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Relationships Between Athlete Activist Identities and Resilience in College Athletes

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Abstract

Many high-profile athletes have engaged in athlete activism and continued to remain successful both in sport and activism. Although several barriers have been documented preventing athletes from engaging in activism (e.g., public criticism, status and job loss, withdrawal of funding, anticipated distress; Cunningham & Regan, 2012), activism itself also has been connected to several positive outcomes (e.g., improved confidence, self-concept, belief in change, agency, life meaning; Klar & Kasser, 2009; Rabkin et al., 2018). Indeed, both sport and activism provide opportunities for athlete activists to develop resilience. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between athletic identity (AI), activist identity and commitment (AIC), stress control mindset (SCM), and mental toughness (MT). NCAA student-athletes ($N = 204$) reported low AIC overall. Regression models did not suggest that AI and AIC predict SCM or MT as expected, but correlations did provide evidence that SCM and MT are positively related. Possible explanations for these findings are discussed.

Keywords: *Athletic identity, Activist identity and commitment, Mental toughness, Resilience, Stress control mindset*

Several high-profile athletes such as Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Billie Jean King, Colin Kaepernick, LeBron James, Serena Williams, and Megan Rapinoe have proven themselves as elite athletes while also utilizing their platforms as a means to raise awareness for various causes (e.g., police brutality, racial injustice, gender discrimination, LGBTQ+ rights). College athletes such as the football players at University of Missouri who boycotted playing in 2016 and Ariyana Smith who protested during the national anthem have similarly used their platforms as athletes to raise awareness for certain causes. Accepting a role as an athlete activist, however, does not come without repercussions. Several scholars have noted that athletes, especially Black athletes, are expected “to play and not protest” and/or “shut up and play” (Agyemang, 2012; Candaele & Dreier, 2004; Edwards, 1969, 2016; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). Athlete activists also commonly face offensive and disparaging verbal attacks (Litchfield et al., 2018). Relatedly, fans often call for these athletes to be benched or cut from the team (Frederick et al.,

2017). Sponsors might even rescind endorsements while professional clubs and schools might release athletes or revoke their athletic scholarships. In other words, athlete activists risk their prestige, privilege, and income by participating in activism (Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Powell, 2008; Till, 2001).

Many athletes further are concerned that becoming an activist will require greater emotional regulation to manage these stressors (i.e., barriers) (Smith et al., 2016) that would disrupt training, recovery, and performance (Wagstaff et al., 2013). Interestingly, though, Beachy et al. (2018) demonstrated that athletic identity and activism are not significantly related. More importantly, Smith et al. (2016) deduced that athletic identity was not compromised by an activist identity. Indeed, several athletes can be athlete activists, manage the associated stressors, and still be successful in their athletic role. While research on athlete activism mostly has focused on its barriers, development, and sociopolitical impact, research on the psychological impact of athlete activism remains understudied. Scholars in other areas, though, have

found connections between activism, well-being, and resilience (e.g., Frost et al., 2019; Klar & Klasser, 2009). It is possible that athlete activism, too, can provide unique benefits for athlete activists. Specifically, athletes may experience psychological benefits related to resilience by engaging in activism. The present study, therefore, sought to address a gap in the literature on athlete activism by exploring two possible connections to athlete activist identities. The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between athletic identity, activist identity and commitment, and stress control mindset and mental toughness, two possible indicators of sport resilience.

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity (AI), the level one defines one's self as an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993), is associated with greater self-esteem (Van de Vliet et al., 2008), quality of life (Groff et al., 2009), and enjoyment of and commitment to sport and a larger social network (Horton & Mack, 2000). Strong AI also can facilitate self-acceptance of one's disability (Peers, 2012). Additionally, sport provides a context in which athletes are challenged to compete. Indeed, AI has been connected to greater risk-taking (Brewer et al., 1993; Gustafsson et al., 2007a; Gustafsson et al., 2007b). While risk-taking can be perceived as brave, it also can lead to poor decision-making that jeopardizes one's health for the sake of competition. Nonetheless, risk-taking may be influential for athletes as it inherently involves problem-solving, agency, and control over one's future.

