology and harmful substance use, making the role of perceived social support even more critical for this population (Bozovic et al., 2013; Fink, 2007; Sullivan et al., 2020). Perceived social support also buffers against depressive symptoms, which are prevalent within the collegiate student-athlete population (Sullivan et al., 2020). Experiencing a high quality of social support is important, as it aids student-athletes in adapting

better to the collegiate environment and internalizing an increased sense of belonging and empowerment (Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023). A higher degree of perceived social support also may increase a student-athlete's self confidence and sport performance while positively affecting their behavior, affect and cognition (Gabana et al., 2017; Katagami & Tsuchiya, 2016).

Perceived social support is especially important for student-athletes during injury recovery periods. Student-athletes typically experience a significant reduction in perceived social support around one week after an injury occurs that persists throughout the return-to-play process (Stowe, 2015). Perceived social support is critically important in order to avoid athletic identity loss and the development of psychopathology (Simons & Bird, 2023). The key role of perceived social support as a psychological buffer was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic social isolation period when student-athletes who experienced higher perceived social support and connection to teammates retained a higher sense of athletic identity and a higher degree of psychological wellness (Graupensperger et al., 2020). Perceived social support clearly plays a major role in maintaining and protecting psychological health and wellness within the student-athlete population as well as serving as an important component in the lifelong well-being of these individuals (DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Lee et al., 2018).

### **Psychological Sense of Community**

Psychological sense of community is the experience of likeness with others, the recognition of connectedness and interdependence with others, a desire for the maintenance of this interdependence through continued mutuality and the understanding that an individual is one part of a greater whole (Fisher et al., 2002; Jason et al., 2015; Sarason, 1974). The concept, originally introduced by Seymour Sarason in 1974 as a core idea within the emerging discipline of community psychology, is best understood as an affective experience that is the product of an

individual's interaction with their environment and associated contextual factors, demonstrating the interconnectivity of different organizational levels of a social environment or system (Fisher et al., 2002; Jason et al., 2016). Throughout the years, many different researchers have attempted to identify a precise model of psychological sense of community that appropriately captures all its dimensions and components (Buckner, 1988; Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Doolittle & MacDonald, 1978; Fisher et al., 2002; Glynn, 1981; Hill, 1996; Jason et al., 2015; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Riger & Lawvrakas, 1981). Doolittle and MacDonald (1978) attempted to encapsulate the dimensions of psychological sense of community as well and landed upon six factors, including localism, neighborly interaction, safety, informal interaction, supportive climate and family life cycle. Glynn (1981) also formulated a six dimensional model which included quality of community environment, community security, individual involvement in the community, supportive relationships in the community, similarity and relationship patterns of community residents and objective evaluation of community structure. However, these models failed to thoroughly capture the concept of psychological sense of community.

Next, Riger and Lawvrakas (1981) created a bidimensional model built upon the constructs of physical rootedness and social bonding. Davidson and Cotter (1986) also attempted this modeling task but decided on a one dimensional model with the core dimension being a sense of community. Buckner (1988) tried to encompass this concept into three distinct domains including attraction to neighboring, degree of neighboring and psychological sense of community but also realized that the best model was unidimensional, with the primary domain identified as cohesion (Buckner, 1988). Lastly, a commonly used four dimensional model was formulated by McMillan and Chavis (1986), based upon the four domains of shared emotional connection, influence, membership and fulfillment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

However, this model is still questionable in regard to results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and specific constructs, alluding to a need for a stronger and improved model (Hill, 1996; Jason et al., 2015).

The optimal modeling approach for psychological sense of community is based on community psychology's ecological model and associated empirical findings (Jason et al., 2015). The ecological model posits that individuals exist first as distinct entities with unique cognition, affect and behavior but are simultaneously nested within a microsystem of relationships with other individuals which are also concurrently nested within a broader macrosystem of institutions, organizations, societies and cultures (Jason et al., 2015). The three foundational domains of this model, evolved from the three distinct ecological model levels, are *self*, *membership* and *entity* (Jason et al., 2015). The *self* component of psychological sense of community, the most micro-level domain, refers to the affective connectivity, significance and allegiance that members experience (Jason et al., 2015). The *membership* portion of psychological sense of community, the mid level domain, refers to the relational quality and connectivity between individual members of the group (Jason et al., 2015). Lastly, the *entity* component of psychological sense of community, which is the most macro-level dimension of this concept, refers to the broader culture and characteristics of the entire group that include shared objectives, collective aspirations and unified purpose (Jason et al., 2015). This ecological framework provides a conceptualization of how community comprises domains distinctly nested in an interconnected and hierarchical system.

### **The Transfer Portal**

The transfer portal is rapidly changing the landscape of the NCAA as the decision to transfer institutions has become increasingly more frequent among student-athletes (Benson et

al., 2023; Fuller, 2023; Kramer, 2023; Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024; National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.; Swingle & Salinas, 2020). Research done in 2020 found that almost 12 percent of student-athletes transfer at least once during their time in collegiate athletics (Swingle & Salinas, 2020). Prior to 2018, student-athletes faced a full year sporting ban if they decided to transfer institutions during their time as a NCAA athlete (Benson et al., 2023; Reese, 2023). While this policy resulted in more student-athletes remaining at one single institution for their entire collegiate career, this policy also constrained student-athlete autonomy and decision-making power. Beginning in 2021, the NCAA decided that all student-athletes, regardless of division, would be allowed to transfer a single time without a year-long penalty being implemented under a policy called the One-Time Transfer Rule (Benson et al., 2023; Kramer, 2023; Reese, 2023). However, in April 2024, the NCAA Division I Council approved a change that allowed student-athletes to transfer more than one time without penalty (Wright, 2024). While the decision to transfer still requires a notification to the current institution's compliance department and is restricted to a few different periods of time during the year, or "transfer portal windows," the transfer process has become much easier and more common for student-athletes (Benson et al., 2023; Kramer, 2023; Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024; Reese, 2023).

According to data from the NCAA, reported reasons for student-athletes' consideration of transferring include mental health, team conflict, playing time, academics, finances and family or personal considerations (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022). While student-athletes who enter the transfer portal may be seeking an improvement for a variety of factors, such as a better overall experience, more playing time, more money, a different coaching staff, a higher level of competition or a better chance at playing at the professional level, there are many risks in the face of the potential benefits (Benson et al., 2023; Economou & Gamble, 2025; Fuller, 2023;

Kramer, 2023; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022; Reese, 2023; Richards et al., 2016; Swingle & Salinas, 2020). However, it is important to note that the transfer portal is not necessarily a finalized decision to leave one's institution. The student-athlete, after entering the portal, must reengage with the recruiting process and it is very possible and likely that the options within the portal are not more optimal than the student-athlete's current situation (Fuller, 2023; Reese, 2023). Some student-athletes end up withdrawing their name from the transfer portal, especially considering that the number of student-athletes within the portal is much higher than the available number of scholarships (Fuller, 2023; Reese, 2023). Data from the NCAA indicate that around seven to nine percent of Division I and II student-athletes returned to their teams from the transfer portal during 2022 to 2024 (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Because of this ambiguous and complex transfer process, student-athletes often experience a high degree of stress when attempting to make transfer decisions (Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024).

Once a student-athlete enters the transfer portal, they lose any current athletic scholarships and their current institution has the discretion to reallocate those funds (Fuller, 2023). While some student-athletes decide to remain at their current institution after exploring other options in the portal, there is no guarantee that a previous athletic scholarship will be waiting for them once they decide to stay (Fuller, 2023). The transfer portal works both ways, and while student-athletes are now better able to weigh their options and make year to year decisions about where they want to compete, coaches are able to recruit new student-athletes from the portal who are trying to find a new institutional home (Benson et al., 2023; Fuller, 2023). Coaches may also use the transfer portal to bring in older student-athletes each competition year, shifting the recruiting focus away from incoming freshmen and high school prospects (Carlay, 2025; Reese, 2023). In some extreme cases, coaches may even pressure their

current student-athletes to enter the portal to make room for desired new players in the face of strict NCAA-imposed roster limits (Carlay, 2025; Reese, 2023). Regardless of the specific reason, engaging with the transfer portal is a clear risk to a student-athlete's well-being and future in sport.

