

REDEFINING THE RETIRED FEMALE COLLEGE SWIMMER



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WOMEN'S SWIM & DIVE, CLASS OF 2020

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the difficult transition process female college swimmers go through during retirement. Currently, there is very little research on the retirement process of former NCAA athletes. There is no scientific research looking explicitly at retired female college swimmers. Through the conducted research, I hope to provide insight on this challenging retirement process and provide recommendations that can make this process easier.



BACKGROUND RESEARCH

NCAA Stats:

- 460,000 NCAA Student-Athletes
- 2% play professionally, 98% retire upon graduation

Retirement Trends:

- Linked to weight gain
- Struggles with exercise
 - Over-exercise
 - Lack of exercise
 - understanding what "enough exercise" looks like

NCAA Gallup Study

Retired SA succeed in:

- Purpose Well-being
- Social Well-being
- Community Well-being
- Physical Well-being

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative Study

- 8 Open-ended questions
- 9 respondents (Retired DI Swimmers)
- Purpose: identify themes for quantitative survey

Quantitative Survey

- 27 questions
- 109 respondents
- 60% Response Rate

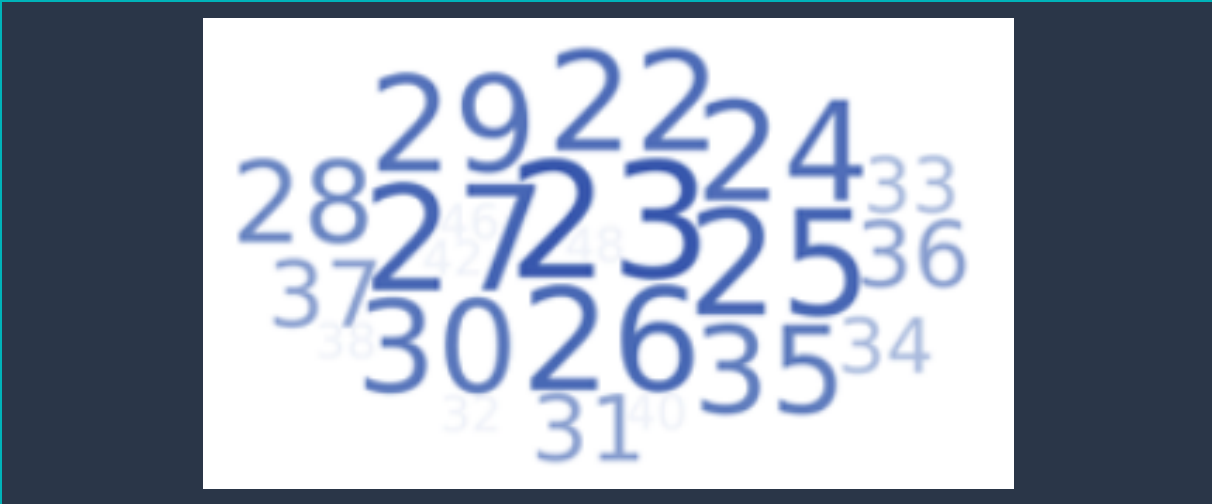


