

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Mental Health Among College Athletes

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Rationale

- Athletic identity (AI), describes the extent to which an individual identifies as an athlete.
- Athletic retirement or the inability to participate for those with high AI may lead to feelings of loneliness and other mental health struggles.
- **Purpose: Analyze the relationship between athletic identity, loneliness, and mental health resource utilization in current and previous NCAA athletes.**

Methods

Data Collection

- Participants (Average age: 22-25 years old; N= 178) were recruited via email and word of mouth.
- Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale¹, and the UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale², and answered questions about mental health resource utilization.

Data Analysis

- Data was analyzed using R Software
- A Spearman correlation was used to determine the relationship between AI and loneliness.
- A logistic regression was used to determine the association between AI, loneliness, and mental health resource utilization.
- Athlete participation status (current athlete vs. previous athlete) appeared influential, leading to secondary analyses.
- ANOVAs were used to analyze outside pressure and mental health resource utilization rates between current and previous athletes.

- **Figure 1** shows a weak, negative relationship between athletic identity and loneliness ($r_{\text{spearman}}(176) = -0.16, p < .05$).
- A non-significant association between athletic identity and loneliness with mental health resource utilization was observed (**Figure 2**).
- There was a significant association between mental health facility use and athlete status ($F(1, 176) = 6.032, p < .015$; **Figure 3**).
- There was a significant association between outside pressure and athlete status ($F(1, 176) = 10.37, p < 0.00156$; **Figure 4**).