While there is no available data for Division III student-athletes, there is a clear increase in transfer portal activity for both the Division I and Division II levels (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). During 2022, there were around 15,500 NCAA Division I and II student-athletes at both the graduate and undergraduate levels who entered the transfer portal. However, this number jumped almost fifteen percent in 2023 to around 17,800 student-athletes. The number increased another 10 percent the following year with approximately 19,600 Division I and II student-athletes active in the portal (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). The number of undergraduate student-athletes using the transfer portal rose by approximately 27 percent between 2022 and 2024, demonstrating a rising pattern within the student-athlete population of exploring institutional options even during the initial four years of undergraduate eligibility (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Additionally, the number of Division I student-athletes who successfully enrolled at new institutions rose from 57 percent to 62 percent from 2022 to 2024 (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). This data demonstrates a clear trend that more student-athletes are utilizing the transfer portal now more than ever during their collegiate careers despite the risks associated with the transfer process.

Leadership changes within collegiate athletics programs are a threat to student-athletes' security throughout their collegiate career. While student-athletes often choose a program to commit to during high school based on mutual interest and perceived fit between the head coach and the student-athlete, a coach's job is never guaranteed throughout that player's entire

collegiate career. Coaching staff changes are a key reason for student-athletes to enter the transfer portal (Benson et al., 2023; Richards et al., 2016). Unfortunately, an incoming coach may have a completely different coaching philosophy or style than a previous coach and the same player who might be an ideal fit for a certain coach's team would fit poorly into a different coach's system. A student-athlete's playing time might drastically reduce under leadership of a new coach despite their skill and abilities remaining the same. Coaching staff changes can lead to periods of precariousness and ambiguity for athletic teams or programs, which might require too much adversity or patience for a student-athlete with limited eligibility to endure (Benson et al., 2023). The most common predictors of transferring are, unsurprisingly, factors outside of a student-athlete's realm of control (Benson et al., 2023; Richards et al., 2016).

There are a variety of psychosocial risks associated with the transfer portal. First, individuals such as coaches, administrators, teammates, fans and the media may criticize a student-athlete as being selfish or egocentric for pursuing opportunities within the transfer portal (Benson et al., 2023). Because of this criticism, a student-athlete's reputation may be damaged and they might experience isolation, hopelessness and despair. Next, a coach may attempt to interfere with a student-athlete's opportunities within the portal by speaking poorly about the player to other coaches. A disgruntled coach may also attempt to impede processes that are required for a student-athlete's transfer, such as paperwork. Another risk is general distress and anxiety (Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024). Negative affect such as disappointment, frustration, uncertainty and loss may become prevalent among student-athletes who get caught in the middle between institutions, intent upon leaving but having nowhere to go (Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024; Reese, 2023). Student-athletes may also lose the majority of their social support networks if their

support is heavily dependent upon individuals at their previous institution. There are clearly a variety of salient psychosocial risks for student-athletes who engage with the transfer portal.

Additionally, there may be significant financial repercussions for student-athletes who enter the transfer portal and lose existing financial support without the guarantee of financial support somewhere else (Reese, 2023). Some student-athletes may not be able to afford a college education at all without the scholarship they previously held (Reese, 2023). Other risks include career or academic-related limitations. A student-athlete may not be able to complete their intended degree if their institution does not offer the same concentration of study (Benson et al., 2023; Swingle & Salinas, 2020). All academic credits from one institution may not transfer to another institution, reducing the sufficient recognition of a student-athlete's completed coursework and potentially impeding a student-athlete's academic progress. For most student-athletes, the outcomes of the transfer portal process are more detrimental than beneficial to their overall situation (Reese, 2023). The lack of regulations and protections for student-athletes during the transfer portal process are concerning in the face of general student-athlete wellness and success (Reese, 2023). Lastly, current research on the consequences of considering transferring is dearth (Reese, 2023; Swingle & Salinas, 2020). The scope of psychosocial implications and consequences are still widely unknown at this time. While it is certain that transfer student-athletes experience higher risk for reduced psychological wellness and adjustment challenges, more research is needed to better understand the full impacts of the initial decision to enter the transfer portal (Swingle & Salinas, 2020).

Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) is an important sociocultural consideration in the current collegiate environment regarding the transfer portal. During July 2021, the NCAA approved a policy that allowed current NCAA student-athletes to financially profit from their

name, image or likeness (Dees et al., 2021; Economou & Gamble, 2025; Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024). This policy allowed current NCAA student-athletes to profit from sponsorships or endorsements without losing their eligibility to compete (Dees et al., 2021; Economou & Gamble, 2025; Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024). While there are many benefits for student-athletes, including increased financial profit, there are also many challenges that NIL has created within the collegiate athletics environment, such as the exclusion of international students from NIL opportunities based on student visa restrictions, NIL-based gender inequities or the limited regulatory legislation for NIL deals and products (Dees et al., 2021; Economou & Gamble, 2025; Fortunato, 2023; Solomon et al., 2022). One significant issue with NIL is increasing pressure for student-athletes to transfer in order to receive better NIL benefits (Economou & Gamble, 2025). Student-athletes want to increase their earning potential but often get little guidance from the individuals within their current institution (Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024). Student-athletes may experience a high degree of stress when they do not have support or guidance in the realm of NIL and may make poor transfer decisions as a result (Economou & Gamble, 2025; Madden & O'Hallarn, 2024). Unquestionably, NIL has intensified the ambiguity and complication surrounding the decision to transfer within collegiate athletics.

### **Relational-Cultural Theory Framework**

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) posits that individual growth and flourishing are best achieved through meaningful interpersonal relationships that provide opportunities for intrapersonal development (Jordan, 2000; Lenz, 2016; Lértora & Croffie, 2020). In other words, relationships serve as a central mechanism for personal growth, learning, well-being, and life satisfaction across the lifespan. The theory emphasizes relational concepts such as mutuality, engagement, authenticity, and connectivity while acknowledging the influence of the unique

cultural context in which all relationships exist (Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023; Lenz, 2016). According to RCT, higher levels of psychological wellness and relational maturity promote interpersonal complexity and life satisfaction. Positive relational growth helps individuals avoid isolation and emotional disconnection, ultimately supporting greater overall well-being (Comstock et al., 2002; Frey, 2013; Jordan, 2000; Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023). As relational maturity develops, individuals ideally distance themselves from relationships that cause chronic harm or distress (Comstock et al., 2002; Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023).

RCT identifies three foundational principles of growth-fostering relationships: authenticity, mutual empowerment, and mutual empathy (Jordan, 2000). These relationships are associated with the “Five Good Things,” which include increased clarity about the self and others, a desire for more meaningful connections, enhanced sense of worth, greater productivity, and increased zest for life (Comstock et al., 2002; Jordan, 2000; Lértora & Croffie, 2020). The ultimate goal of RCT is relational differentiation, defined as preserving one’s autonomy while simultaneously sustaining and nurturing connections with others, resulting in a fulfilled and mature self (Jordan, 2000; Lenz, 2016).

RCT also emphasizes that conflict or disconnection within relationships is inevitable, but outcomes depend on whether such conflicts are addressed maturely and empathically. Chronic mishandling of relational conflict can create negative relational images that inhibit individuals’ sense of connection and life satisfaction (Comstock et al., 2002; Lértora & Croffie, 2020). Conversely, effectively managed conflicts contribute to continued personal growth, self-insight, and holistic well-being (Comstock et al., 2002; Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023).

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant for student-athletes, who navigate multiple relational opportunities within the closely-knit social environment of collegiate

athletics, including interactions with teammates, coaches, administrators, and support staff. RCT was originally developed by female psychologists at Wellesley College with a focus on individuals with marginalized identities, making its constructs especially applicable to diverse populations of student-athletes (Cannon et al., 2012; Lenz, 2016; Lértora & Croffie, 2020; Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023). By emphasizing the critical role of relationships and quality interpersonal connections across the lifespan, RCT provides a strong theoretical foundation for examining psychosocial factors in understanding transfer-related considerations among NCAA student-athletes.

