

March Sadness: A content analysis of Division I men's and women's basketball athletes' Instagram posts following the cancellation of the NCAA basketball tournament

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Abstract

On March 12, 2020, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) made the decision to cancel the coveted men's and women's basketball tournaments over growing concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Schlossberg's (1981) Model of Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition, the purpose of this study was to examine how men's and women's Division I basketball athletes in their final year of eligibility internalized the non-normative transition brought on by COVID-19. A content analysis of photos posted on Instagram by Division I basketball athletes on AP top 25 rosters was conducted. The 246 photographs revealed that the majority of basketball athletes posted color images that predominantly featured the sample in athletic uniforms and in groups (e.g., team, coaches) which emphasized a strong athletic identity. Through analysis of the images, it can be inferred that the sample viewed this non-normative transition as a loss.

Introduction

March Madness is a commonly used term for the 67-game National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) annual men's basketball tournament watched by roughly 100 million people (Adgate, 2019). However, in 2020, March Madness took on a very different meaning. On March 12, 2020, the NCAA (2020) canceled the Division I men's and women's basketball tournaments amidst concerns of the growing COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the NCAA did not extend additional eligibility to college athletes participating in Winter sports (Hosick, 2020). In an instant, the 2020 college basketball season came to an abrupt end. For basketball athletes with athletic eligibility remaining, perhaps their teams would make an appearance in the big dance another time. For those basketball athletes (i.e., seniors, graduate students) who had exhausted all athletic eligibility, unfortunately, their collegiate basketball careers came to a sudden and unexpected end.

To understand how the cancellation of the March Madness tournament impacted the athletes, Schlossberg's (1981) Model of Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition was utilized to examine how men's and women's NCAA Division I basketball players, in their last year of athletic eligibility, responded to the unexpected cancellation to the remainder of the 2020 season during conference tournament play due to COVID-19 concerns. Specifically, through a content analysis of photos posted on Instagram by Division I basketball men's and women's athletes, this study answered the following research question: How did NCAA Division I

basketball collegiate athletes internalize their non-normative transition through their Instagram posts?

Review of Literature

Transitions

When referring to athletes transitioning, it has been well documented that often athletes face difficulties adapting to a life beyond sport (e.g., Smith & Hardin, 2018; Stokowski, Paule-Koba, & Kaunert, 2019; Warehime, Dinkel, Bjornsen-Ramig, & Blount, 2017). Sport participation within the collegiate setting is often a full-time job (New, 2015); as such, when athletes discontinue sport participation, there is often an identity crisis (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993; Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019). Psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress frequently accompany athletes upon the termination of intercollegiate athletics participation (e.g., Lally, 2007; Stokowski et al., 2019). Consequently, previous research has illustrated that athletes may experience self-defeating behaviors (e.g., disordered eating, loneliness, isolation, mood changes, weight fluctuation) upon discontinuing sport participation (Etzel, 2006; Falls & Wilson, 2013; Fuller, 2014; Griffiths, Barton-Weston, & Walsh, 2016; Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Papathomas, Petrie, & Plateau, 2018; Smith & Hardin, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019).

Adapting to a life beyond sport may also be a liberating experience for some athletes (Stokowski et al., 2019). Those who transfer the skills (e.g., collaboration, leadership, time management) they have learned as an athlete into an occupational setting reported a positive transition (e.g., Bardick et al., 2009; Smith & Hardin, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019). Further, those who were well equipped for the transition and prepared for their collegiate careers to end tend to experience a positive transition into a life beyond sport (e.g., Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Stokowski et al., 2019).

Whether the transition is viewed as liberating or a challenge, transition (or change) is unescapable (Schlossberg, 1981), especially in the realm of collegiate sport where only 2% of collegiate athletes will participate in professional sport (NCAA, 2018). The ability for athletes to adjust to change often depends on the circumstances surrounding the transition (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Athlete transition is divided up into two categories, normative or non-normative (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Normative transitions are expected in a way, this type of transition occurs when an athlete chooses to discontinue sport participation or when the athlete exhausts athletic eligibility (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Non-normative transitions are unanticipated; as such, an athlete may experience a non-normative transition due to an athletic injury or not making the final team roster (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Paule-Koba & Rohrs-Cordes, 2019; Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018; Stoltenburg, Kamphoff, & Lindstrom Bremer, 2011; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The impact of COVID-19 on intercollegiate athletics was unforeseen. Therefore, athletes who had their season(s) suddenly cancelled by the pandemic experienced a non-normative transition.