Results

Figure 1 Correlation Between Athletic Identity and Loneliness

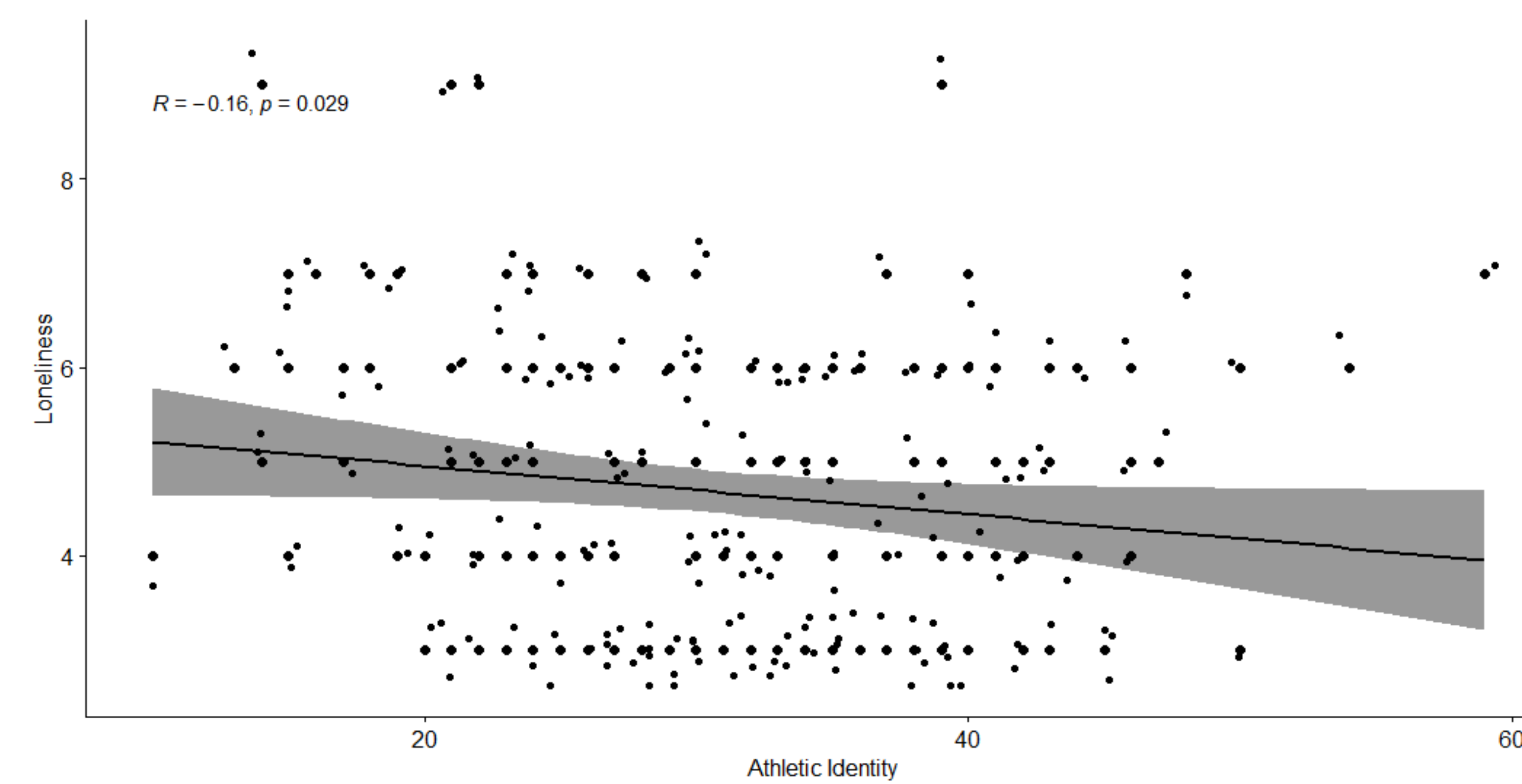