### **Purpose of the Current Study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of well-being and relational quality on NCAA collegiate athletes' desire to transfer institutions. Ideally, this study will also contribute knowledge to the long-term goal of reducing student-athlete transfer rates and increasing the overall satisfaction and well-being within this population. Increased understanding about the psychosocial well-being of student-athletes will likely facilitate the creation of better tailored wellness interventions for the collegiate athletics environment. Based on the existing literature, this study will test a variety of demographic variables as well as three key psychosocial variables, including individual well-being, perceived social support and psychological sense of community, as predictors of student-athletes' desire to transfer. Due to the exploratory nature of the study regarding demographic factors, no directional hypothesis was proposed. The present study addresses one exploratory question and three a priori hypotheses in congruence with the existing literature on student-athlete wellness, psychosocial factors and Relational-Cultural Theory:

Q1: To what extent do demographic characteristics (racial and ethnic majority-minority status, sexual orientation majority-minority status, year in school, age, socioeconomic status, distance from home and sex assigned at birth) and motivational factors (personal importance of NIL opportunities) predict desire to transfer among current NCAA student-athletes?

Q2: To what extent does individual well-being predict desire to transfer among current NCAA student-athletes?

H2: Higher levels of individual well-being will be associated with lower levels of desire to transfer among current NCAA student-athletes.

Q3: To what extent does perceived social support predict desire to transfer among current NCAA student-athletes?

H3: Higher levels of perceived social support will be associated with lower levels of desire to transfer among current NCAA student-athletes.

Q4: To what extent does psychological sense of community predict desire to transfer among current NCAA student-athletes?

H4: Higher levels of psychological sense of community will be associated with lower levels of desire to transfer among current NCAA student-athletes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Participants

To be eligible for the study, participants were required to be at least 18 years old and currently enrolled at an NCAA institution. Within the recruited study sample ( $N = 518$ ), approximately half of the participants agreed to the study terms, completed all necessary items, passed the quality response checks and were included in the final analysis. The final sample consisted of 242 current NCAA student-athletes across all sports, divisions, institutions, and years in school. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 24 ( $M = 19.44$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ). Within the final participant sample, 31 percent ( $n = 75$ ) were 18 years old, 25.2 percent ( $n = 61$ ) were 19 years old, 21.1 percent ( $n = 51$ ) were 20 years old, 17.8 percent ( $n = 43$ ) were 21 years old, 1.7 percent ( $n = 4$ ) were 22 years old, 2.9 percent ( $n = 7$ ) were 23 years old and less than 1 percent ( $n = 1$ ) were 24 years old.

Within this study, most of the participants were undergraduate student-athletes. Regarding year in school, 38.4 percent ( $n = 93$ ) were first years, 20.7 percent ( $n = 50$ ) were second years, 16.5 percent ( $n = 40$ ) were third years, 21.5 percent ( $n = 52$ ) were fourth years and 2.9 percent ( $n = 7$ ) were fifth years. Most participants were Division III student-athletes ( $n = 218$ , 90.1%), followed by Division II ( $n = 20$ , 8.3%) and Division I ( $n = 2$ , <1%). All three NCAA divisions were represented despite the study only recruiting participants through Division III institutions. There were more female student-athletes ( $n = 181$ , 74.8%) represented in the sample than male student-athletes ( $n = 61$ , 25.2%). Additionally, there were 19 different types of sports represented in the study, distinct from male or female designation.

Regarding the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the sample, 78.5 percent of participants identified as White ( $n = 190$ ), 11.6 percent ( $n = 28$ ) identified as more than one race or ethnicity, 4.1 percent ( $n = 10$ ) identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 2.5 percent ( $n = 6$ ) identified as Asian, 2.1 percent ( $n = 5$ ) identified as Black or African American, less than one percent ( $n = 2$ ) identified as a race or ethnicity not listed and less than one percent ( $n = 1$ ) identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Regarding sexual orientation, 81 percent of participants ( $n = 196$ ) identified as straight or heterosexual, 7.9 percent ( $n = 19$ ) identified as bisexual, 3.3 percent ( $n = 8$ ) identified as asexual, 2.5 percent of participants ( $n = 6$ ) identified as lesbian, 2.1 percent ( $n = 5$ ) identified as gay, 1.7 percent ( $n = 4$ ) identified as queer, less than one percent ( $n = 2$ ) identified as questioning or unsure and less than one percent ( $n = 2$ ) identified as a sexual orientation not listed.

The study included additional questions to better understand participants' backgrounds. Participants rated their socioeconomic status on a ladder from one to 10 compared to other people in the United States. Within the sample, less than one percent of participants ( $n = 2$ ) gave themselves a 10, the highest rating, 5.4 percent ( $n = 13$ ) rated themselves a nine and 14 percent ( $n = 34$ ) rated themselves an eight. Among the remaining participants, 24 percent ( $n = 58$ ) rated themselves a seven, 23.1 percent ( $n = 56$ ) a six and 15.3 percent ( $n = 37$ ) a five. Finally, 10.7 percent ( $n = 26$ ) rated themselves as a four, 5.4 percent ( $n = 13$ ) a three and 1.2 percent ( $n = 3$ ) a two. This distribution reflects a diverse range of socioeconomic status within the study sample.

Participants varied widely in their distance from home while attending their current school. Specifically, 19.4 percent of participants ( $n = 47$ ) lived within 50 miles of home, 10.7 percent ( $n = 26$ ) lived 50–100 miles away, 26.4 percent ( $n = 64$ ) lived 100–250 miles away, 16.5 percent ( $n = 40$ ) lived 250–500 miles away, and 26.9 percent ( $n = 65$ ) lived over 500 miles from

home. Lastly, the study measured the impact of NIL support on the desire to transfer. Less than one percent of study participants ( $n = 1$ ) reported that NIL support “very much” impacted their desire to transfer, seven percent of participants ( $n = 17$ ) reported that it “somewhat” impacted their desire to transfer and the majority (92.6%,  $n = 224$ ) reported that it “not at all” impacted their desire to transfer.

### **Procedures**

Data was collected through an online survey on the Qualtrics website. Participants were recruited through emails sent to every coach, administrator and trainer listed in each NCAA Division III institution’s athletic staff directory during fall 2025. The email included an anonymous link to the study and an attached flyer with the study invitation and information. The online survey began with a consent form describing the study procedures and outlining the risks and benefits of participation. Participants were then required to either agree to the terms of voluntary participation or decline participation. If participants provided consent, the survey automatically directed them to the first set of items. If participants declined consent, the survey directed them to the gift card drawing. All participants, regardless of consent or survey completion, were given the opportunity to enter a drawing for an Amazon gift card. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the survey used a separate link for survey responses and for collecting emails for the gift card drawing. The study was initially reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for human subjects (UTK IRB-25-09001-XM).

### **Instrumentation**

Participants answered demographic questions during the study, providing information on age, racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, sex assigned at

birth, and gender identity. They also reported their current year in school, current or intended major, sport, NCAA division, academic and athletic scholarship status, and the distance from their hometown to their current school. Finally, participants indicated whether they were first-generation college students, international students, or transfer students.

***Psychological Well-Being.*** The World Health Organization-Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) is a widely used self-report tool to measure subjective psychological well-being (Topp et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 1998). The questionnaire has high clinimetric validity and strong generalizability to a variety of populations, including college students (Downs et al., 2017; Lenahan et al., 2022; Topp et al., 2015). The WHO-5 is a brief five item measure that is easy to score and interpret (Downs et al., 2017). The scale's five items are scored on a Likert scale from zero (at no time) to five (all of the time) with a higher score reflecting enhanced psychological well-being (Topp et al., 2015). A possible raw score ranges from zero to 25 with that score being converted to the final score by multiplying the raw score by four. The best possible well-being score is 100 and the worst possible score is zero (Topp et al., 2015). Overall, the questionnaire demonstrates high test-retest reliability, good factor structure and strong internal consistency, making it a consistent and strong measure of student-athlete psychological well-being for this study (Downs et al., 2017). Within this study, the WHO-5 demonstrated good internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

