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Identity Crisis of an Athlete/Student

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Identity Crisis of an Athlete/Student

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the self-identity of an athlete and how the label of being an athlete impacted decisions and behaviors of a person. In previous research student athletes had a difficult time with their identity because of competing elements including family, community, teammates, coaches, teacher/professors, peers and themselves. Other elements included the student athlete's internal and external factors. From these proposed elements and factors, seven interviews with student athletes were conducted and discovered that family had the biggest impact on student athletes lives. This research uncovered that these athletes were more internally motivated than prior research. New insights were shown in that four of the student athletes reported that their parents were more worried about their education than their athletic performance. The results of the study could be used to inform parents and families the impact that they have on their student athletes when it comes to academics and athletics. Also, the study could be used for Division III colleges/universities to help student athletes in a school environment.

Identity Crisis of an Athlete/Student

College had become a very big aspect in people's lives as they grew up. There had been a higher demand for college education (Vieira & Vieira, 2014); leading to an increase in different ways colleges approach the interests of potential students. Colleges and universities alike had many different features that encouraged students to attend their school. One of the main features colleges had to attract students was athletics. College athletics could play a large role when a student was making a decision on attending an school/university (Inan, Karagozoglu, Dervent, & Arslantas, 2015). Athletics could determine if a student wanted to attend a school or not. Larger colleges, such as Division I programs, have the luxury of recruiting the best athletes to compete for their team in some of the biggest stadiums in the country.

Non-student athletes could also create a strong identification with the college as they showed pride in their school. The fans and students helped create the atmosphere for these highly touted games. At the Division I level where student athletes were playing in front of large crowds and national attention, it was easy to understand how their identity was strongly influenced by their sport participation. But at the Division III teams typically do not have a luxury of having a big fan base. Because of this, student athletes played the game in front of smaller crowds and received no compensation in scholarships or fame. This research examined the ways in how athletes at a Division III school identify themselves when it comes to being a student and an athlete. This research looked at how student athletes identified themselves.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

To understand a student athlete, one must look at the psyche of a student athlete and recognize why they act in a certain way. Student athletes considered acting in two specific ways, either following Role Theory or Family Theory. Role Theory articulates that each person had to fit a certain character; a specific role that they must fulfill to meet external expectations (Cooper, & Cooper, 2015). A big component to Division I student athletes playing sports is because of Role Theory. When the student athlete was identified as an athlete, the athlete worked harder to keep their social status instead of focusing on their grades (Cooper, & Cooper, 2015). These athletes had more of a demand for their image rather than their grades. For most athletes, it was a challenging transition to fit in on a big college campus compared to where they originally lived. To fit in, the students had to adapt to the social change around them, which led to athletes being around other athletes (Alder & Alder, 1985).

Student athletes had a hard time with self-identification when starting college. Because of this, they identified themselves as athletes, which put themselves at opposition with their role as a student. Athletes believed that they must fill a stereotype, an expectation from society, which believed that the athletes were only enrolled because of athletics and not academics.

Freshman/first year student athletes often wanted academics to play a big role in their college career, but as the year went on, the priorities changed to a point when athletics was the higher priority (Cooper & Cooper, 2015). Because of the higher-level competition and the increased demand on time for practice and competition, these athletes formed a strong athletic identity (Poux & Fry, 2015). These athletes did not want to fail when it comes to being identified as an athlete. However, Role Theory did not pertain to everyone; some athletes used the dumb jock

stereotype as motivation to disprove society (Cooper & Cooper, 2015). According to Stone (2012), student athletes had a negative perception because they were scholar athletes. Because the athletes attended school due to their athletic ability, they were perceived as dumb jocks that did not care and did not have the ability to attend school (Stone et al., 2012). Because Role Theory did not relate to every athlete, other researchers focused on how families and communities played a role in athlete's lives to explain athlete behavior.

Instead of athletes feeling the need to fill the role of athlete, Family Theory stated how family influences members by creating expectations for one another. Pete Thamel (2015), journalist for *Sports Illustrated*, wrote about how the influence of family could make a big impact on a student athlete. Family could have a big impact on an athlete's life because the athlete found their family members to be motivational (Thamel, 2015). Parents may have the biggest influence on their children, the family gave the student athlete high expectations that lead to positive or negative pressure (Schaeperkoetter, Bass, & Gordon, 2015). High expectations of the student athlete could push the athlete to be better, or consequently push the athlete out of sports. As athletes were driven to better themselves, the athlete could find motivation through the pressure of their parents, which could lead to the athlete wanting to compete. However, parents were not the only possible familial influence.