Athlete Identity

Sport consumes much of an athlete's life (e.g., Stoltenburg et al., 2011), and often such dedication to sport fails to allow athletes to develop in other areas (e.g., academic preparation, career maturity) which can lead to an identity crisis (e.g., Kid, Southall, Nagel, Reynolds II, & Anderson, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019). Athlete identity, or the level to which an individual identifies with their role as an athlete (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), has a significant

impact on how one will adapt to a life beyond sport (Schlossberg et al., 1981). Those with high athlete identity often have a difficult time transitioning into sport retirement (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Smith & Hardin, 2019; Stokowski et al., 2019; Stoltenburg et al., 2011). As many athletes' social support system (e.g., coaches, teammates) revolves around sport, exiting the familiar environment of intercollegiate sport is often difficult for this population (Stoltenburg et al., 2011).

Theory

Schlossberg's (1981) Model of Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition offers an understanding regarding how certain perceptions and characteristics may impact an individual's aptitude to adapt to transition. Scholars have used Schlossberg's (1981) model to gain a greater understanding of how the college athlete population adapts to change. Schlossberg's (1981) model has been used to better understand initial (high school to college) transition (e.g., Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009; Gaston-Gayles & Baker, 2015), transfer transitions (e.g., Flowers, Luzynski, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2014), coaching transitions (e.g., Pate, Hardin, & Stokowski, 2011), transition from college to elite sport (e.g., Poczwardowski, Diehl, O'Neil, Cote, & Haberl, 2014), and transition into sport retirement (e.g., Stokowski et al., 2019).

According to Schlossberg (1981) there are "three major sets of factors that influence adaptation to transition" (p. 5). The first factor involves "the characteristics of the particular transition" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Such characteristics encompass the impact the transition has on the individual (e.g., negative, positive, loss, gain), the nature of the transition (e.g., expected, sudden), as well as the stability of the transition (e.g., permanent). The second factor consist of "characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). The environment consists of social support as well as institutional support and the resources that are made available to the individual to assist with the transition. The third factor, "the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition" also influences an individual's ability to adapt to transition (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Individual characteristics involves age, sex, well-being (i.e., social, psychological), values, and insists that previous experience "of a similar nature" also impacts transition (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Through the lens of Schlossberg's (1981) model, the present study provided insight into how basketball athletes internalized their transition through the images posted on Instagram.

Social Media

Social media permits users to expose and internalize their thoughts and experiences as well as connect with other users (Kapoor et al., 2018). Alhabash and Ma (2017) examined college students' motivations for utilizing various social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter). The study revealed "convenience, medium appeal, passing time, self-expression, self-documentation, social interaction and information sharing" motivated college students to use Instagram (Alhabash & Ma, 2017, p. 8). Further, college students preferred Instagram as Alhabash and Ma (2017) reported that their sample spent the most amount of time on the platform. Lastly, college women expressed a greater intensity to use Instagram when compared to their male counterparts (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

Although social media usage is high among college students (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Duggan, 2015), there is limited literature that speaks to how collegiate athletes utilize social media platforms (Park, Williams, & Son, 2020). Regarding the athlete population, social media can be positively utilized as a personal branding tool (e.g., Park et al., 2020). However, much of the literature on social media and collegiate athletes revolves around institutional social media policies and restrictions regarding what this population can (and cannot) post on various social

media platforms (e.g., Bentley, 2011; Penrose, 2012; Sanderson, 2011; Snyder, 2014). While athletes utilize social media, they often do not receive effective social media training at their institutions and there is a lack of social media literacy among this population (Park et al., 2020; Sanderson, Browning, & Schmittel, 2015; Sanderson, Stokowski, & Taylor, 2019).