***Perceived Social Support.*** The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a commonly used self-report measure of perceived social support from three different sources: a significant other, family and friends (Zimet et al., 1988). The scale consists of 12 items, four items for each source of PSS, scored on a seven-point Likert scale from one (very strongly disagree) to seven (very strongly agree) with higher scores reflecting greater

levels of PSS (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018; Osman et al., 2014). A possible composite score for the MSPSS ranges from 12 to 84 (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018; Dambi et al., 2018). The MSPSS was selected to measure PSS based on its strong factorial validity, high internal and test–retest reliability and moderate construct validity when applied to populations of college students (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018; Bukhari & Afzal, 2017; Kazarian & McCabe, 1991; Osman et al., 2014). Within this study, the MSPSS demonstrated excellent internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

***Psychological Sense of Community.*** The Psychological Sense of Community Scale (PSCS) utilizes the three level ecological model approach from community psychology to quantify psychological sense of community (Jason et al., 2015). The measure assesses social participation, connectedness and belonging to the broader community across three ecological levels: Self, Membership and Entity. It consists of nine items scored on a six-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to six (strongly agree) with higher scores indicating greater psychological sense of community (Cordier et al., 2017; Jason et al., 2015). The PSCS was selected for this study due to its strong internal consistency, good measurement model fit, robust structural and convergent validity, high reliability and focus on the construct of social connectedness applicable across diverse community contexts (Cordier et al., 2017; Jason et al., 2015). Within this study’s sample, the PSCS demonstrated excellent internal consistency based on Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

***Desire to Transfer.*** A participant’s desire to transfer was measured using a single self-created item: “On a scale from 1 to 7, where would you rate yourself on the desire to transfer from your current institution?” The item employed a 7-point Likert scale, with one representing “I do not intend to transfer” and seven representing “I have decided to transfer.” The

straightforward wording was intentional and designed to enhance respondent comprehension, a key aspect of effective Likert scale development associated with high item validity (Jebb et al., 2021). A seven-point scale was used based on evidence indicating no psychometric advantage to using more than six response options (Jebb et al., 2021).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 27. Prior to analyses, the data were examined for quality response checks and item completion and cleaned as needed. After data cleaning, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed to examine the factors that best predict student-athletes' desire to transfer institutions. Predictor variables were entered in two blocks. The first block included demographic and motivational variables and the second block included psychosocial factors across three social-ecological organizational levels.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Examination of Predictors of Desire to Transfer

The study employed a two-step hierarchical regression analysis to explore psychosocial and demographic predictors of desire to transfer. Results of the regression are presented in **Table 1**. In the first step, demographic predictors, including year in school, age, racial and ethnic majority-minority status, sexual orientation majority-minority status, distance from home, socioeconomic status, sex assigned at birth, and the perceived importance of NIL support, were entered. This model accounted for 7 percent of the variance after adjusting for predictors ( $R^2 = .10$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .07$ ) and significantly predicted desire to transfer ( $F(8, 233) = 3.30, p = .001$ ). Within this model, racial and ethnic minority status ( $B = .69, SE = .20, \beta = .22, t(233) = 3.47, p = .001$ ), age ( $B = -.35, SE = .11, \beta = -.36, t(233) = -3.20, p = .002$ ) and year in school ( $B = .28, SE = .12, \beta = .27, t(233) = 2.40, p = .017$ ) were significant predictors of desire to transfer. Specifically, racial and ethnic minority status was positively associated with desire to transfer, while higher age and year in school were negatively associated. All other demographic variables were not significantly associated with desire to transfer ( $p > .05$ ).

In the second step of the hierarchical regression, well-being, perceived social support, and psychological sense of community were added as predictors of desire to transfer. These additions significantly improved the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .19, \Delta F(3, 230) = 20.58, p < .001$ ). The second model accounted for 26 percent of the variance after adjusting for predictors ( $R^2 = .29$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .26$ ) and significantly predicted the desire to transfer ( $F(11, 230) = 8.621, p < .001$ ). Within this model, psychological sense of community ( $B = -.079, SE = 0.12, \beta = -.41,$

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Predicting Desire to Transfer

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	95% CI (LL)	95% CI (UL)	
<b>Step 1</b>							
Constant	8.073***	2.021	—	3.994	4.091	12.055	
SO Majority-Minority Status	-0.127	0.213	-0.038	-0.595	-0.547	0.293	
RE Majority-Minority Status	0.694**	0.200	0.220**	3.470	0.300	1.088	
NIL Importance	-0.021	0.285	-0.005	-0.073	-0.583	0.542	
Socioeconomic Status	0.022	0.051	0.028	0.429	-0.079	0.123	
Distance from Home	-0.052	0.039	-0.084	-1.318	-0.129	0.026	
Year in School	0.277*	0.115	-0.269*	2.404	-0.050	0.504	
Sex Assigned at Birth	-0.326	0.196	-0.109	-1.657	-0.712	0.061	
Age	-0.35**	0.109	-0.357**	-3.204	-0.565	-0.135	
<b>Step 1 Model Statistics</b>							
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.102	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.071			
<b>Step 2</b>							
Constant	11.616***	1.874	—	6.200	7.925	15.308	
SO Majority-Minority Status	-0.246	0.193	-0.074	-1.274	-0.625	0.134	
RE Majority-Minority Status	0.680***	0.179	0.216***	3.792	0.327	1.034	
NIL Importance	-0.095	0.257	-0.021	-0.370	-0.603	0.412	
Socioeconomic Status	0.053	0.046	0.067	1.160	-0.037	0.144	
Distance from Home	-0.045	0.035	-0.073	-1.272	-0.115	0.025	
Year in School	0.262*	0.103	0.255*	2.548	0.059	0.465	
Sex Assigned at Birth	-0.138	0.178	-0.046	-0.773	-0.489	0.213	
Age	-0.350***	0.098	-0.357***	-3.572	-0.543	-0.157	
Well-Being	-0.034	0.019	-0.106	-1.746	-0.072	0.004	
Perceived Social Support	0.002	0.012	0.020	0.324	-0.011	0.016	
PSOC	-0.079***	0.007	-0.407***	-6.682	-0.103	-0.056	
<b>Step 2 Model Statistics</b>							
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.292	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.258	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F(3, 230)$	20.582***

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; SO = Sexual Orientation; RE = Racial and Ethnic; PSOC = Psychological Sense of Community

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

$t(230) = -6.68, p < .001$ ) was a negative predictor of desire to transfer. Racial and ethnic minority status ( $B = .68, SE = .18, \beta = .22, t(230) = 3.79, p < .001$ ) and age ( $B = -.35, SE = .098, \beta = -.36, t(230) = -3.57, p < .001$ ) remained significant predictors, as did year in school ( $B = .26, SE = .10, \beta = .26, t(230) = 2.55, p = .011$ ).

One-tailed Pearson correlations were conducted to examine the relationships between predictor variables and desire to transfer. While most demographic variables were not significantly associated with desire to transfer ( $p > .05$ ), racial and ethnic majority-minority status was positively associated ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ), and age was negatively associated ( $r = -.15, p = .011$ ). All three psychosocial predictors, including well-being ( $r = -.21, p < .001$ ), perceived social support ( $r = -.17, p = .005$ ), and psychological sense of community ( $r = -.43, p < .001$ ), were negatively associated with desire to transfer. Sex assigned at birth was on the threshold of significance ( $r = -.11, p = .052$ ). No significant multicollinearity concerns were observed in either model, with variance inflation factors (VIFs) generally low. Age and year in school had moderately elevated VIF values around three, reflecting shared variance between these conceptually similar variables. Because all VIFs remained below the threshold for multicollinearity ( $VIF \geq 5$ ) and tolerance values were high, multicollinearity was not considered a concern and regression assumptions were met.

The final model had a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.973, indicating relatively independent residuals. Predicted values ranged from 0.60 to 4.56 ( $M = 1.90, SD = 0.70$ ), and residuals ranged from -2.09 to 5.53 ( $M = 0.00, SD = 1.09$ ). Standardized residuals ranged from -1.87 to 4.95 ( $M = 0.00, SD = 0.98$ ). Although a few cases exhibited larger standardized residuals, further inspection indicated that they did not exert undue influence on the model. These results suggest that the

assumptions of homoscedasticity, linearity, and normality were reasonably met, supporting an acceptable distribution for the regression model.