Competition was a big component to an athlete's life as the athletes had been influenced to compete by their family members. The competition of family had an impact on the athletes, as a student athlete would compete with their siblings for recognition (Thamel, 2015). But when the athlete goes away for college, there is a decrease of competition from the household. The athlete was not as competitive when away from the family, which led to negative results in the person's life (Inigo, Podlog, & Hall, 2015). The stress could result from the athlete feeling pressure from

home, a study on college athletes showed how athletes had certain obligations that he/she had to attain by their family and friends to be a success story (Inigo, et al., 2015). From here, college athletes had a tendency to fill a role in the lives of people close to them instead of playing their sport (Schaeperkoetter, et al., 2015).

Family Role did not pertain to only relatives, but also the people that represented the community of the athlete in their hometown. Athletes sometimes considered their community as family members. The community could set certain standards for an athlete to be their best (Inigo, et al., 2015). Families play a role in the athlete's lives when the athlete responded to meet expectations set by their family and either filled the role or looked for other influences to be a positive impact to succeed in college athletics. Student athletes found ways to keep themselves motivated, equally they looked for positive motivation to help them prosper and become a better athlete. But, there were external factors that could positively or negatively affect the athlete.

External Factors

An athlete's goal is to be successful, as Abraldes (2016, pg. 585) wrote, "Success is achieved through the effort carried out in training and competitions prevails." Athletes wanted to train hard and then test their skills and training on elite competition (Abraldes, 2016). When it came to student athletes, there were various amounts of people that put pressure on the student athlete.

Student athletes were under pressure to succeed. To succeed, the athlete had to meet a certain expectation from outside pressure. One of the pressures that could be found existed because student athletes were expected to fill a role in their communities. Athletes faced a challenge managing the two different images people see in them. Athletes often had significant accomplishments, which placed them as role model. But being classified as a student, they were

often labeled as dumb jocks (Cooper & Cooper, 2015). Sometimes because they were acknowledged as role models, the communities where the athletes grew up knew that athletics were the only way to attend college. Other kids in the community looked up to these college athletes as role models, but in reality the athlete was not being productive and struggled in classes while attending college (Cooper, & Cooper, 2015). The student athletes had to balance two different images people identified them as. Athletes had to balance athletics and academics to be enrolled in school, but the athlete could not prioritize between school and sports.

Athletes also received pressure from their institution as athletics played a major role in how the school was perceived (Nite, Hutchinson, Melton, & Bouchet, 2015). The colleges were looking for the best athletes to win championships, which led to higher enrollments for the school (Getz & Siegfried, 2012). The pressure to win a championship came from many different outside factors (Inigo, et al., 2015). This pressure could come from the college community, alumni and fans in the area demanded their team to win and continue winning. Pressure could also be seen in the coaches in college athletics because the universities put an emphasis on winning and demanded more from their athletes to win (Nite et al., 2015). Because of this, student athletes leaned towards athletics and spent less time on their academics (Casement, 2013). The pressure of sports had a big impact on college athletes, the athlete needed to find the balance in time demand when they were dealing with academics, athletics, social life, and health.

In another article, Poux (2015) examined how a student athlete who competed at a high level of sport formed a strong athletic identity. Because of the high level of competition, the athlete had a weaker academic identity (Poux, 2015). Student athletes that believed this would prioritize their time and effort differently since they did not give significant consideration to education. Athletes also gave less consideration to the major they chose, because they saw the

selection of a major as a requirement that needed to be met to play a sport, not as an important decision that affected their future. These athletes also indicated that they put low effort into their class assignments and were less concerned with missing class (Poux, & Fry, 2015).

Demands on Time

Aside from who has influenced athletes, the manner of influence and the outcome of that influence varied. Demands on an athlete's time could come from physical, social, or academic origins. Sleep took up to thirty percent of a person's day, a person needs sleep to be mentally accessible (Loft & Cameron, 2014). There were three factors that determine a recuperative outcome of sleep: the duration, quality, and phase of sleep (Fullagar, Duffield, Skorski, Coutts, Julian, & Meyer 2015). Players tended to have trouble getting enough sleep as a result of night games, travel, and a congested schedule. Negative results of sleep deprivation could affect augmented physical fatigue, slower cognition function, and lower body power suppression (Skein, Duffield, Minett, Snape, & Murphy 2013). Athletes must be able to manage their time while having to prioritize their sport. The time that the athlete had available was critical when it came to finding time to sleep, but also finding time for academics and a social life. For example, when the athlete had time to rest traveling to games, there was evidence that athletes lost sleep before and during competition periods (Fullagar, et al., 2015). When a person could not sleep, the body would break down and not function (Fullagar, et al., 2015). This made it even harder for the athlete to focus on their athletics and academics, and athletes may continue to favor sleep over other high time demanded endeavors.