While strong AI is beneficial for sport participation, the maintenance of strong AI without the development of other identities can be detrimental for some athletes post-retirement (e.g., Erpič et al., 2004). Lavallee (2005) and Warriner and Lavallee (2008) suggested that athletes have greater success with transitioning out of sport when they develop other identities (see also Falls & Wilson, 2013; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Stokowski et al., 2019). Developing an identity as an activist, for example, allowed former Paralympic athletes to experience more positive and less negative effects after retirement (Smith et al., 2016). After retirement, some athletes regretted not becoming activists when they had the spotlight and

struggled with losing their identity as an athlete. They explained that losing their identity as an athlete equated to a loss of privileges associated with athletics and more experiences of oppression, decreasing overall health, well-being, and quality of life. Interestingly, these former athletes also believed that becoming an activist can help current and future athletes have a smoother transition out of sport (Smith et al., 2016).

Activist Identity and Commitment

Activist identity and commitment (AIC) is an orientation in which one values and is committed to engagement in social action (Corning & Myers, 2002). Activism includes behaviors ranging from low-risk (e.g., donating) to high-risk (e.g., kneeling during the national anthem). It is further important to note that AIC, though, is not the level that one engages in activism, but is the level that one identifies as an activist and is related to levels of activism (Klar & Kasser, 2009).

Additionally, AIC is positively related to positive affect, self-actualization, hope, meaning in life, life satisfaction, flourishing, and increased vitality (Klar & Kasser, 2009). Interestingly, athlete activism draws upon several skills that also are beneficial in sport. According to Kaufman and Wolff (2010), sport strengthened several skills that activists utilize including discipline, goal-setting, long-term planning, fearlessness, focus, and the pursuit of progress. The authors also mentioned that sport can promote social consciousness (i.e., awareness of social issues), meritocracy (i.e., fairness), responsible citizenship (i.e., sportspersonship and civic duty), and interdependence (i.e., teamwork), all critical components of developing an AIC. Agyemang et al. (2010) extended upon this and found that sport also strengthens leadership skills that are transferable to activism.

Corroborating these accounts of athlete and non-athlete activism suggests that AIC may supplement AI and provide several benefits to an athlete's health and well-being. Of further note is that college athletes engage in less political activism (e.g., signing a petition, protesting) and more service projects (e.g., volunteering at a soup kitchen) than non-athletes (Hoffman et al., 2015). Perhaps this lack of political activism is due to concerns related to the previously

mentioned barriers to athlete activism (e.g., financial loss, increased demand for emotional regulation). Nevertheless, several studies have suggested that activism has several positive effects on psychological well-being. Indeed, sport and activism may both be contexts in which athlete activists develop resilience.

Resilience

Resilience is a process of several mental processes and behaviors to promote positive adaptations to stress and protect from negative adaptations to stress (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Adversity or stressor(s) disrupt one's sense of normalcy and potentially can motivate one to positively respond to achieve self-actualization. Based on this theoretical understanding, scholars have identified several moderators of resilience. Galli and Vealey (2008), for example, argued for a resilience model that includes adversity (e.g., injury), sociocultural influences (e.g., social support, cultural factors), and personal resources (e.g., confidence, determination, motivation). These moderators do not necessarily occur simultaneously but may interact over time to affect how one responds to adversity.

Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) extended upon this model and emphasized reappraisal techniques and metacognitive skills as important moderators between a stressor and resilience and performance. Brown et al. (2020) agreed, specifying that it is important to re-appraise a situation as a challenge rather than a threat to overcome performance slumps. Stress control mindset and mental toughness are two psychological constructs that are similar in nature and encompass reappraisal strategies and metacognitive skills. Therefore, both may be important moderators and even indicators of resilience.