Descriptive statistics for the study sample indicated that desire to transfer was relatively low ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ), as was the perceived importance of NIL support on a student-athlete's desire to transfer ( $M = 1.08$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ). Participants reported moderate levels of psychological sense of community ( $M = 43.80$ ,  $SD = 6.68$ ) and well-being ( $M = 14.96$ ,  $SD = 4.11$ ), as well as relatively high levels of perceived social support ( $M = 68.77$ ,  $SD = 11.54$ ). The majority of the participants were White (78.5%,  $n = 190$ ), heterosexual (81%,  $n = 196$ ) and female (74.8%,  $n = 181$ ) with an average age of 19.44 ( $SD = 1.326$ ).

### **Discussion**

A two-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among demographic variables, psychosocial variables and desire to transfer in a sample of 242 NCAA student-athletes. The theoretical foundations of this study supported the examination of both demographic and psychosocial factors in student-athletes' transfer decisions within the collegiate athletics environment. However, a priori hypotheses were proposed only for the three psychosocial variables. Analyses of demographic variables were exploratory in nature. This study aimed to identify demographic factors associated with the desire to transfer, to test a priori hypotheses regarding psychosocial factors of transfer desire and provide insights that may help reduce NCAA transfer rates and better support the student-athlete population.

The first step of the regression used primarily demographic variables as predictors of the desire to transfer. This initial model explained just over seven percent of the variance in desire to transfer and identified racial and ethnic minority status, age and year in school as significant predictors. Among these, racial and ethnic minority status and age were the strongest predictors,

while year in school also contributed to the model with less strength. These results suggest that younger student-athletes with racial or ethnic minority identities may be at the greatest risk of desiring to transfer. This interpretation is supported by existing research that demonstrates poorer psychological outcomes within these demographic groups, yet it represents a novel contribution to the literature on student-athlete transfer patterns (Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Kroshus et al., 2023; Lubker & Etzel, 2007; Tran, 2021). Notably, most other demographic variables, including sexual orientation minority status, distance from home, sex assigned at birth, socioeconomic status and the perceived importance of NIL, were not significant predictors. This finding also contributes to the literature by demonstrating that traditionally marginalized groups of student-athletes who often report poorer psychological outcomes, such as female student-athletes and those who identify as sexual minorities, are not necessarily more likely to want to transfer (Armstrong et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2022; Havey, 2021; Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Storch et al., 2005).

The second step of the regression model introduced psychosocial factors at three social-ecological levels: individual, relational and community. The predictor variables included individual well-being, perceived social support and psychological sense of community. Adding these variables increased the model's explained variance to 25.8 percent, adjusted for predictors, and significantly improved model fit. While individual well-being and perceived social support were not significant predictors, psychological sense of community emerged as the strongest predictor of desire to transfer in the final model. These findings represent a variety of key contributions to the existing literature.

The study's finding that individual well-being was not associated with desire to transfer is not aligned with existing literature in the field or the associated hypothesis (H2). Within this

study, the desire to transfer had no association with individual well-being. However, existing research reports that transfer students experience poorer psychological outcomes and report lower individual well-being (Beiter et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2019; Swingle & Salinas, 2020; Thomas et al., 2021). This discrepancy raises the question of whether actual transfer status may be a stronger prediction of poorer psychological outcomes than a student-athlete's desire to transfer. Additionally, the study's finding that perceived social support was not associated with desire to transfer is inconsistent with existing research demonstrating that higher levels of perceived social support are associated with improved adjustment and greater sense of belonging, two key factors of student retention within the collegiate environment (Awang et al., 2014; Sweet & Avadhanam, 2023). This finding also contradicts the associated hypothesis (H3).

Lastly, the study's finding that psychological sense of community was the strongest predictor of desire to transfer represents a novel and meaningful contribution to the literature and supports the associated hypothesis (H4). This finding emphasizes the key importance of community connection in potentially reducing transfer desire among student-athletes while simultaneously proposing a new strategic approach to student-athlete retention in an age of transfer portal volatility (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Notably, psychological sense of community was the sole predictor of student-athlete transfer desire across the three social-ecological levels examined, highlighting the critical and unique role of connectedness to one's athletic department and broader institutional community in successful student-athlete retention.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Practical Implications**

Several key takeaways and practical implications emerge from this study. First, it is important to identify the student-athletes who demonstrated the highest desire to transfer. Racial and ethnic minority student-athletes and younger student-athletes were most at risk for a stronger desire to leave their current institution. In particular, younger racial and ethnic minority student-athletes appeared to be the most vulnerable subgroup. Athletic departments should be aware of these demographic risk factors and prioritize the wellness and satisfaction of these student-athletes, especially at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Given that these student-athletes are already at higher risk for negative psychosocial outcomes in such environments, targeted support and attention from athletic departments are essential to mitigate potential challenges and reduce the desire to transfer.

The study also provides insight into strategies for retaining at-risk student-athletes. The final regression model indicated that higher psychological sense of community was associated with a lower desire to transfer. This finding has important implications for athletic department programming and interventions. Rather than focusing solely on individual well-being or relational quality within a team, departments should emphasize community-level initiatives. While individual or team-based interventions remain valuable, engaging the broader athletic community may be a more effective approach in reducing student-athletes' desire to transfer.

Athletic departments can support student-athlete well-being by providing opportunities for participation in community-based interventions. Examples of possible interventions include clinician-led support groups, first-year cohorts, faculty mentorship programs, upperclassman

ambassador programs, community partnerships, cross-team engagement events, and identity-based student-athlete social groups. Community-based interventions may also foster stronger interpersonal relationships, leading to enhanced social support networks and higher levels of perceived social support among student-athletes.

When designing these interventions, departments should prioritize younger student-athletes, racial and ethnic minority student-athletes, or ideally, those who fall into both groups. Athletic departments may also want to enhance support of existing community-based groups that serve student-athletes with these specific identities. This targeted focus may help reduce overall transfer rates while improving the collegiate experience for student-athletes who are at higher risk for negative psychosocial outcomes. Importantly, all student-athletes, regardless of their initial desire to transfer, are likely to benefit from a strengthened psychological sense of community. By enhancing student-athletes' sense of community, athletic departments can positively impact individual experiences within the collegiate athletics environment while simultaneously reducing transfer rates.

### **Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insight into student-athlete transfer patterns and psychosocial well-being, several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional, self-report survey design introduces potential methodological limitations. Self-report data may be influenced by intrapersonal factors such as mood, personality traits, memory errors, or social desirability bias (Kreitchmann et al., 2019; Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Psychopathology and certain personality dimensions, such as neuroticism, may also act as confounding factors (Kreitchmann et al., 2019; Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Some participants may engage in impression management or self-deception, leading to self-enhancing responses, while others may

exhibit extreme responding on Likert-scale items due to item ambiguity or a desire to complete the survey quickly (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Additionally, acquiescent response bias, or the tendency to agree with items regardless of content, remains a potential concern (Kreitchmann et al., 2019; Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). These response biases may negatively affect the study's validity despite the inclusion of quality control items in the survey design (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007).

A potential limitation of the Likert-scale response format used in this study is that different cultural groups may demonstrate distinct response patterns (Lee et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2008). For instance, research indicates that Chinese and Japanese individuals are more likely to select moderate midpoints, whereas Hispanic and Black individuals are more likely to use extreme responses (Lee et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2008). Another limitation is the cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single time point and does not account for fluctuations in well-being (Cummings, 2018). Given that student-athletes constantly adapt to a dynamic environment, they are highly likely to experience changes in well-being throughout the academic year (Kaishian & Kaishian, 2022; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003).

Another potential limitation of this study is the measurement of perceived social support. Perceived social support is a subjective construct that relies on individuals' recollections and interpretations rather than objective evidence of past supportive actions (Wang et al., 2018). An individual's perception of the quality of their social support network may differ from an objective assessment due to intrapersonal or contextual factors such as perception, memory, judgment, or bias (Haber et al., 2007; Gülaçtı, 2010). While perceived social support is an important component of well-being, its subjectivity, combined with the self-report methodology, may affect the study's validity.

This study also has several sampling limitations. Although recruitment emails were sent to every coach, administrator, and athletic trainer listed in each NCAA Division III institution's athletic staff directory, it is unknown how many of these individuals actually shared the opportunity with their student-athletes. Consequently, not all Division III student-athletes may have had the chance to participate. Additionally, while the study only directly recruited NCAA Division III student-athletes, a small number of Division I and Division II student-athletes also completed the survey. Given structural and sociocultural differences across NCAA divisions, the findings should not be generalized to all NCAA student-athletes without further investigation (Kramer, 2023). Future research should include student-athletes from all three divisions to enhance generalizability.