Even when sleep deprived, the athletes must learn to focus on the tasks at hand. In one sense, they could easily be more focused on the game rather than other responsibilities they may of had. But because of this sport focus, they were not focusing on academics, which could lead to

more stress. Not all college students had to balance a heavy workload when attending school, non-student athletes had better time management skills than student athletes (Burak, Levent, & Kaan, 2015). Student athletes had more responsibility when it came to managing their time compared to non-student athletes. This led to stress that athletes had to deal with when it came to high demand of time and time mismanagement.

Stress on college students had increased tremendously in the past fifteen years (Krieg, 2013). Stress led to a misuse of time and energy in school and athletics if they were not managed effectively (Krieg, 2013). Understanding how to handle free time could reduce stress (Ludvigson, 2013). The athletes that had stress in their everyday life had an increased chance of using drugs compared to athletes that found ways to reduce their stress through socializing and spending time with family (Krieg, 2013). Student athletes had found it difficult to balance other life demands with their participating in sports because of increased in practice and training times, meetings, travel and competitions. The atmosphere of mental, emotional, and physical strain, as well as intense competition and expectations, could produce a negative effect on the overall wellness and education of the student athlete (Ludvigson, 2013). It had been reported that many female student athletes who participated in sports where body image was stressed, unhealthy behaviors such as eating disorders, binge drinking and depression could occur and self-esteem may be indirectly affected. These athletes that were affected by their body image were worried of how they appeared to others. This internal factor of how they felt could affect the student athletes abilities in how effective they were in school and how they performed in their sport (Ludvigson, 2013).

Internal Factors

Each student athlete had personal reasons why they wanted to play and compete at the collegiate level. In a study of collegiate athletes, Stoll (1995) expected to find that Division I student athletes were going to be motivated by the scholarship and fame while the Division III student athletes were anticipated to be motivated by the love of the game. In studying Division I and Division III sports, the expectation assumed DI is controlled by money compared to DIII, which had considerably smaller budget, but both were led by sport competition (Stoll, 1995). But, the competition in both DI and DIII played a serious role in the level of collegiate competition because the athletes had a personal goal achievement for themselves and their team. “There is a negative perception that competition coupled with the intense nature of interscholastic athletics may cause athletes to perceive instrumental values (i.e. winning, fame, and prestige) as more important than competing to the idealistic perception of one’s ability” (Stoll, 1995, p. 16). The young adults in school playing sports were identified as student athletes. Though Stoll (1995) believed how student athletes were in fact competitors, they were not identified as competitors though the research concluded the athletes main concern was to win.

Goal achievement in athletics was critical when it came to creating a legacy and being identified as being an athlete (Poux, & Fry, 2015). Athletes wanted to win to earn a legacy and leave their own mark on the school. This was caused by the competitive nature of athletics and the willingness to win because participants were perceived to compete at a higher level when there was an award attached (Yarimkaya, Ilhan, & Gencer, 2015).

Athletes also had an internal factor that drove them, regret: Regret from previous seasons could really affect the mental aspect of the student athlete. In one study, only four athletes out of 172 did not have a regret after the season while there was a total of 1,236 regrets reported by the other athletes (Robbins, Madrigal, & Stanley, 2015). These athletes wanted to do better for

themselves after the season and regretted decisions not to be more dedicated to their sport. “People think they will experience regrets more than they actually do, thus the fear of experiencing regret could positively or negatively impact behavior as one may change a behavior to avoid regret or not engage in a behavior for the same reason” (Robbins, et al., 2015, p. 220). The leading regrets in a season were categorized in three sections: relationships, sport behavior, and health. The three most reported regrets included not being enough of a leader, eating right, and sleep habits (Robbins, et al., 2015). This is where the athletes looked at him or herself and saw where they could individually improve to avoid having the same regret the next season. It had been said that athletes who had read previous regrets at the start of the season provided fewer weekly regrets compared to their counterparts who did not have access to the regrets of former athletes.

Though the pressures from the school could affect the athlete and how they were influenced, the athlete also had the championship mindset that would influence him/her to compete (Yarimkaya et. al., 2015). Studies had shown that higher achievement motivated athletes and created the mindset for the athlete to contend. The willingness to compete created a desire to put in more work into team meetings and strength and conditioning sessions (Poux & Fry, 2015). This willingness could create a positive atmosphere that would let the athlete reach their full potential. But the athletes needed a certain grade point average to stay in school, which led to an imbalance of academics and athletics. Cooper (2015) reported how athletics wanted to maximize their player’s athletic ability. Because of this, athletes must choose how they identify themselves. By identifying themselves and their core beliefs, they could choose what is most important to them while attending school.