While the use of social media is beneficial to athletes, researchers are just beginning to investigate how collegiate athletes use social media platforms, specifically, Instagram. The majority of the literature that examines athletes Instagram usage is limited to professional athletes (e.g., Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Pegoraro, Comeau, & Frederick, 2018; Smith & Sanderson, 2015; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018) and fails to consider the collegiate athlete population. According to Bowles (2016), “academic research involving Instagram in the area of sport is limited because of the more recent rise of the platform” (p. 228). Bowles (2016) examined the content that institutions in the South Eastern Conference (SEC) were posting on Instagram. The study found 15% of the posts promoted athletes and/or athletic events and only 9.1% of the posts celebrated team or individual victories (Bowles, 2016).

Smith and Sanderson (2015) study of professional athletes “explored athletes’ self-presentation on Instagram across a variety of sports to gain more insight into how this practice differed both across sports and between genders of athletes who play the same sport” (p. 347). A key finding in the study was that of “ritualistic touching” (Smith & Sanderson, 2015, p. 353). The majority of female athletes posted pictures of themselves “hugging” something (e.g., stuffed animal, trophy) or someone (e.g., teammate) (Smith & Sanderson, 2015, p. 353). Although male athletes also posted pictures that involved touching (on the shoulders), such interactions often involved friends and/or family (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). The study found that athletes did not participate in what seems to be normative behavior on Instagram in that rarely did this population post selfies (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Smith and Sanderson (2015) suggested that athletes appear to be using Instagram “to showcase their personal likes, interest, families, and charitable work” as opposed to “athletics and competition” (p. 355).

According to Stokowski et al. (2019), “social media should be utilized to examine the experiences of college athletes regarding transition” (p. 420). The Stokowski et al. (2019) study utilized the platform, Twitter, to better understand former athletes’ experiences adapting to life beyond sport. The study (which analyzed 178 Twitter responses) found that “57.3% of respondents reported a negative perception of transition while 42.7% reported a positive perception of transition” (Stokowski et al., 2019, p. 403). The present study hopes to build upon the literature to better understand how athletes used social media to assist in adapting to the unexpected, non-normative transition from collegiate athlete to former athlete following the cancellation of the 2020 post-season due to COVID-19 concerns.

Method

A content analysis of photos posted on Instagram by Division I basketball men’s and women’s athletes were chosen to better understand how this population internalized their non-normative transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instagram was selected because the platform is “rising in popularity” (Alhabash & Ma, 2017, p. 1) and the largest group of Instagram users are young adults (aged 18–29 years) (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Duggan, 2015). Instagram is also a platform based on images. Further, college students spend more time on Instagram than any other social media platform (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

Sample

The researchers chose to include NCAA Division I basketball athletes in their last year of eligibility (e.g., seniors, graduate students) from the AP top 25 teams as of March 16 and March 17, 2020 (the final NCAA Division I women's and men's rankings) (Associated Press, 2020a; 2020b). These teams were chosen because even if they would have lost in their conference tournament, they would most likely have made the NCAA Basketball Tournament (i.e., March Madness) due to their national ranking. As such, those included in this sample did not enter their conference tournament believing this could (or would) be their final game. Thus, their transition from collegiate athlete to former collegiate athletes was non-normative in nature.

Data Collection

The researchers first went to each of the top 25 men's and women's basketball teams and entered every athlete listed as a senior or graduate student into a spreadsheet. Next, the researchers searched for the athlete on Instagram and recorded all posts relating to basketball and/or the NCAA basketball tournament from the athletes between March 12 (the date the tournament was cancelled) and March 19 (one-week post cancellation). The photographs were analyzed independent of the Instagram captions because, according to Smith and Sanderson (2015), photographs and captions are not always correlated and "to code both together incorrectly assumes an automatic relatedness. A witty caption could have nothing to do with the action in the photograph" (p. 348). Similar to the Smith and Sanderson (2015) study, any videos and graphics that were posted were discarded from the analysis. The photos themselves are considered to be in the "public" domain of Instagram. The researchers did not have to request to follow, as all the photos collected were published on public account from the athletes. Therefore, IRB approval was not needed as it is classified as "non-human subjects" per the Office of Human Research Protections (HHS.gov, 2018).