Finally, several key demographic limitations should be considered. The socioeconomic profile of NCAA Division III student-athletes is likely distinct from that of Division I and II student-athletes, given Division III's limited opportunities for athletic scholarships. While the sampling method was designed to avoid institutional selection bias by providing all Division III institutions an equal opportunity to participate, the final study sample was demographically skewed. Specifically, 74.8 percent of participants were female, 78.5 percent were White and 81 percent identified as heterosexual. Despite demonstrating balanced representation in terms of socioeconomic status and year in school, these demographic biases highlight the need for future research with more diverse samples to improve the generalizability and representation of all NCAA student-athletes.

### **Conclusions**

This study provides important insights into student-athlete well-being and offers guidance for addressing rising transfer rates. It is the first known study to examine demographic and

psychosocial factors at three social-ecological levels as predictors of the desire to transfer. The findings indicate that age, year in school, and racial and ethnic minority status are significant demographic predictors of transfer desire. Additionally, psychological sense of community emerged as a significant psychosocial predictor, suggesting that community-based interventions and programming designed to strengthen student-athletes' connections to their athletic or institutional community may help reduce transfer rates. These findings have practical implications for coaches, administrators, student-athletes, and other professionals invested in promoting holistic student-athlete well-being and supporting athletic department retention efforts.

## REFERENCES

- Alorani, O. I., & Alradaydeh, M. T. F. (2018). Spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among university students. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 23*(3), 291-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2017.1352522>
- Armstrong, S. N., Burcin, M. M., Bjerke, W., & Early, J. (2015). Depression in student athletes: A particularly at-risk group? A systematic review of the literature. *Athletic Insight, 7*(2), 177-193.
- Awang, M. M., Kutty, F. M., & Ahmad, A. R. (2014). Perceived social support and well being: First-year student experience in university. *International Education Studies, 7*(13), 261-270. <http://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n13p261>
- Beasley, L., Hardin, R., & Palumbo, D. J. (2022). Athletic trainers' perceptions of their role in the mental health care of student-athletes. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, 15*(1), 9.
- Beiter, R., Nash, R., McCrady, M., Rhoades, D., Linscomb, M., Clarahan, M., & Sammut, S. (2015). The prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of college students. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 173*, 90-96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.10.054>
- Bell, L. F. (2009). Examining academic role-set influence on the student-athlete experience. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, 2*(2), 2.
- Benson, J., Commander, T., Flanagan, S., Williams, C., Stokowski, S., Corr, C., & Godfrey, M. (2023). "Really just bettering myself": Experiences of Division I male transfer student-athletes. *Journal of Student-Athlete Educational Development and Success, 5*, 24-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2025.2470091>

- Bowman, N. A. (2010). The development of psychological well-being among first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 51*(2), 180-200.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0118>.
- Bozovic, D., Racic, M., & Ivkovic, N. (2013). Salivary cortisol levels as a biological marker of stress reaction. *Med Arch, 67*(5), 374-377.  
<https://doi.org/10.5455/medarh.2013.67.371-374>
- Brown, B. J., Aller, T. B., Lyons, L. K., Jensen, J. F., & Hodgson, J. L. (2022). NCAA student-athlete mental health and wellness: A biopsychosocial examination. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 59*(3), 252-267.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2021.1902820>
- Buckner, J. C. (1988). The development of an instrument to measure neighborhood cohesion. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 16*(6), 771-791.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00930892>
- Bukhari, S. R., & Afzal, F. (2017). Perceived social support predicts psychological problems among university students. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology, 4*(2), 18-27.
- Cahuas, A., Marenus, M. W., Kumaravel, V., Murray, A., Friedman, K., Ottensoser, H., & Chen, W. (2023). Perceived social support and COVID-19 impact on quality of life in college students: An observational study. *Annals of Medicine, 55*(1), 136-145.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07853890.2022.2154943>
- Cannon, K. B., Hammer, T. R., Reicherzer, S., & Gilliam, B. J. (2012). Relational-Cultural Theory: A framework for relational competencies and movement in group work with female adolescents. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 7*(1), 2-16.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2012.660118>

- Carlay, W. S. (2025). The student-athlete scholarship agreement in the transfer portal era: An examination of cultural codes of silence. *Sports Lawyers Journal*, 32, 1.
- Chen, S., Snyder, S., & Magner, M. (2010). The effects of sport participation on student-athletes' and non-athlete students' social life and identity. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 3(1), 10.
- Çivitci, A. (2015). The moderating role of positive and negative affect on the relationship between perceived social support and stress in college students. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 15(3), 565-573. <https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2015.3.2553>
- Comstock, D. L., Duffey, T., & St. George, H. (2002). The relational-cultural model: A framework for group process. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 27(3), 254–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193392202027003002>
- Cordier, R., Milbourn, B., Martin, R., Buchanan, A., Chung, D., & Speyer, R. (2017). A systematic review evaluating the psychometric properties of measures of social inclusion. *PloS One*, 12(6), e0179109. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0179109>
- Cummings, C. L. (2018). Cross-sectional design. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. SAGE Publications Inc. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n118>
- Dambi, J. M., Corten, L., Chiwaridzo, M., Jack, H., Mlambo, T., & Jelsma, J. (2018). A systematic review of the psychometric properties of the cross-cultural translations and adaptations of the Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MSPSS). *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 16(1), 80. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12955-018-0912-0>
- Davidson, W. B., & Cotter, P. R. (1986). Measurement of sense of community within the sphere of city. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 16(7), 608-619.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1986.tb01162.x>

Dees, W., Cianfrone, B., & Andrew, D. (2021). Show me the money! A review of current issues in the new NIL era. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 13(2), 2.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/jasm13bamf>

DeFreese, J. D., & Smith, A. L. (2013). Teammate social support, burnout, and self-determined motivation in collegiate athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 14(2), 258-265.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2012.10.009>

Diamond, A. B., Callahan, S. T., Chain, K. F., & Solomon, G. S. (2016). Qualitative review of hazing in collegiate and school sports: Consequences from a lack of culture, knowledge and responsiveness. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 50(3), 149-153.

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-095603>

Diener, E., & Ryan, K. (2009). Subjective well-being: A general overview. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 39(4), 391-406. <https://doi.org/10.1177/008124630903900402>

Diener, E., Sapyta, J. J., & Suh, E. (1998). Subjective well-being is essential to well-being.

*Psychological Inquiry*, 9(1), 33-37. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0901\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0901_3)

Doolittle, R. J., & MacDonald, D. (1978). Communication and a sense of community in a metropolitan neighborhood: A factor analytic examination. *Communication Quarterly*,

26(3), 2-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463377809369297>

Downs, A., Boucher, L. A., Campbell, D. G., & Polyakov, A. (2017). Using the WHO-5 well-being index to identify college students at risk for mental health problems. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(1), 113-117. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2017.0008>

Eckenrod, M., & Kossman, M. K. (2025). Working with and through athletic trainers to meet student-athletes' mental performance and mental health needs. *Journal of Athletic*

- Training*, 60(1), 88-91. <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-0132.24>
- Economou, P. J., & Gamble, A. (2025). Navigating an intercollegiate athletes' transition related to the Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) interim policy. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 16(2), 155-164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2024.2348153>
- Edwards, B., Froehle, A. W., & Fagan, S. E. (2023). Trends in collegiate student-athlete mental health in the national college health assessment, 2011–2019. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 58(4), 361-373. <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-0586.21>
- Etzel, E. F. (2006). Understanding and promoting college student-athlete health: Essential issues for student affairs professionals. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 43(3), 894-922. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1682>
- Fink, G. (Ed.). (2007). *Encyclopedia of Stress* (Vol. 2). Academic Press.
- Fisher, A. T., Sonn, C. C., & Bishop, B. J. (Eds.). (2002). *Psychological sense of community: Research, applications, and implications*. Springer Science & Business Media. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-0719-2>
- Fortunato, J. A. (2023). Student-athlete name, image, and likeness (NIL): Sponsorship opportunities and challenges. *Sports Sponsorship and Branding: Global Perspectives and Emerging Trends*, 126-143. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003458890-9>
- Frey, L. L. (2013). Relational-cultural therapy: Theory, research, and application to counseling competencies. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 44(3), 177. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033121>
- Fuller, J. (2023). *Welcome to the portal—where college athletes can risk it all for a shot at glory*. National Public Radio (NPR). <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/19/1173134544/college-football-all-transfer-portal-ncaa-student-athlete>