Purpose

Existing research reviewed how the student athlete was motivated by their external factors more than their internal factors, the external factor was how the student athlete was perceived in society and how the athlete felt as if they needed to fill a role instead of being themselves (Cooper & Cooper 2015). The athletes that were not motivated by society were ones who were motivated by their families and their roles that were established in their community (Schaeperkoetter, et al., 2015). Role and Family Theory showed how the athlete is motivated externally, however the theories fail to interpret why athletes choose why they prioritize. The research that had been presented gave a platform of how athletes behaved and how the athlete is perceived. However, previous research did not touch how the athlete identified themselves and how the athletes managed their conflicting identities. The purpose of this research is to understand the self-identity of an athlete and how the label of being an athlete impacted decisions and behaviors of a person. Subsequently, the research questions are as follows:

1. How is the primary identity of an athlete shaped?
2. In what ways do athletes manage conflicting/competing identities?
3. How do athletes interpret/deal with the expectations of others
4. What is the primary identity of an athlete?

Method

General Research Descriptors

Using the interpretivism paradigm, a qualitative primary approach to research was undertaken to answer the research questions (Jones, 2015). As the athlete experience is unique, this design utilized the insider view and uncovers explanations about athlete identity and behavior that were not understood before. This qualitative research design used a small number

of individuals to collect the specific data to uncover links or relationships between reasoning and actions identify the perceptive behind the athletes and if the athletic identity reflects their actions (Jones, 2015). Since there had not been any information that revealed the understanding of self-identity of athletes at the Division III level of college athletics and how their self-identity influences the athlete's actions, the researcher used inductive reasoning. The inductive approach collected the data first and then derived a conclusion about how athletes behaved in college athletics (Jones, 2015).

Participant/Sample Selection

As little research focused on the Division III level, athletes from five different sports at the same level were identified as participants. Athletes needed to be participating in college sport for at least one year to fit the additional criteria to be considered. Participants were selected at random with the use of a web based random number generator that chose the sports and athletes participating in the study. Every sport at Saint John Fisher College was placed into a Microsoft Excel workbook to designate a number to each sport. The random number generator for men's sports consisted of baseball and football, but because of the larger rosters of the two sports, the women's sports were expanded to three aimed at roster number equalization. The three sports selected for women were lacrosse, softball, and track & field. From there, all athletes were then placed in another Microsoft Excel workbook to be selected for the interview. Twenty names were selected using the random number generator. Because the interview is based on volunteering, the final interviewees consisted of seven athletes. This number is consistent with existing qualitative research (Poux & Fry, 2015). With the technology provided by Saint John Fisher College, using their Gmail account allowed access to all students email accounts to effectively contact the interviewees to set up interviews.

Variables

For independent variables, the participants were asked various questions that categorized the interviewee as a student identity or an athlete identity. The first set of questions that were asked of the participant's general background information included class, high school attended and the sports they played in high school. Then the next set of questions consisted of how long they had played their sports. After, the question asked if the participants were recruited to play in college and if the answer is yes, then how many colleges. This set of questions was focused on the background of the interviewee. The recruitment question is asked to see if the participant was recruited to Fisher and to see if they were wanted to play collegiately elsewhere.

The variables in the research included sport and class. These two were utilized in the study to see the impact of the different sports and year in school impacted the athletes (See Table 1). The variables in the beginning of the research were to find what shapes the identity of a student athlete. For example, the researcher would discover the number of different colleges the student athlete was recruited by shaped their athletic identity. To continue, a scale was used to measure the importance of several elements to participants. The participant was asked to rank elements, which included family, community, teammates, coaches, teacher/professors, peers and themselves. Also, the researcher discovered the student athlete's influences and how this impacted how they identified themselves. The independent variable in the research looked to see if external factors impacted the student athlete and how they identified themselves. The dependent variable in the research is the primary identity of the participant because it determined if the external factors impacted the identity of a student athlete.

Data Collection Instrument

The interviews were conducted to answer the research questions while using quantitative and qualitative data (See Appendix A). The questions in the beginning of the interview were quantitative, as the questions asked the interviewees background knowledge of what class they were currently in, the high school they went to and the different sports they played. The researcher then asked how long the participant played their sport(s) in high school and if they were recruited to play in college. In terms of qualitative data, the researcher asked questions that were multiple choice, ranking, and short answer. The short answer questions were asked to understand why the participant plays sports. For example, one of the questions asked if being a college athlete was about either fulfilling a personal passion or fulfilling others' expectations. The questions were precise, but the participants were able to give their explanation to each multiple-choice question. Another multiple-choice question moved to the priorities of an athlete, the question asked what the participant is more likely to do with an hour of free time.