In total 164 athletes (77 men, 87 women) met the criteria for this study. The sample criteria for this study included: (1) men's or women's Division I basketball athlete, (2) listed as a senior or graduate student according to the university's online basketball roster, and (3) an athlete on a team ranked in the AP top 25 poll as of March 16 and March 17, 2020 (the final NCAA Division I women's and men's rankings) (Associated Press, 2020a; 2020b). However, 64 athletes (26 men, 38 women) had private Instagram accounts or did not post during the time frame analyzed. Additionally, 26 athletes did not have an Instagram account that could be located by the researchers. In total, this study analyzed 264 photos posted by 74 athletes from the top 25 men's and women's basketball teams.

Coding Process and Data Analysis

All photos were collected from the athlete's Instagram accounts and put into an excel document with one picture per cell. Prior to coding, the researchers determined the labels that would be used to code the Instagram photos. The coding system that was adapted from Goffman (1979), Hatton and Trautner (2011), and Kim and Sagas (2014). Each photograph was coded for the following seven items: black and white photo/color photo, solo/group photo, in uniform/out of uniform, in-game photo/outside of game photo, in-action/out-of-action, face in view/face not shown, and good-bye or finality image in picture (e.g., waving to crowd, walking off court). Two researchers, with extensive experience with qualitative research and data coding, coded the entire sample separately then came back together to check reliability. A third researcher, who also has trained as a qualitative researcher, was used if there was a discrepancy between the coding, which only happened twice. The inter-rater reliability, the extent to which raters code the

same units of data in the same way (Krippendorff, 2004), between the two initial coders was 99.2%.

Results

As noted above, the sample yielded 246 photographs. Of this number 92 of the photographs were from male athletes (37.4% of the sample) and 154 were from female athletes (62.6% of the sample). Majority of the photos posted were color images. Male athletes posted 86 color photos (93.5%) and six black and white photos (6.5%). Female athletes posted 152 color photos (98.7%) and two black and white photos (1.3%). Overall, there were 238 color images (96.7%) in the sample and eight black and white images (3.3%).

When examining the subject of the photos, male athletes posted 37 solo images (i.e. the only person in the photo was the athlete) (40.2%) and 55 images of a group (2 or more) of people (59.8%). Female athletes also had more group images (n=103, 66.9%) than solo images (n=51, 33.1%). As an entire sample there were 158 group images (64.2%) compared to 88 solo images (35.8%).

Of the 246 photos that were analyzed, 212 (86.2%) of the images featured the athletes in his or her basketball uniform. Male athletes posted images of themselves in their uniform in 73 (79.3%) of the 92 photos, and female athletes were in uniform in 139 (90.3%) of the 154 photographs. Athletes were not considered in uniform if they had school apparel on like a sweatshirt or t-shirt or non-athletic apparel.

To be classified as an in-game photo, the athlete had to be in uniform and participating in a basketball game. The in-game classification included images of athletes cheering on their teammates, standing on the court during a game, and speaking with coaches in game. Male athletes posted 49 photos (53.2%) that were deemed in-game images and 43 photos (46.8%) that were outside of game (the photo was not from a basketball game) images (i.e., outside of the arena or professional basketball picture). Female athletes posted 103 in-game photos (66.9%) and 51 (33.1%) outside of game photos.

Male athletes posted more out-of-action (not engaged in basketball activity on the basketball court) images (n=72, 78.3%) than in-action (engaged in basketball activity on the basketball court) images (n=20, 21.7%). The same was found in the analysis of the female athlete photos, although there was not as stark of a contrast. Female athletes posted 84 out-of-action photos (54.5%) compared to 70 in-action photos (45.5%).

In addition to the type of action and location of the images, each photo was inspected to identify whether or not the athletes face was in view. Photos with their faces in view simply meant that their face was shown. Male athletes posted 73 photos (79.3%) with their face in view and 19 photos (20.7%) where the athlete's face was not shown to the camera. Female athletes published 111 photos (72.1%) with their face in view and 43 photos (27.9%) where their face was not shown.

Finally, each of the 246 images was examined and coded on whether or not the picture signified a good-bye or finality image. To be included in this section, the image had to be waving to the crowd or walking off the court with their back to the camera. The researchers deemed 47 (51%) of the photos posted by male athletes and 17 (11%) of the photos posted by the female athletes met the criteria of a good-bye or finality image.