Stress Control Mindset

Researchers have found both positive and negative effects of stress on health, well-being, and performance, suggesting that the stress response is malleable (i.e., stress can be debilitating or enhancing). From this idea, Crum et al. (2013) conceptualized stress mindsets, later to be reconceptualized as stress control mindsets (SCM; Keech et al., 2018). Crum and colleagues (2013) explained that SCM is

the beliefs one holds about the effects of stress. A stronger SCM, therefore, includes beliefs that stress has positive effects on health and performance whereas a weaker SCM is indicative of beliefs that stress only has negative effects on health and performance.

Indeed, Crum and colleagues (2013) further found that SCM does have an impact on one's stress response. A strong SCM, for example, decreases perceived distress and health symptoms, boosts work performance, and promotes more optimal cortisol reactivity to acute stress. Specifically, a strong SCM lowers cortisol response in those with usually high cortisol reactivity to stress and raises cortisol response in those with usually low cortisol reactivity to stress to help one reach a more optimal arousal state. Similarly, Liu et al. (2017) noted that priming participants to embrace a stronger SCM decreased heart rate and diastolic blood pressure in response to a stressor. A weak SCM, on the contrary, has the opposite effects. Nonetheless, SCM also has been associated with greater energy, life satisfaction, and problem-focused coping skills, as well as fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Crum et al., 2013; Keech et al., 2018). Therefore, SCM likely would impact the stress response in an athlete, which would then impact the athlete's arousal state and performance. In other words, a strong SCM may help athletes respond to stressors more effectively to maintain and reach optimal arousal levels to improve performance.

Mental Toughness

While SCM has not yet been discussed in the sport psychology literature, mental toughness (MT), a similar construct, has been connected to peak sport performance (e.g., Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002). MT is a psychological tool useful in the management of stressors, involving control (i.e., sense of power over life's events), commitment (i.e., degree of engagement), and confidence (i.e., sense of value and competence when facing stressors) (Clough et al., 2002; Sheard et al., 2009). While Clough et al. (2002) also included challenge (i.e., belief that change is normal and an opportunity for growth), Sheard and colleagues (2009) did not when defining and measuring MT in sport. Nonetheless, challenge still is important in the development of resilience and may be characteristic of SCM.

Moreover, MT is mediated by optimism, hardiness, and positive affectivity (Golby & Sheard, 2004; Sheard & Golby, 2006). MT and its mediators, according to Jones et al. (2007), allows athletes to maintain optimal performance even when confronted with adversity. Indeed, MT minimizes the negative effects of perceived stress (Gerber et al., 2018), decreases the perception that an injury is a threat (Levy et al., 2006), and cultivates control through greater problem-focused coping and mental skills rehearsal (Crust & Azadi, 2010; Nicholls et al., 2008). Crust and Swann (2013) even found that greater MT promotes challenge seeking and flow, which facilitates greater performance. In other words, both SCM and MT reportedly enhances one's stress response and improves performance.

Perceived Stress

Within the context of resilience, it also is important to discuss sociocultural differences (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Mahoney & Bergman, 2002; Waller, 2001). Minority stress theory posits that individuals of marginalized identities experience additional unique stress that others live without (Meyer, 2003a, 2003b; Meyer & Frost, 2013). These additional stressors include but are not limited to stigma; rejection; expectations of discrimination; internalized negative attitudes regarding one's identity; and struggling with acceptance, disclosure, and maintenance of one's identity (Frost, 2011; Meyer, 2003b). In the context of sport, Kimball and Freysinger (2003) found that African American and biracial women college athletes and college athletes from lower social classes recognized this identity as an additional stressor to optimal performance. More specifically, these athletes had difficulty with managing perceptions from others, had fewer resources, and were under greater pressure to stay involved in sport to remain a student. Therefore, given the unique experiences of each individual athlete, and in accordance with recommendations for studying resilience by Sarkar and Fletcher (2013), the present study also studied perceived stress (PS) as a control variable. PS, the degree to which one perceives one's life situations as stressful (Cohen et al., 1983), has a small-to-moderate positive relationship with SCM (Crum et al., 2013), suggesting that mod-

erate PS can improve SCM, but too little or too much PS may not sufficiently facilitate resilience in athletes.