Next, the researcher would display seven different elements in front of the participant, as he or she had to rank the elements from most to least influential. For example, the ranking question entailed to what extent do each of the following influenced you/influenced your decisions. The categories were family, community, teammates, peers, coaches, teachers/professors, and self. Looking at the same categories, the participant had been asked to answer questions of who is the most influential to them as a person, athlete, and student. These set of questions looked to gain insight of who influences the participant given the specific circumstance. For example, if the participant's influences came from their family as a student and themselves for athlete, the participant looked for external influences when it came to school and internal factors when it came to athletics. Similar questions asked the participant who puts the most pressure on them as a person, athlete and student. These set of questions

looked to find more negative pressures of the participant from external elements. The next set of questions included the expectations and the impact on the participants of the seven categories listed above. These questions asked how the participant was impacted by expectations of external factors and internal factors. The last question of the research asked the participant where they fell on the continuum. The continuum showed the identity of a student athlete and if the participant believed if they identified themselves closer to an athlete or a student. At the end of each interview, the participant was asked if they would like to share any more information for the interview.

Data Collection Process

The research commenced by randomly selecting twenty participants to interview. The participants were emailed information of the research that included the purpose of the study, length of the interview, and a request for the participant to send their availability if they were willing to participate (see Appendix B). For the final list of interviewees, the interviewer organized times to meet with the participants to complete the interviews. The researcher conducted two pilot tests used in the preparation of the interviews, as the pilot test simulated the actual interview without analyzing the actual data that had been collected (Jones, 2015). When modifications were made to the interview, the researcher then constructed an email to send to all participants (see Appendix B). The initial distribution of the interview was over email, as eight student athletes responded. Within the email it asked the student athletes to respond within a week, in which a follow up letter was then sent to those who did not respond to the email (see Appendix C). This follow up was a reminder of the interview, which gave the participants the opportunity to schedule a day to be interviewed.

Before the interview, the researcher gave the participant a consent statement including the purpose of the research and the notification of voice recording during the interview. After the interviews were done, thank you letters were written via email to each individual thanking them for their effort in supporting the study (see Appendix D). The data was inserted into a spreadsheet and the researcher then began to analyze the data (Jones, 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

Once the interviews were completed, the data was transcribed and analyzed. To see the outcome of the study, the results were sorted to find similarities and differences of participants. This could not be determined without having an organizational plan made for the interview results. By using an Excel spreadsheet, the question and answers were placed in order of the interview. The questions were placed into columns and the answers were placed in rows next to the questions in the spreadsheet. The participant's pseudonym was used to organize each participant's result.

Using qualitative research, the data was coded to find similarities from each interview. The interviewees were organized by their class (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), and commonalities were found. The interviewees were also organized by sport to find commonalities within the same sport.

One category was specific to how athletes were motivated to play collegiate sport and then categorized to what motivated that specific athlete. The results of the research did not have set categories because the answers of the participants were compared to all questions and possible correlations. The answers to the questions were not supposed to be too specific because the answers would be easier to correlate and compare with each participant. However,

demographic questions were used because they gave a straightforward answer in which could be correlated with information that was harvested from the interview (Jones, 2015).

Results and Discussion

The researcher was able to find how student athletes were shaped from high school leading into college. Of the seven participants, six of them were recruited out of high school to play sports at the collegiate level. Participants in the research summarized the reason to play sports in college was to compete at a higher level of competition within their sport. As Abraldes (2016) explained, athletes want to compete at a high level after the time commitment and sacrifice to their sport. The student athletes wanted to keep playing their sport because they were not ready to stop. Because the athlete was recruited to play in college, they knew that they had the talent to play at a higher level (Abraldes, 2016). The participants in this study were recruited by zero to fifteen colleges and found there were no significant relationships between athletic identity and the number of colleges they were recruited by.

Athlete Identities

Out of the seven participants, four identified themselves as a student before being an athlete. The older the participant, the more they understood that their athletic careers were almost complete. Thomas said, “now that I am older, I understand how important school is. You know athletes are one injury away from being done with sports and education is going to carry with me for the rest of my life.” Four of the participants in the research were seniors and three explained how their identity had changed since they had been a student athlete from high school to college. Because these students were non-scholarship athletes, they believed that school would help build their future compared to athletics (Cooper & Cooper, 2015). Student athletes at a Division I level had to put more effort to athletics other than academics because of their scholarship (Cooper &

Cooper 2015). Because of the previous and current research presented, the researcher could see how student athletes from all levels of collegiate sport had contributing factors that shaped student athletes.

Student athletes were stereotypically pressured into choosing a school because of athletics (Stone et al., 2012). The researcher found there were other components to these Division III athletes attending college. Six out of seven participants reported that both the ability to play the sport they were recruited for and the major they wanted to pursue was important to them. This was a vital piece as three of the participants reported that Saint John Fisher College would not have been considered if they did not offer both academic and athletic opportunities that aligned with their personal goals. For example, Thomas' intentions of playing sports in college were to receive a scholarship. Thomas said, "I attended a community college at first to have the opportunity to receive a scholarship, once I figured out that wasn't going to happen I decided to focus more on school while playing the sport I love."