Discussion

The sudden cancellation of the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournament(s) due to the apprehension surrounding COVID-19 encompassed all three major transition factors as outlined in Schlossberg's (1981) model. Further the context of the transition significantly impacted how athletes internalized the transition (e.g., Wylleman et al., 2004; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Schlossberg's (1981) model states that those who have experienced a similar transition may have an easier time adjusting. The characteristics surrounding this particular transition were sudden and unexpected, which resulted in a non-normative transition, as the cancellation of March Madness due to COVID-19 was indeed unforeseen.

For most athletes in their final year of eligibility, the transition is permanent. Majority of these athletes will not be playing basketball at the professional level; therefore, the sudden end to their career can be likened to those who suffer career ending injuries (Grove et al., 1997; Paule-Koba & Rohrs-Cordes, 2019; Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018; Stoltenburg et al., 2011). The permanent nature of this transition could be seen in the 64 images (26%) that elucidated a good-bye or finality feeling. Schlossberg (1981) believes transitions are viewed as a loss or a gain. Considering the majority of the posts were sport related, it can be inferred that the sample viewed this transition as a loss and utilized Instagram as an outlet for self-expression (Kapoor et al., 2018). After all, the images were not reflective of the athletes looking towards the future (e.g., pictures of new homes, career opportunities).

This is similar to Stokowski et al.'s (2019) study, 42.7% of former college athletes reported feeling free and ready for the future upon the completion of their collegiate sport career. The athletes who reported a positive transition were aware their sport would end and ultimately had a plan for the future (Stokowski et al., 2019). In this particular case, there was no way athletes could prepare for COVID-19. If athletes are unable to prepare for their transition, previous work demonstrates that athletes often feel a great sense of loss (Etzet, 2006; Falls & Wilson, 2013; Fuller, 2014; Griffiths, Barton-Weston, & Walsh, 2016; Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Papatomas, Petrie, & Plateau, 2018; Smith & Hardin, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019).

Even though this event was unforeseen and cause the athletes to enter a non-normative transition, how the athletes process that transition can be impacted by others around the athlete. For example, social and institutional support plays a large role in how an individual can adapt to an event (Schlossberg, 1981). Although group images were common among the present sample as 59.8% of male athletes and 66.9% of female athletes posted images with a

Table 1: Summary of Results

Photo Code	Male Athletes	Female Athletes
Black and White	86	152
Color	6	2
Solo	37	51
Group	55	103
In Uniform	73	139
Out of Uniform	19	15
In Game	49	103
Outside of Game	43	51
In Action	20	70
Out of Action	72	84
Face in View	73	111
Face Not Shown	19	43
Good-bye/Finality Image	47	17

group of people, studies (e.g., Etzel, 2006; Falls & Wilson, 2013; Fuller, 2014; Griffiths et al., 2016; Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Papathomas et al., 2018; Smith & Hardin, 2018; Stokowski et al., 2019) repeatedly demonstrate that athletes often lose their support system (e.g., teammates, coaches) and experience loneliness upon sport retirement. Group images ranged from team group photos (both with/without coaches) and group images that included family members. This particular transition brought on by COVID-19 may have increased feelings of isolations for athletes due to stay at home orders, self-quarantine efforts, and social distancing requirements. Although posting group pictures on Instagram is common, specifically for female athletes (Smith & Sanderson, 2015), college athletes already lack institutional support (e.g., Bowles, 2016; Stokowski, et al., 2019) upon adapting to transition. It can be assumed that COVID-19 and the sudden departure from campus for the athletes further hindered institutional efforts (e.g., programming) to assist college athletes in transitioning to a life beyond sport (Stokowski et al., 2019).

In addition to social and institutional support, individual characteristics (e.g., age, sex, well-being, values) can also impact an individual's ability to adapt (Schlossberg, 1981). All those who met the criteria included in the present study had similar characteristics, senior or graduate student basketball athletes. These characteristics were evident in the photos that athletes chose to post. Majority of athletes in this study, 79.3% of male athletes and 90.3% of female athletes, posted pictures wearing their basketball uniform. Further, unlike the results presented in Smith and Sanderson's (2015) study where there was not a significant difference in the percentage of in-game photos of male and female athletes, the present study found more images posted by female athletes (66.9%) than male athletes (53.2%) portrayed in-game action. Not only do these posts depict what athletes value (their sport), but also how they view themselves. The sheer volume of the posts in the present study of athletes wearing their uniforms and/or participating in basketball game shows evidence of high athlete identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Research has exhibited (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Stoltenburg et al., 2011) that those with high athlete identity often face difficulties adapting to a life beyond sport, especially a non-normative sport transition (Paule-Koba & Rohrs-Cordes, 2019; Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018).

