Examining the Relationship of College Adjustment on Athletic Identity of Division I Female Basketball Players’ Decisions of Transfer

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Abstract:

From society's perspective, college student-athletes competing in football and basketball are the epitome of a successful college experience. The athletic identity of student-athletes has been a topic of interest for many researchers to examine the positive or negative academic and social experiences of student-athletes (Brewer et al., 1993). Three social variables relate to institutional attachment: athletic experience, support systems, and societal influences can impact their college experience as a student-athletes (Brewer et al., 1993; Beamon, 2012; Harrison et al., 2014) to stay or transfer from college (Tinto, 2006).

The athletic identity of student-athletes has been a topic of interest for many researchers to examine the positive or negative academic and social experiences of student-athletes (Brewer et al., 1993). Athletic identity is comprised of a student’s self-identity that is exclusively centered around the “athletic self” which affects an athlete’s transition into or out of athletics (Beamon, 2012). Adjusting to college can affect athletic and social identity for student-athletes who navigate between intersecting identities.

Students who identify as a member of ethnic group, an athlete find it difficult navigating
between multiple identities (Burton, 2015; Harris et al., 2018; Steinfeld et al., 2010). Athletic identity in revenue generating athletics is tied to academic motivations, social influences, and the support systems that influence individual and athletic identity development (Bruening et al., 2005; Cooper & Jackson, 2019; Harrison et al., 2014). Black female student-athletes are provided athletic support through academic advisors, coaches, and teammates that help increase their self-esteem and their academic and athletic performance (Graupensperger et al., 2020). While research focuses on male student athletes, (Steinfeldt et al., 2010); however, more research is needed to determine whether there is a difference between athletic identity of NCAA Division I black and white female student athletes.

Student-athletes have more access to transfer from one institution to another than in previous years through the transfer portal. The NCAA transfer portal reports that 50% of student-athletes entered the transfer portal, and 43% of student-athletes are currently exploring options, competing at non-NCAA institutions, or have retired as collegiate athletes (NCAA, 2022). In 2021, 63% of female student-athletes entered the transfer portal, and 33% of female student-athletes that entered the transfer portal are awaiting playing options, transferred to a community college, or retired playing (NCAA, 2022). Little information is known about the factors relating to student athletes’ decision to transfer from institutions.

The role of the athletics should be considered an integral aspect of student-athlete development (Melendez, 2006). Several studies have also examined the experiences of Black female students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in comparison with those at predominantly white institutions (PWI’s) (Cokley, 1999; Cokley & Helm, 2001; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Worrell, Vandiver, Schaefer, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2006). Despite this potential theoretical link between sport and race, a dearth of studies has examined racial identity and athletic identity in conjunction, with a particular absence of institution-type (i.e., HBCUs and PWIs) comparison studies that focus on student-athletes. The role of the athletic subculture should be considered an integral aspect of student-athlete development (Melendez, 2006). A more comprehensive examination of the culture of HBCU athletics and how it impacts the developing role of athlete saliency in Black female student-athletes.
College sports provide social interaction, exclusivity, and positive and negative affection for developing pride and attachment to one's institution (Cooper & Jackson, 2019; Harris et al., 2018; Melendez, 2006; Slaten et al., 2020). Despite the growing number of scholars focusing on female student-athletes at Division I PWIs, there is a need to focus on the psychological development process of female athletes (Cowley et al., 2021; Forsyth & Roberts, 2019). The account about men and women through the lens of gender and social norms has created a dissonance in athletic identity between male and female. Most of the research on student athlete transfers is examined by the NCAA. Gender and social norms have created a narrative about men and women identity and athletic identity specifically the developmental, psychological, and social aspects of the athlete role in Division I female student-athletes.

Purpose

The purpose of study will examine a vital gap in the literature by examining the college adjustment among female student-athletes who play Division I basketball, and second compare the athletic identity of female basketball players at PWI’s with those who play at HBCU’s. The study will be grounded by Tinto’s (1993) student integration theory, in relation to how students experience campus communities into remaining or transferring from universities. The researcher predicts that a positive campus adjustment and positive athletic identity will lead to female student-athletes’ decision to stay at their institution. The researcher predicted that a negative campus adjustment will lead to female student-athlete transfers.

H1: Black female student-athletes will have a positive college adjustment and positive athletic identity at PWI’s.

H2: Black female student-athletes competing at HBCU’s will have a negative college adjustment
and negative athletic identity.

H3: Does college adjustment effect athletic identity development in Black female student athletes’ decision to transfer from HBCU’s?

Methods

A convenient sample of four-year public institutions with student enrollment sizes between 5,000 and 9,999 competing at the NCAA Division I Football College Subdivision (FCS) in the United States. The intended participants will be female basketball players that compete at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-FCS levels.

The study will deploy a 10-item Baller Identity Measurement Scale (BIMS) based on psychometric properties of the 10-item revision of the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Harrison et al., 2014). Responses to the 10-item BIMS will be scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree), producing a mean score for athletic identity. The BIMS is measured with four first order variables: social identity, exclusivity, positive affectivity, and negative affectivity (Cieslak, 2004).

Expected results

The study intends to predict athletic identity solely based on choice of institution type and socialization processes that are enacted while students are attending their institutions. The researcher hypothesizes that higher levels of college adjustment would predict higher levels of athletic identity among female student-athlete basketball players at HBCU’s. The researcher
hopes to uncover information to assist athletic departments and universities in supporting female-athletes at different institution types and ultimately the black female student-athlete retention rates.