- Gabana, N. T., Steinfeldt, J. A., Wong, Y. J., & Chung, Y. B. (2017). Gratitude, burnout, and sport satisfaction among college student-athletes: The mediating role of perceived social support. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 11*(1), 14-33.  
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.2016-0011>
- Galli, N., Petrie, T., & Chatterton, J. (2017). Team weigh-ins and self-weighing: Relations to body-related perceptions and disordered eating in collegiate male athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 29*, 51-55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2016.12.004>
- Gayles, J. G. (2009). The student athlete experience. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 144*, 33-41. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.311>
- Glynn, T. J. (1981). Psychological sense of community: Measurement and application. *Human Relations, 34*(9), 789-818. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678103400904>
- Graupensperger, S., Benson, A. J., Kilmer, J. R., & Evans, M. B. (2020). Social (un) distancing: Teammate interactions, athletic identity, and mental health of student-athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 67*(5), 662-670.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.08.001>
- Greenleaf, C., Petrie, T. A., Carter, J., & Reel, J. J. (2009). Female collegiate athletes: Prevalence of eating disorders and disordered eating behaviors. *Journal of American College Health, 57*(5), 489-496. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JACH.57.5.489-496>
- Gülaçtı, F. (2010). The effect of perceived social support on subjective well-being. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2*(2), 3844-3849.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.602>
- Haber, M. G., Cohen, J. L., Lucas, T., & Baltes, B. B. (2007). The relationship between self-reported received and perceived social support: A meta-analytic review. *American*

- Journal of Community Psychology*, 39, 133-144.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9100-9>
- Hailey, V., Fisher, A., Hamer, M., & Fancourt, D. (2023). Perceived social support and sustained physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 30(5), 651–662. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-022-10125-2>
- Havey, N. (2021). When the campus is the locker room: A queer analysis of student athletics bias incidents. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 14(2), 187-203.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2021.1950740>
- Hill, J. L. (1996). Psychological sense of community: Suggestions for future research. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(4), 431-438.  
[https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6629\(199610\)24:4<431::AID-JCOP10>3.0.CO;2-T](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199610)24:4<431::AID-JCOP10>3.0.CO;2-T)
- Hodges, B. C. (2022). Collaborative initiative to improve DIII student-athlete well-being. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, 4(1), 2.  
<https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.04.01.02>
- Hooker, E. D., Campos, B., Zoccola, P. M., & Dickerson, S. S. (2018). Subjective socioeconomic status matters less when perceived social support is high: A study of cortisol responses to stress. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9(8), 981-989.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617732387>
- Howard-Hamilton, M. F., & Sina, J. A. (2001). How college affects student athletes. *New Directions for Student Services*, 93, 35-45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.3>
- Howell, R. T., Kern, M. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). Health benefits: Meta-analytically determining the impact of well-being on objective health outcomes. *Health Psychology Review*, 1(1), 83-136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17437190701492486>

- Huppert, F. A. (2009). Psychological well-being: Evidence regarding its causes and consequences. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 1(2), 137-164.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2009.01008.x>
- Jason, L. A., Stevens, E., & Ram, D. (2015). Development of a three-factor psychological sense of community scale. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 43(8), 973-985.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21726>
- Jason, L. A., Stevens, E., Ram, D., Miller, S. A., Beasley, C. R., & Gleason, K. D. (2016). Theories in the field of community psychology. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.7728/0702201601>
- Jayakumar, U. M., & Comeaux, E. (2016). The cultural cover-up of college athletics: How organizational culture perpetuates an unrealistic and idealized balancing act. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 87(4), 488-515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2016.11777411>
- Jebb, A. T., Ng, V., & Tay, L. (2021). A review of key Likert scale development advances: 1995–2019. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 637547.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.637547>
- Jordan, J. V. (2000). The role of mutual empathy in relational/cultural therapy. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56(8), 1005-1016.  
[https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679\(200008\)56:8<1005::AID-JCLP2>3.0.CO;2-L](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679(200008)56:8<1005::AID-JCLP2>3.0.CO;2-L)
- Kaishian, J. E., & Kaishian, R. M. (2022). The prevalence of mental health conditions among high school and collegiate student-athletes: A systematic review. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 16(3), 254-275. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.2020-0066>
- Katagami, E., & Tsuchiya, H. (2016). Effects of social support on athletes' psychological well-being: The correlations among received support, perceived support, and personality.

- Psychology*, 7(13), 1741. <http://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2016.713163>
- Kazarian, S. S., & McCabe, S. B. (1991). Dimensions of social support in the MSPSS: Factorial structure, reliability, and theoretical implications. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(2), 150-160. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(199104\)19:2<150::AID-JCOP2290190206>3.0.CO;2-J](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199104)19:2<150::AID-JCOP2290190206>3.0.CO;2-J)
- Kegelaers, J., Wylleman, P., Defruyt, S., Praet, L., Stambulova, N., Torregrossa, M., Kentta, G. & De Brandt, K. (2024). The mental health of student-athletes: A systematic scoping review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17(2), 848-881. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2022.2095657>
- Kimball, A., & Freysinger, V. J. (2003). Leisure, stress, and coping: The sport participation of collegiate student-athletes. *Leisure Sciences*, 25(2-3), 115-141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400306569>
- Knettel, B. A., Cherenack, E. M., & Bianchi-Rossi, C. (2021). Stress, anxiety, binge drinking, and substance use among college student-athletes: A cross-sectional analysis. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.17161/jis.v14i2.14829>
- Kramer, E. G. (2023). Decisions, decisions: Analyzing college choice amongst NCAA Division II transfer and non-transfer athletes. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, 5(2), 1. <https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.05.02.01>
- Kreitchmann, R. S., Abad, F. J., Ponsoda, V., Nieto, M. D., & Morillo, D. (2019). Controlling for response biases in self-report scales: Forced-choice vs. psychometric modeling of Likert items. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2309. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02309>
- Kroshus, E., Coakley, S., Conway, D., Chew, K., Blair, N., Mohler, J. M., Wagner, J. & Hainline, B. (2023). Addressing mental health needs of NCAA student-athletes of colour:

- Foundational concepts from the NCAA summit on diverse student-athlete mental health and well-being. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 57(3), 137-145.  
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2022-105891>
- Kroshus, E., Wagner, J., Wyrick, D., Athey, A., Bell, L., Benjamin, H. J., ... & Hainline, B. (2019). Wake up call for collegiate athlete sleep: narrative review and consensus recommendations from the NCAA Interassociation Task Force on Sleep and Wellness. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 53(12), 731-736.  
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2019-100590>
- Lee, S., Chung, J. E., & Park, N. (2018). Network environments and well-being: An examination of personal network structure, social capital, and perceived social support. *Health Communication*, 33(1), 22-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2016.1242032>
- Lee, J. W., Jones, P. S., Mineyama, Y., & Zhang, X. E. (2002). Cultural differences in responses to a Likert scale. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 25(4), 295–306.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.10041>
- Lenahan, K. N., Rueda, M., & Hernandez, T. D. (2022). Student-athlete health and well-being: Looking at the past to inform the future. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 53(5), 459-474. <https://doi.org/10.7352/IJSP.2022.53.459>
- Lenz, A. S. (2016). Relational-Cultural Theory: Fostering the growth of a paradigm through empirical research. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 94(4), 415-428.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12100>
- Lértora, I. M., & Croffie, A. L. (2020). Using relational-cultural theory to conceptualize international student transitions. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 15(1), 30-42.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2019.1638862>

- Liu, C. H., Stevens, C., Wong, S. H., Yasui, M., & Chen, J. A. (2019). The prevalence and predictors of mental health diagnoses and suicide among US college students: Implications for addressing disparities in service use. *Depression and Anxiety, 36*(1), 8-17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22830>
- Lubker, J. R., & Etzel, E. F. (2007). College adjustment experiences of first-year students: Disengaged athletes, nonathletes, and current varsity athletes. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 44*(3), 855-878. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1831>
- Ma, D. Y., Chang, W. H., Chi, M. H., Tsai, H. C., Yang, Y. K., & Chen, P. S. (2016). The correlation between perceived social support, cortisol and brain derived neurotrophic factor levels in healthy women. *Psychiatry Research, 239*, 149-153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2016.03.019>
- Madden, E., & O'Hallarn, B. (2024). "The game was ruined for me there:" Examining the mental health byproducts of the transfer portal and NIL on student-athletes. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience, 6*(2), 1. <https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.06.02.01>
- Mahanta, D., & Aggarwal, M. (2013). Effect of perceived social support on life satisfaction of university students. *European Academic Research, 1*(6), 1083-1094.
- Malinauskas, R. (2010). The associations among social support, stress, and life satisfaction as perceived by injured college athletes. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal, 38*(6), 741-752.
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*(1), 6-23. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198601\)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I)
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2022). *NCAA student-athlete well-being study*.