To find if the participant was influenced by others, the researcher learned that all participants in the research were playing collegiate sports for a personal passion rather than fulfilling others' expectations. The participants were further asked who had an influence or had pressured them as a person, athlete, or student. The results of this section established how student athletes were influenced and pressured from within themselves and their families. This supports the previous information found stating that athletes were driven to be better for themselves and the team (Yarimkaya et. al., 2015). The researcher also found how student athletes did not want any regrets when it came to athletics. Three of the participants spoke of internal pressure and the regret of not playing in college (Robbins, et al., 2015). These student athletes did not want to live with regret if they stopped playing after high school.

The researcher established how the individual athlete wanted to be better for their team to have an opportunity to win. All participants in the study mentioned winning a championship as a team while only two of the participants mentioned individual goals within their sport. Though Stoll (1995) found that Division I and Division III athletes were motivated from winning, Division I athletes were compensated with scholarships (Cooper & Cooper, 2015). Furthermore, this research found how the participants wanted to compete at a high level. Karl kept referring to becoming the best and competing with the best. Karl said, "I am competing to be a starter. The two starting corners right now are the best in the conference, heck Mort might be one of the best in the nation. I watch more film on him than of myself." Student athletes want to compete and be able to earn success because of their years of hard work playing and preparing for their sport (Abralde, 2016).

Interview respondents had to deal with different identities. Four of the seven participants had a difficult time with prioritizing time for family, school, and athletics. When the researcher asked the participants to answer a multiple choice question that made them prioritize either family, school, or athletics, five of the participants told the researcher that the answer depended on the situation and time (see Table 2). Emily explained how getting ahead with homework is key during softball season because of the cancellations of games and the amount of double headers the team could have during a season could take away from time to do homework. Previous research found this to be common as time commitment towards athletics powers student athletes to spend less time on academics (Casement, 2013). Continuing with the study, the researcher asked the participants to rank different factors that influenced decision making (see Table 3). The participants, on average, chose that they relied on themselves, family, peers and teammates the most. Within the interviews, the researcher found how the athletes did not see

a difference between their peers and teammates. Emily said, “Somedays I don’t even talk to anyone else but my teammates, coaches, or professors.” This could be explained with the demand of time on the athletes because they were spending so much time with their team, the student athletes had limited time between classwork and their sport to socialize with others their age (Burak et al., 2015). Student athlete’s teammates were their peers too, but the research suggests that the teammates had more of an impact on the student athletes than their peers.

When the interviewees were asked to list their influences and explain how each component had impacted them, the researcher concluded that Family Theory had a significantly more of an impact on the participant than Role Theory. Six out of the seven participants ranked how family had more of an influence on themselves than their community. The majority of the participants recognized how a community could have an impact on athletes and five believed that they went to high school in a small town. Small towns were known as having more of community impact on student athlete’s lives rather than bigger communities (Inigo, et al., 2015). During one of the interviews, Jay said, “the town always had expectations of their athletes and they expect us to go out there and play well... it’s always in the back of your mind.”

Outside expectations were considered to be a big factor for student athletes to compete (Abralde, 2016). Having external factors for athletes were encouraging when they did not want to compete (Nite et al., 2015). In five of the seven interviews, the expectations of others were known, but did not factor into their everyday life. Because the researcher was able to find the influences of a student athlete (See Table 2), it was found that external factors that would lead to outside expectations were not as high of an influence than internal influences. Five of the participants noted how their family members supported their decisions. This is important because Thamel (2015) explained how families influenced each other but also competed with each other.

The study refuted this piece of information because the participants saw their family support instead of the influence of competition. Jack mentioned how his parents had expectations for him as a person but not as an athlete; he explained how his parents wanted him put forth his best effort and how his expectations were through his character and not through his athletic ability.

As mentioned before, four participants identified themselves as students while the others identified themselves as athletes. The answer for this question varied with each participant. One general topic that was the same for the participants that identified as athletes was the opportunity to play the sport while being young and never being able to play again. Papí concluded that he would give his best effort to football because his teammates and himself had the same goal of winning a championship. Whereas Jack mentioned that he would continue to pursue being an athlete after college until his opportunities with professional level teams are gone. Participants that identified as a student consistently agreed how they want to continue playing because of their passion, but know the priority reason of attending college that was to earn a higher education. Supporting the research by Cooper (2015), Thomas recognized that he would put more time and effort if he were a scholar athlete but because of the level and his future goals he identifies himself as a student until he reaches his professional goals.