Figure 2

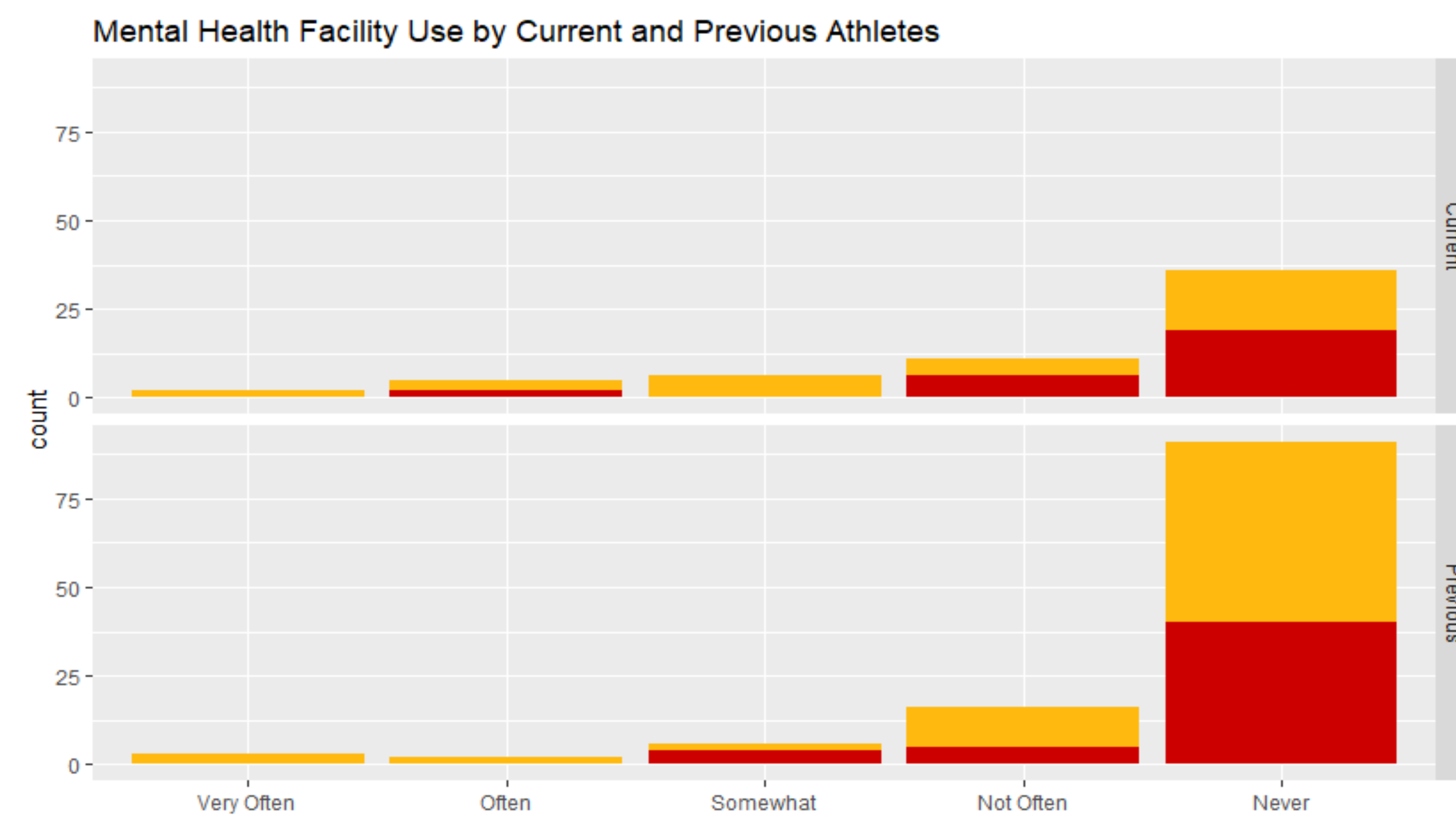
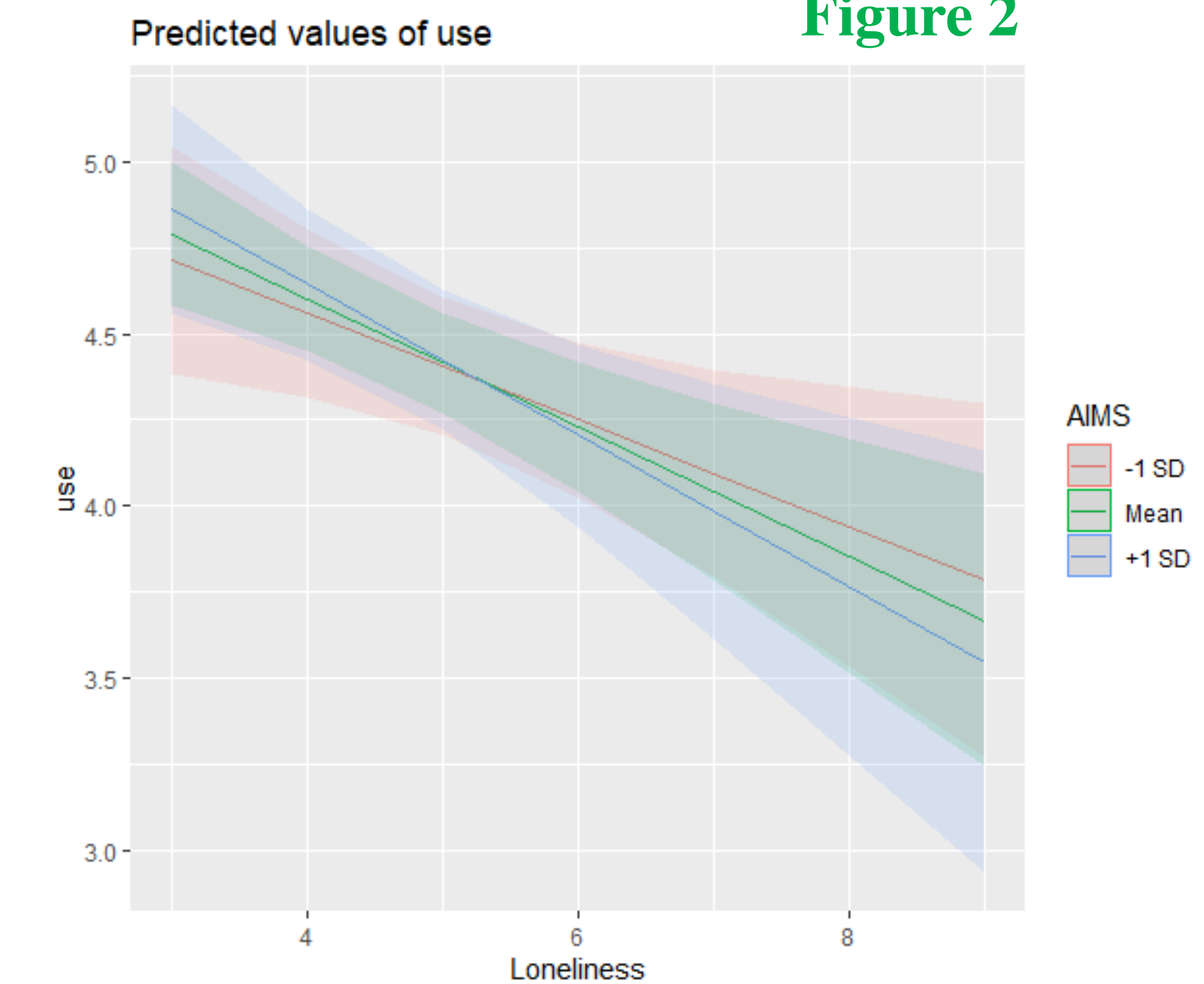


