

Youth Athletes' Identity And Career Development: The Moderating Role Of Boundary Management Preference

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Aim of the research/project

Purposes of this study aimed: (1) to examine the potentially positive effect of athletic identity on career expectation at student-athletes stage; (2) to identify the potential moderating role of boundary management preferences.

Theoretical background or literature review

Athletic identity is a salient self-concept that influences social relationships, chosen activities, and the manner which exerts effects on athletes' career development. According to a systematic review from 1968 to 2010, it was concluded athletic identity was negatively associated with the athletes' career transition in 34 out of 35 independent studies (Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013). However, recently studies indicated athletic identity might not harmful for career development (see Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014). Therefore, based on the athletic holistic model (Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013), we inferred that athletic identity would positively associate with future-focused outcomes such as career behavior, career planning, and future work self because athletic identity enables student-athletes to possess optimistic attitude toward future. In addition to precisely facilitate the career development intervention, we grounded on Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate's (2000) boundary theory to propose the boundary condition that boundary management preferences would facilitate the positive effect of athletic identity on career development. It is because integration-segmentation preference facilitates the resources exchange between student and athlete. Consequently, we expect that the positive relationship between athletic identity and career development will be stronger among those who are low in segmentation preferences than those who are high in segmentation preferences counterparts.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The participants for this study were 197 athletes (54 female) with a mean age of 23.85 (SD = 3.93) competing at NCAA Division I (N = 110), II (N = 65), and III (N = 22) recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturkers; see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011, evidenced that Mturkers' data are similarly informative and, sometimes, more normally representative than participants in lab). The measurements included athletic identity, segmentation preferences, proactive career behaviors, career planning, and future work self. Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to examine the hypothesis.

Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

The results support our hypothesis that athletic identity has positively correlated with career expectation. Further, athletes with higher athletic identity exhibited increased career expectation when they possess lower levels of segmentation preferences. The present study revealed the moderating effect of boundary management preferences on the influence of athletic identity and career development and provides several new insights at both the theoretical and practical levels. First, we introduced the use of athletic holistic model to understand the association between athletic identity and career development. Beyond the conventional perspective that treats athletic identity as situational variables and clarifies the condition about its effects on other career-related outcomes, we emphasized the importance of different athletic career stages to account for the effect of athletic identity on athletic career development. Second, by focusing specifically on boundary management preferences as a moderator, we provided a more specific foundation for understanding individual differences in career expectation between youth athletes.

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