The research suggests how student athletes at the Division III level prioritize academics over athletics, but the student athlete prioritizes their time for sports to compete at a higher level compared to high school (Abralde, 2016). The study completed by the researcher suggests that each participant did not have a clear identity. Combining two of the questions from the interviews uncovered that student athletes may be facing an identity crisis (see Table 2). When asked to name the largest part of their identity, the participants were unclear to say if they were one or the other. For example Jay said, “School definitely comes first for me but

there is that percentage of being an athlete that carries with me. At the end of the day football is not going to give me job and school is more important for my future.” But when asked about what he would do with free time, he said “It depends on the day... if I’m all caught up on things I would get a lift in or on the weekend after the game I would want to spend time with my friends or family.” Jay was inconsistent with priorities, but was very clear how he identified with being an athlete, though he would prioritize weight lifting over doing schoolwork. In another case, the researcher had drawn on how the student athlete and their identity roots from their athletic performance in high school and their prioritization to schoolwork. Karl said, “I didn’t become a good athlete until my junior/senior years of high school. That was when my coach told me that I would be a good candidate to play college football because of my athletic ability.” Also the researcher had found that an expectations from parents were higher for education than for athletic performance. Four of the participants advised that their parents were more worried about grades than their performance in the sport. Emily said, “Whenever I talk to my mom she asks how school is going and then asks about softball.” This was not discovered in prior research in the prioritization of parents. Though there was not a correlation of student identity and parents priority of education over athletics, the researcher discovered how there was a correlation between family influence and priority of education.

Conclusion

The student athlete has an identity crisis; student athletes had a difficult time being consistent with their decisions and behaviors as an athlete or student. However, limitations to the research start with the majority of the participants being seniors. This could possibly skew the information because the participants in the study had the same general feelings when

categorized by class. Also, the researcher had suggested examples for the participants to understand the different elements of a student athlete. This could have skewed the information because the interviewer could have explained the elements better than other elements that were presented. The last piece of information that possibly could be skewed was the continuum. The researcher suggested to choose either student or athlete rather than choosing the middle, resulting in no results. This could have an impact because the participant might have considered themselves equal with their identity but the researcher suggested to clearly identify their answer.

In future studies, the researcher could broaden his research methods and take more of a quantitative approach. This would allow more participants to participate in the research as well as have more questions that clearly identify the participant as a student or an athlete. Other variables that could possibly be suggested in a further study is exploring if family members participated in sports. This could affect the participant because family has a big impact on student athletes, but the research can look further into how family impacts the student athlete.

The researcher was able to draw conclusions from the study. Every athlete was impacted by all elements presented in the previous research. The participants indeed had a difficult time with their identity, but each participant was clear about who positively and negatively impacts them as a person, student, or athlete. The researcher will provide colleges with information of student athletes and could possibly help the student athlete succeed in the classroom. Also, the information provided will help families understand the impact they have on their student athlete and they can motivate their student athlete to excel in sports and in the classroom.

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Appendices & Tables

Appendix A

The purpose of this research is to understand the self-identity of an athlete and if the label of being an athlete impacts decisions and behaviors of a person

Personal/Identity/Self

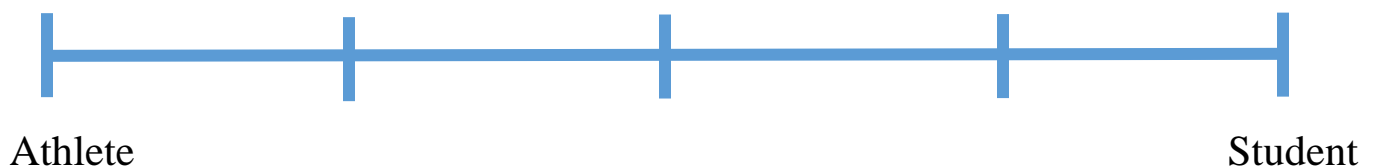
1. Background (Class, high school, sports, How long played, Recruited to play in college?)
y/n, how #
2. Which factor was most important in making your final college decision?
 - a. The ability to play the sport I want
 - b. The major I wished to pursue
 - c. Both the ability to play and the major were important to me
3. To me, being a college athlete is about
 - a. Fulfilling a personal passion
 - b. Fulfilling others' expectations of me
4. Why did you want to play sports in college?
5. Say you have a free hour of time to devote towards something. Which are you most likely to do?
 - a. Do something that would help me perform better as an athlete (workout, film, scout, etc.)
 - b. Work on something class/school related (homework, read ahead, extra studying, etc.)
 - c. Spend time with family or friends

6. Shaping influences/External factors

To what extent do each of the following influence you/influence your decisions? How?

[ranking 1-5]

- Family, Community/social, Teammates, Peers, Coaches, Teachers/Professors, Self
7.
 1. Which of these has been the most influential on you as a person?
 2. Which of these has been the most influential on you as an athlete?
 3. Which of these has been the most influential on you as a student?
 4. Which of these puts the most pressure on you on you as a person?
 5. Which of these puts the most pressure on you on you as an athlete?
 6. Which of these puts the most pressure on you on you as a student?
 8. What are the expectations from or impact on you from each of the following influences?
[content/examples]
 - Family, Community/social, Teammates, Peers, Coaches, Teachers/Professors, Self
 9. Conclusion
 - Where do you fall on the continuum?