Respondent Profile

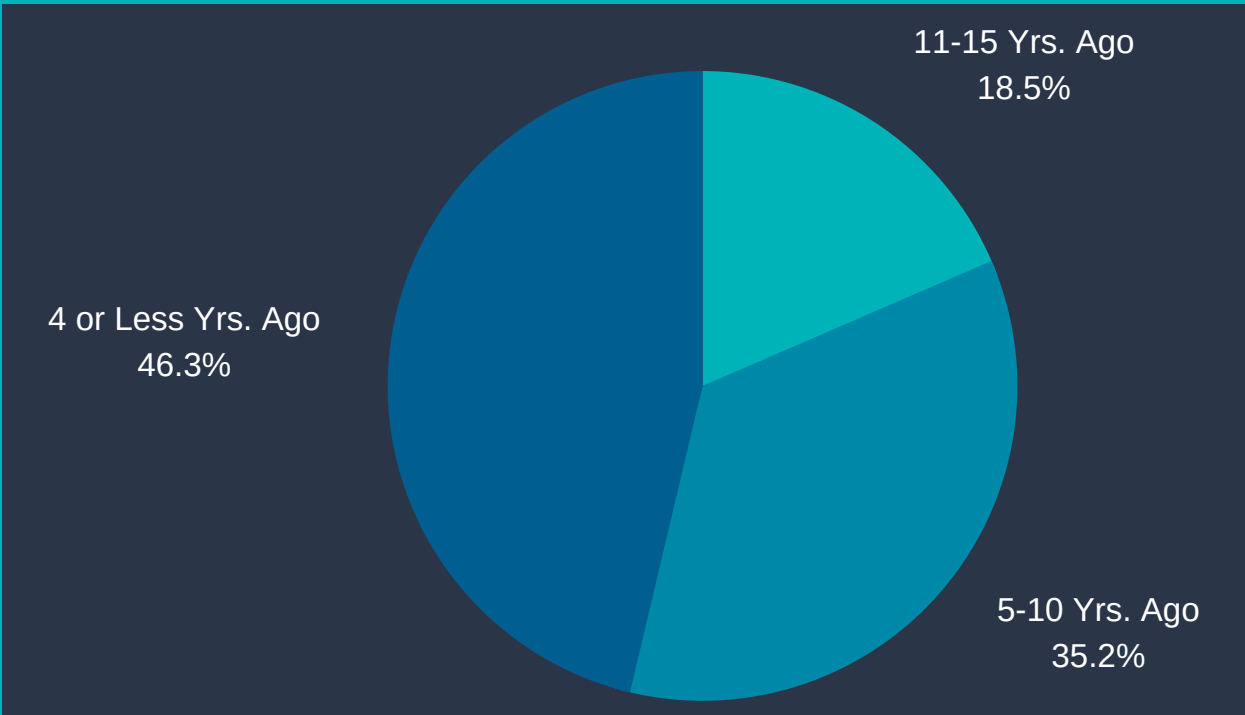


Avg. Years Swam: 15
98% Former DI, 2% Former DII

Respondent Age Distribution



Number of Years Post Graduation



Participating Schools



Themes Analyzed



Identity Loss

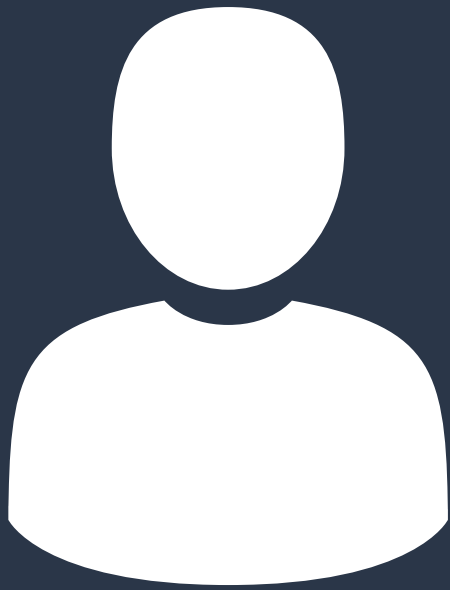


Current Exercise

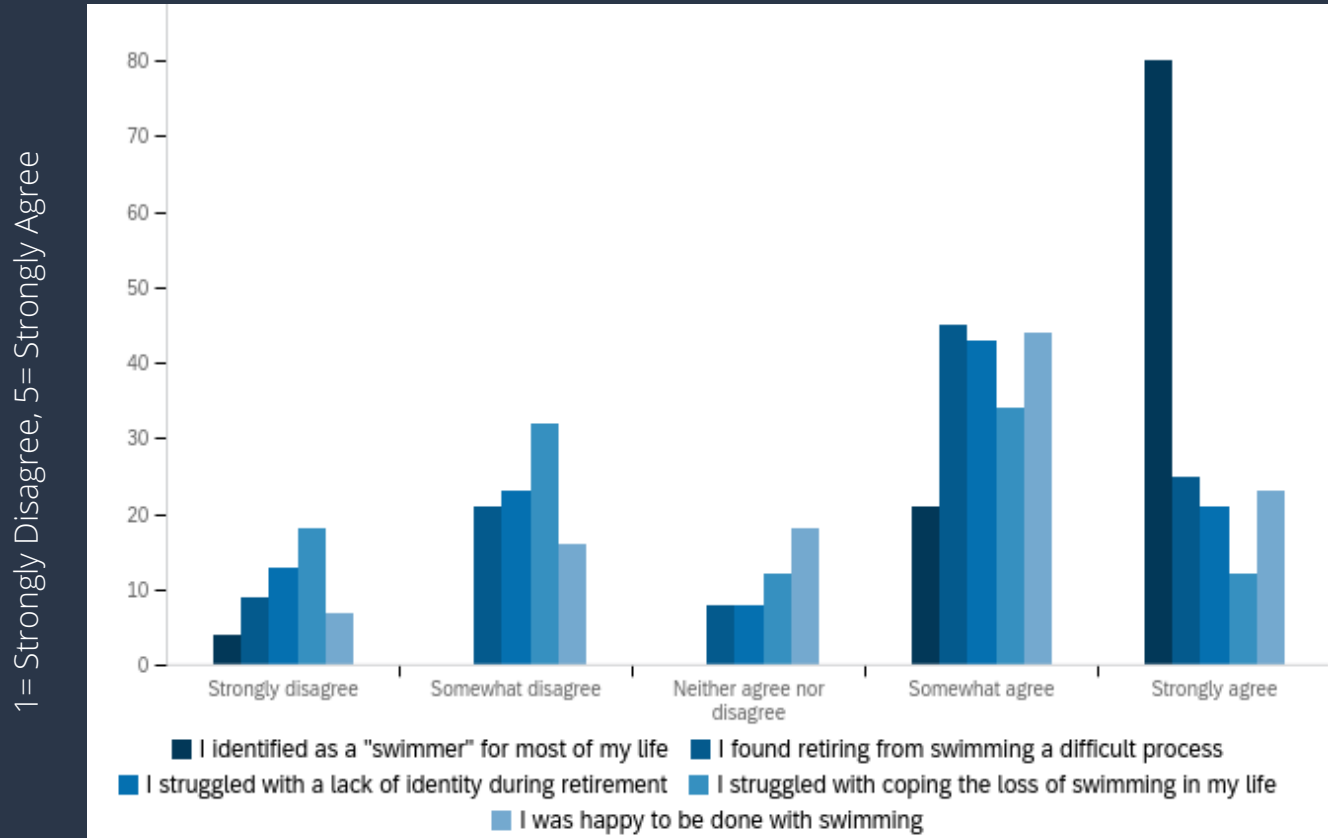


Relationship With
Swimming

Findings



Identity Loss



"I struggle with a lack of identity" mean score= 3.52

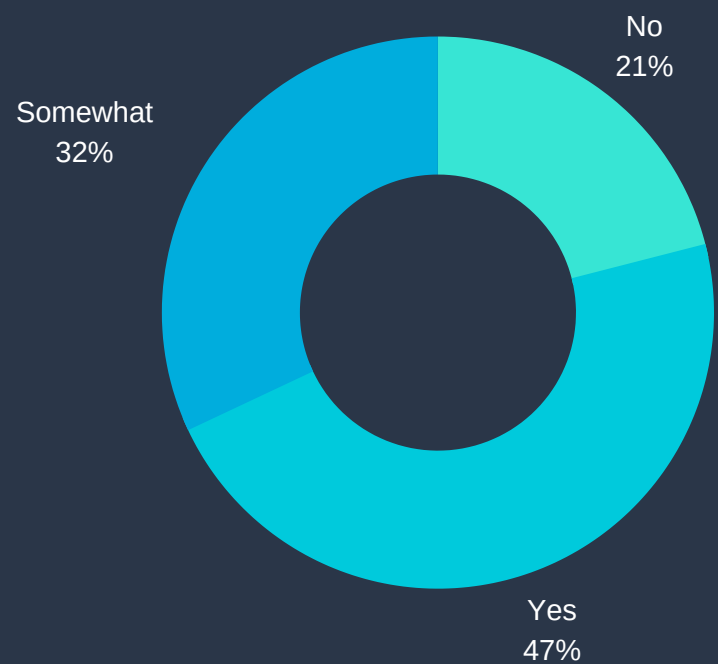
"I had anticipated feeling only joy and excitement once swimming was over... I was surprised at how difficult it was to navigate through that first year."