Figure 3

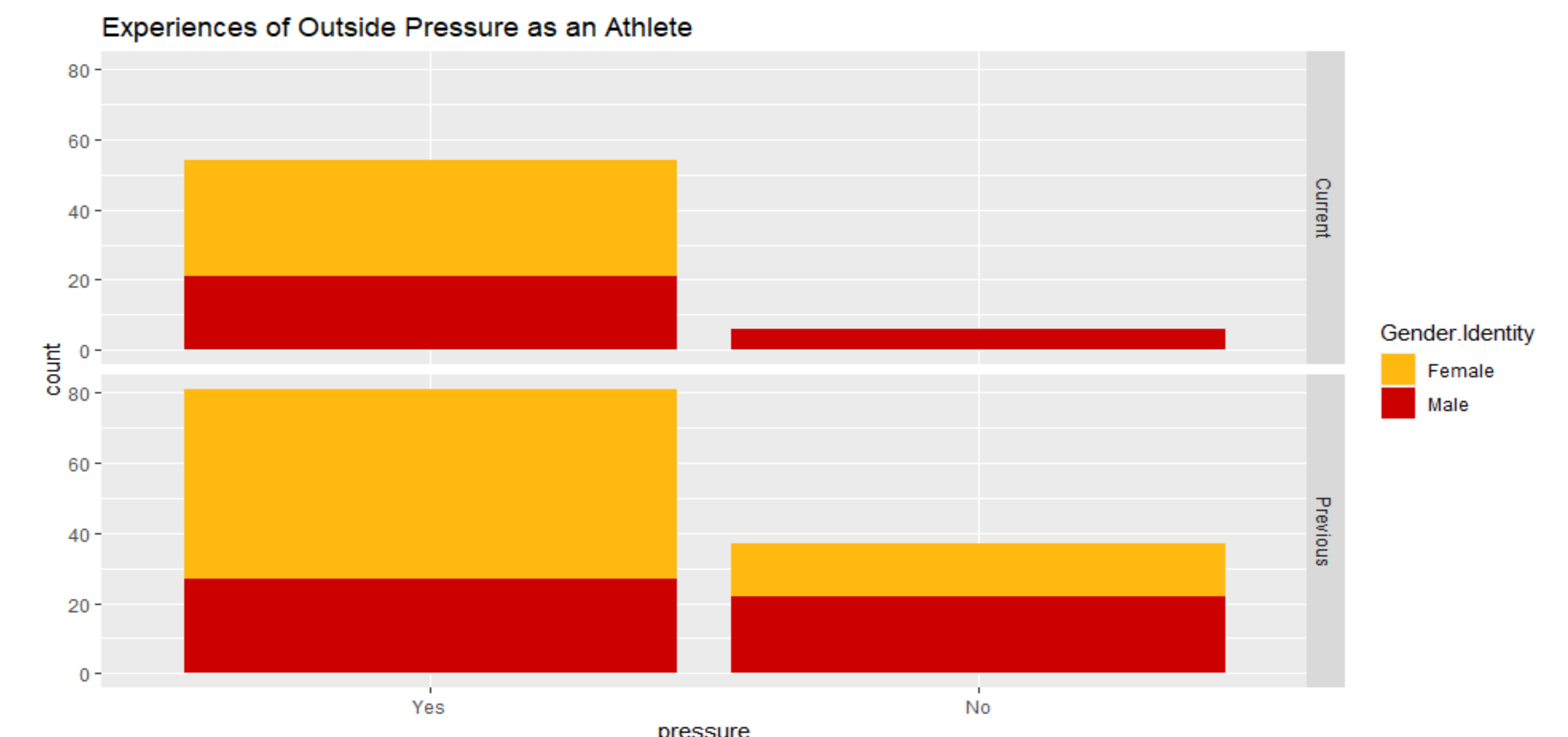


Figure 4

Key Findings

- There is a small negative relationship between AI and loneliness.
- A large proportion of athletes reported never using mental health resources.
- Both previous and current athletes reported having experienced outside pressure as collegiate athletes.
- Previous athletes reported using mental health facilities less frequently than current athletes

Conclusion

- The association between athletic identity and loneliness highlights an area of need to provide mental health outreach to athletes with high athletic identity when their participation ends.
- Athletes (particularly current athletes) are feeling outside pressures that may contribute to mental health resource needs.
- It is critical that mental health resources are available to athletes and that they are aware of them, particularly as these resources may be helpful in assisting with loneliness and coping with the high level of outside pressures that NCAA athletes report facing.

Key References:

1. Russell, D. (1996). The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66, 20–40.
2. Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or Achilles heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24(2), 237-254.