Appendix B

Dear Participant,

My name is Kyle Hoffman and I am a senior at Saint John Fisher College. For my senior thesis in the Sport Management program I am examining how college athletes make decisions and why. Because you are a student-athlete, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing a private interview.

The focus of the research is to understand the self-identity of an athlete, specifically exploring various factors that influence athlete behavior. As a student-athlete, your knowledge and experience is very important to the outcome of the study. The interview is semi-structured and should take about twenty minutes to complete.

With this research, I hope to understand how athlete identity is shaped to enhance the quality of college student-athletes experiences. Your support and information will help my research tremendously.

If you choose to participate in this project, please contact me no later than October 13th so we can make arrangements for the interview. I appreciate the time you have given me and thank you supporting my project.

Sincerely,

Kyle Hoffman

716-512-4884

Kjh03770@sjfc.edu

Dr. Emily Dane-Staples

Edane-staples@sjfc.edu

Appendix C

Dear Participant,

I recently sent you an email asking you to participate in an interview for my senior thesis paper about the self-identity of a student-athlete. The interview is short and should only take twenty minutes to complete. Your response is important to help understand how athletes prioritize their time and why. Again, I would like to ask for your participation in my research as you can provide good information that can help with my thesis paper.

Please email me by October 20th, to convey to me if you will or will not be participating in the interview. Thank you for your help.

Best Wishes,

Kyle Hoffman

716-512-4884

Kjh03770@sjfc.edu

Dr. Emily Dane-Staples

Edane-staples@sjfc.edu

Appendix D

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for taking part in my research project. Your participation was very valuable. I know you are very busy and it is very much appreciated the time you devoted to participate in the study. With your help, I was able to determine what the primary athletic identity is for Division II athletes. I would like to invite you to the Sports Studies Poster Presentation on December 12th beginning at 12pm to 3pm. The results of the research will be presented and displayed on a poster with other Senior Sport Studies Majors.

Thank you again for your participation in the study.

Take care,

Kyle Hoffman

Table 1

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Sport</u>	<u>Years Played in High School</u>
Emily Baker	Senior	Softball	4
Jay	Sophomore	Football	4
Jack Tyler	Senior	Baseball	4
Karl Smith	Sophomore	Football	4
Thomas	Junior	Football	4
Jenna	Senior	Softball	4
Papí	Senior	Football	0

Table 2

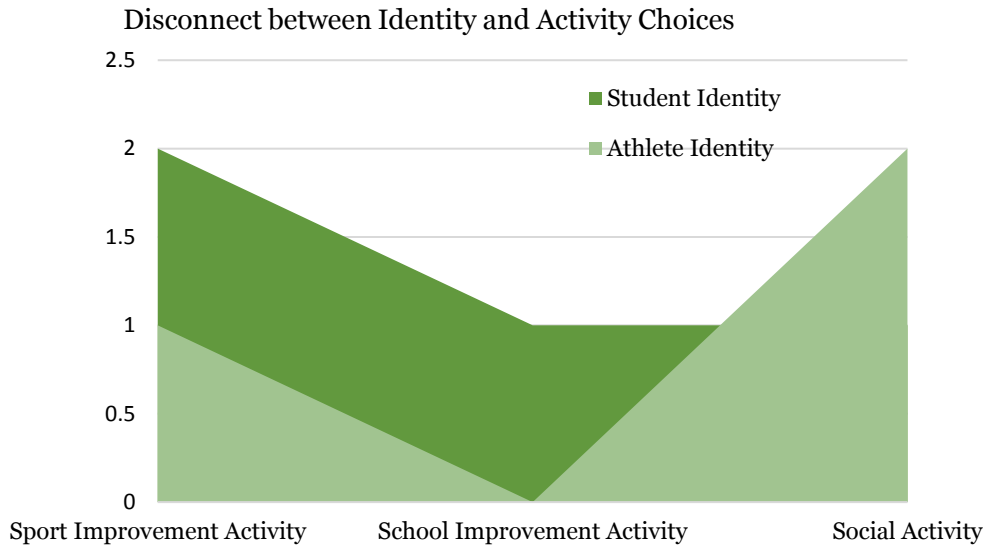


Table 3

<u>Elements</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Average Rank</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Family	3.1	2	2.0
Community/social	5.6	6	1.3
Teammates	3.6	4	1.0
Peers	3.4	3	1.4
Coaches	5.4	5	1.4
Teachers/Professors	5.6	7	1.9
Self	1.3	1	0.5