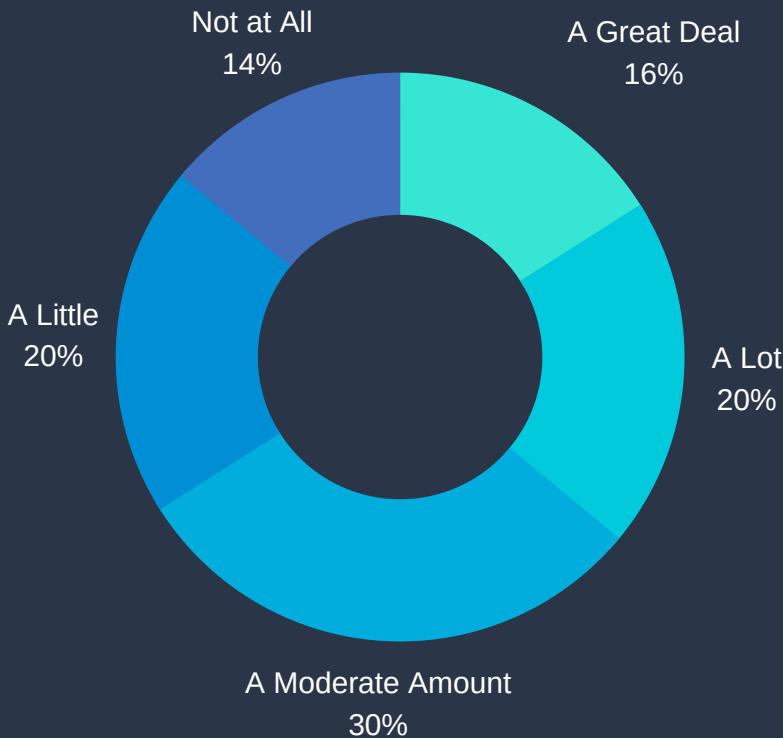
Current Exercise

"It was challenging finding something I enjoyed doing that had a similar intensity level of what I would get during practice."