The unique nature of this transition for the athletes may have resulted in athletes posting different content than "normal" (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Smith and Sanderson, 2015). Previously, information sharing has not been shown to be the primary motivation for college students to use Instagram (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Smith and Sanderson (2015) suggest that collegiate athletes appear to be using Instagram "to showcase their personal likes, interest, families, and charitable work" as opposed to "athletics and competition" (p. 355). The results of this study may have differed from previous research due to the unprecedented nature of the tournament cancellation. Instagram allows users to post up to 10 images (more than the four images Twitter allows), as such, the sample in the present study may have chosen this social network platform as a way to express their thoughts and feelings about the end of their collegiate career.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study offered new insight into how basketball athletes utilized social media to cope with this particular non-normative transition. However, limitations do exist in the present study. For example, although warranted, the present study only looked at one social media platform, Instagram. Future work should examine how athletes utilized other social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter) to internalize their transition. This study also only looked at the non-normative transitions of one sport and one division, as such, future work should examine how COVID-19 has impacted athletes in other sports (e.g., baseball, softball, track and field). Transitions are also individual in nature and such experiences should not be

generalized (Schlossberg, 1981). Further, certain characteristics of the individual (e.g., ethnicity, race), could not (and should not) be determined from pictures. Therefore, gathering demographic data from participants would be helpful in order to assess if there are demographic differences in how social media is utilized to help with transitions. Future research should utilize statistical analysis to determine if gender significantly impacts how NCAA Division I basketball collegiate athletes internalize their non-normative transition through their Instagram posts.

It should also be noted that the researchers are unaware of how the sample was informed of the cancellation of their season and if there were any restrictions placed upon them regarding self-expression on social media. Future research is necessary to better understand the communication between athletic administration and athletes regarding the COVID-19 crisis. Future studies should also not only analyze Instagram pictures, but also the captions in order to better understand how athletes adapt to such a non-normative transition. It is also unknown if the sample was depicting their true thoughts and feelings on Instagram, or if they were presenting images they thought were warranted or expected following the cancellation. There is also limited research on how college athletes utilize Instagram, more work is needed as this platform is growing and the most consumed platform among this population.

Regarding the present study specifically, moving forward the researchers would like to code the captions from the pictures the athletes chose to post on Instagram. Further, interviews need to be conducted with the basketball athletes that were included in this study to gain more insight into their experience adapting to transition. Not only would interviews include questions informed by Schlossberg's (1981) model, but the interview protocol would include questions related to the athletes' motivations for posting on Instagram. Lastly, the researchers would like to conduct an in-depth examination of the policies and programming instituted by colleges and universities to support college athletes who are experiencing a non-normative transition due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Practical Implications

Ultimately, the data revealed that while many collegiate athletes (n=74) posted their thoughts following the tournament's cancellation, more than half of the potential sample (n=90) did not post anything on their Instagram account or did not have an account that could be located. With social media being such a vital tool for communication and self-presentation, an increase in social media literacy through social media training is warranted among this population. Social media can be a useful tool for self-presentation and brand management, but it can also be a therapeutic outlet as seen in this study when athletes utilized the platform as a vehicle to bid farewell to their sport. However, due to the high-profile nature of NCAA Division I basketball, training is necessary to teach athlete's how to utilize their social media in a professional manner. Lastly, given the current COVID-19 environment, athletes should be encouraged to utilize social media to connect and communicate with others. Although social media use has been associated with depression and loneliness (e.g., Aalbers, McNally, Heeren, de Wit, & Fried, 2018), perhaps in this COVID-19 climate, social media can be used to promote community and interconnectedness; ultimately, assisting collegiate athletes with this COVID-induced non-normative transition.

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