[https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/other/2020/2022RES\\_NCAA-SA-Well-BeingSurvey.pdf](https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/other/2020/2022RES_NCAA-SA-Well-BeingSurvey.pdf)

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2026). *Want to transfer?*.

<https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2015/2/13/want-to-transfer.aspx>

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (n.d.). *Transfer portal data: Division I student-athlete transfer trends*. NCAA Research. <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2022/4/25/transfer-portal-data-division-i-student-athlete-transfer-trends.aspx>

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (n.d.). *Transfer portal data: Division II student-athlete transfer trends*. NCAA Research. <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2023/2/21/transfer-portal-data-division-ii-student-athlete-transfer-trends.aspx>

Osman, A., Lamis, D. A., Freedenthal, S., Gutierrez, P. M., & McNaughton-Cassill, M. (2014).

The multidimensional scale of perceived social support: analyses of internal reliability, measurement invariance, and correlates across gender. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 96*(1), 103-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2013.838170>

Paulhus, D. L., & Vazire, S. (2007). The self-report method. *Handbook of Research Methods in Personality Psychology, 1*, 224-239.

Rao, A. L., Asif, I. M., Drezner, J. A., Toresdahl, B. G., & Harmon, K. G. (2015). Suicide in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletes: A 9-year analysis of the NCAA resolutions database. *Sports Health, 7*(5), 452–457.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1941738115587675>

Reese, R. (2023). The unintended consequences of the NCAA college athletics transfer portal.

*Journal of Higher Education Athletics & Innovation, 2*(1), 97-111.

<https://doi.org/10.15763/issn.2376-5267.2023.2.1.97-111>

- Richards, J. K., Holden, S. L., & Pugh, S. F. (2016). Factors that influence collegiate student-athletes to transfer, consider transferring, or not transfer. *The Sport Journal*, *19*(24), 1-4.
- Riger, S., & Lavrakas, P. J. (1981). Community ties: Patterns of attachment and social interaction in urban neighborhoods. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *9*(1), 55.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00896360>
- Ryff, C. D. (1995). Psychological well-being in adult life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *4*(4), 99-104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.ep10772395>
- Şahin, D. S., Özer, Ö., & Yanardağ, M. Z. (2019). Perceived social support, quality of life and satisfaction with life in elderly people. *Educational Gerontology*, *45*(1), 69-77.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2019.1585065>
- Sammarco, A. (2001). Perceived social support, uncertainty, and quality of life of younger breast cancer survivors. *Cancer Nursing*, *24*(3), 212-219.
- Sarason, S. B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. Jossey-Bass.
- Simons, E. E., & Bird, M. D. (2023). Coach-athlete relationship, social support, and sport-related psychological well-being in National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I student-athletes. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, *17*(3), 191-210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2022.2060703>
- Solomon, B. D., Jolly, K. G., Stokowski, S., Ehrlich, S. C., & Arthur-Banning, S. G. (2022). Who is NIL leaving out? Challenges and solutions for international student-athletes. *Sports Innovation Journal*, *3*(SI), 69-80. <https://doi.org/10.18060/26058>
- Storch, E. A., Storch, J. B., Killiany, E. M., & Roberti, J. W. (2005). Self-reported

- psychopathology in athletes: a comparison of intercollegiate student-athletes and non-athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 28(1).
- Stowe, R. W. (2015). Social support in athletic injury prevention and recovery. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 23(2), 85-88. <https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.2014-0036>
- Sullivan, M., Moore, M., Blom, L. C., & Slater, G. (2020). Relationship between social support and depressive symptoms in collegiate student athletes. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 14(3), 192-209.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2020.1768034>
- Sweet, T., & Avadhanam, R. (2023). Stronger together: Supporting Generation Z college students through relational-cultural therapy. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 62(2), 130-144. <https://doi.org/10.1002/johc.12201>
- Swingle, E., & Salinas, C. (2020). Up, down, and all-around: The swirling-transfer collegiate athlete experience. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, 2(3), 2.  
<https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.02.03.02>
- Thomas, D. T., Walsh, E. T., Torr, B. M., Alvarez, A. S., & Malagon, M. C. (2021). Incorporating high-impact practices for retention: A learning community model for transfer students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 23(2), 243-263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025118813618>
- Topp, C. W., Østergaard, S. D., Søndergaard, S., & Bech, P. (2015). The WHO-5 well-being index: A systematic review of the literature. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 84(3), 167-176. <http://doi.org/10.1159/000376585>
- Tran, A. G. (2021). Looking forward to student-athlete mental health: Racial/ethnic trends from 2010 to 2015. *Journal of American College Health*, 69(8), 942-950.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1725018>
- Wahto, R. S., Swift, J. K., & Whipple, J. L. (2016). The role of stigma and referral source in predicting college student-athletes' attitudes toward psychological help-seeking. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 10*(2), 85-98. <http://doi.org/10.1123/JCSP.2015-0025>
- Wang, R., Hempton, B., Dugan, J. P., & Komives, S. R. (2008). Cultural differences: Why do Asians avoid extreme responses?. *Survey Practice, 1*(3).  
<https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2008-0011>
- Wang, J., Mann, F., Lloyd-Evans, B., Ma, R., & Johnson, S. (2018). Associations between loneliness and perceived social support and outcomes of mental health problems: A systematic review. *BMC Psychiatry, 18*(1), 156.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1736-5>
- Watson, D. R., Hill, A. P., & Madigan, D. J. (2021). Perfectionism and attitudes toward sport psychology support and mental health support in athletes. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 17*(1), 11-26. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.2020-0052>
- Watt, S. K., & Moore III, J. L. (2001). Who are student athletes?. *New Directions for Student Services, 93*, 7-18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.1>
- Weight, E., Navarro, K., Huffman, L., & Smith-Ryan, A. (2014). Quantifying the psychological benefits of intercollegiate athletics participation. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, 7*(1), 16.
- World Health Organization. (1998). Wellbeing measures in primary health care/The Depcare Project. WHO Regional Office for Europe: Copenhagen.
- Wright, M. (2024). *Division I Council approves changes to transfer rules*. NCAA.  
<https://www.ncaa.org/news/2024/4/17/media-center-division-i-council-approves->

changes-to-transfer-rules.aspx

Yukhymenko-Lescroart, M. A., & Sharma, G. (2022). An examination of stereotypes toward varsity student-athletes based on student perceptions. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 26(1), 24. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gdn0000174>

Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52(1), 30–41. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5201\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5201_2)

## VITA

Victoria (Tori) Huggins earned her bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from Emory University, where she also competed for four years as a student-athlete on the women's basketball team. She went on to earn a master's degree in education in clinical mental health counseling from Columbia University while serving as the assistant director of basketball operations for the Columbia women's basketball program for two seasons and working as a clinical intern for Seton Hall Athletics. She is currently a second-year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville with a research focus on student-athlete well-being and relational health. Tori intends to pursue a clinical career within the collegiate athletics environment while contributing to research aimed at reducing systemic barriers that negatively impact student-athletes' sense of belonging, safety, identity and autonomy.