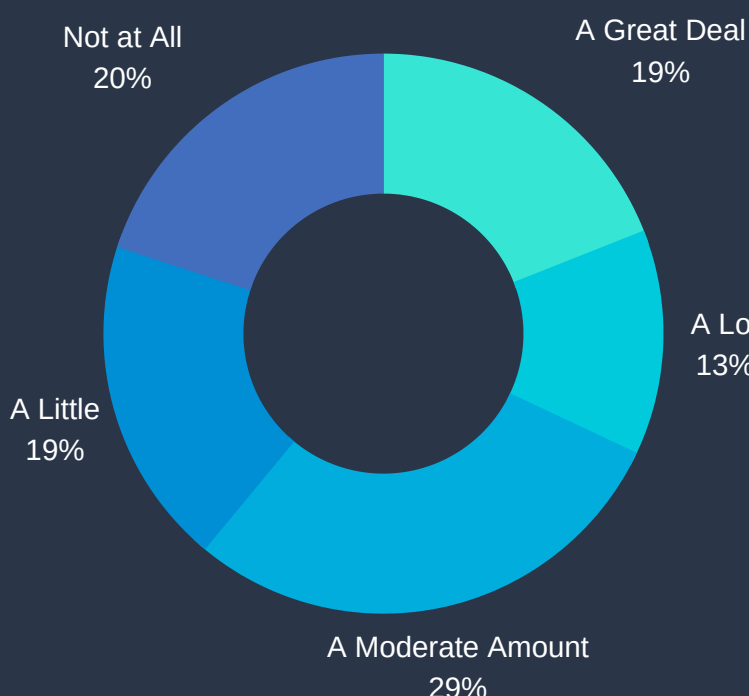
Has Structured Exercise Routine



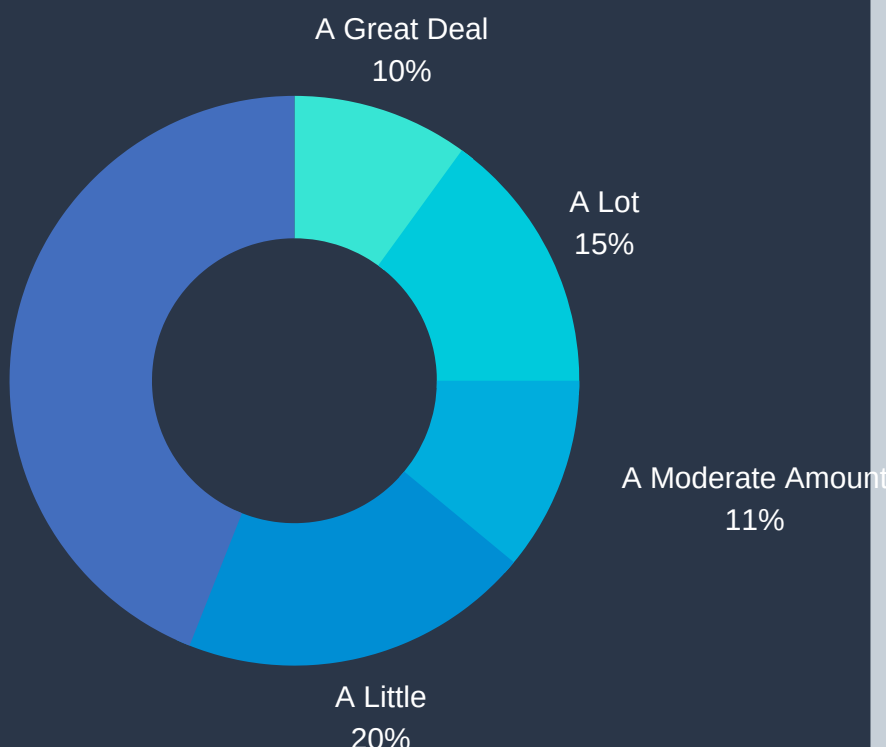
Struggle to Exercise w/o a Coach



Struggle to understand what "Enough" exercise looks like



"I often over-exercise"



Relationship With Swimming

Continue to Swim Today



63%

Miss Swimming

"I will always love swimming... whenever I put on my cap on goggles, it feels like home."

Recommendations

1

Understand the Retirement Process

- It's a real life transition process
- It's gradual
- Flip the script
 - *The analogy "turning a chapter" is wrong. It suggests we leave behind someone we once were and turn into someone else. We remain athletes, regardless of the label "swammer"*

2

Understand Your Personal Self

- We are often driven by external motivators (coaches, teammates, time standards) and high benchmarks for success. Discover your internal motivators. What intrinsically fuels you?
- Know your values ("things that are inherent to you, they keep you feeling fulfilled"). Skills, talents, strengths are not values.
- Your values need to be met, in order to feel personally fulfilled, these in turn achieve your internal validators

3

Initiate Conversation

- Shift negative stigma of fear/ uncertainty around retirement to a positive one
- Have conversations about retirement and what's to come
- Embrace mixed emotions surrounding retirement



This research is dedicated to my fellow senior teammates, whom I have had the pleasure of training alongside with for the past four years. I hope this research will not only help them and myself, but any other female collegiate swimmer who will be retiring. I hope this research proves that most swimmers navigate the retirement process well. The values, the support network, and the life lessons swimming provides will be carried with us throughout our lives.