Moreover, one has a greater risk of experiencing stress with participation in collegiate sport (Mellalieu et al., 2009) and in activism (Smith et al., 2016). Corroborating this with previously noted evidence that both AI and AIC are associated with positive effects on well-being and performance, sport and activism each may be contexts in which athletes experience unique challenges that provide opportunities for building resilience. Further, SCM and MT both facilitate stress management and may be indicators of resilience. Therefore, the present study formed the following hypotheses: (a) Athletes with higher levels of AI and AIC would be more likely to have a strong SCM than athletes with lower levels of AI and AIC; and (b) Athletes with higher levels of AI and AIC would be more likely to have a strong MT than athletes with lower levels of AI and AIC. Furthermore, given the lack of research associating SCM and MT, it was important to raise a third hypothesis: (c) SCM and MT would be positively correlated.

Method

Participants & Recruitment

Participants ($N = 204$) were college athletes who predominately were female ($n = 168$; male = 36) and identified as White ($n = 175$), with others identifying as African American/Black ($n = 13$), Asian American/Asian ($n = 10$), Latinx/Hispanic ($n = 8$), Native American/American Indian ($n = 4$), and other ($n = 2$). College athletes competed at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I ($n = 98$), Division II ($n = 41$), and Division III ($n = 65$) levels. These athletes were an average age of 19.66 years old ($SD = 1.29$). Participants were involved in various sports including track and field/cross country ($n = 44$), softball ($n = 33$), soccer ($n = 31$), swimming and diving ($n = 23$), volleyball ($n = 14$), golf ($n = 13$), basketball ($n = 12$), baseball ($n = 12$), tennis ($n = 9$), and others ($n = 23$). Participants were first-year ($n = 59$), second-year ($n = 62$), third-year ($n = 45$), fourth-year ($n = 33$), and fifth- or greater-year students ($n = 5$). Additionally, while more than half of the participants identified as heterosexual or straight ($n = 184$), others identified as gay/lesbian ($n = 7$), bisexual ($n =$

12), and other ($n = 1$). Almost one-third of the participants also reported a family income of \$100,000 and greater ($n = 67$) while others reported incomes of US\$75,000-US\$99,999 ($n = 26$), US\$50,000-US\$74,999 ($n = 24$), US\$35,000-US\$49,999 ($n = 17$), US\$25,000-US\$34,999 ($n = 4$), US\$16,000-US\$24,999 ($n = 3$), US\$12,000-US\$15,999 ($n = 4$), US\$5,000-US\$11,999 ($n = 4$), and below US\$5,000 ($n = 7$). Several participants did not know or preferred not to respond ($n = 48$). Finally, only 16 participants self-reported a physical or mental disability including ADHD ($n = 5$), depression or anxiety ($n = 3$), and others ($n = 8$). Please see Table 1 for a summary of the participants.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Baseline Characteristic	Sample Size
	<i>n</i>
Gender	
Female	168
Male	36
Race/Ethnicity	
White	175
African American/Black	13
Asian American/Asian	10
Latinx/Hispanic	8
Native American/American Indian	4
Other	2
NCAA Division Level	
I	98
II	41
III	65
Sport	
Track & Field/Cross Country	44
Softball	33
Soccer	31
Swimming & Diving	23
Volleyball	14
Golf	13
Basketball	12

Baseball	12
Tennis	9
Other	23
Year in School	
First	59
Second	62
Third	45
Fourth	33
Fifth or Higher	5
Sexual Orientation	
Straight/Heterosexual	184
Gay/Lesbian	7
Bisexual	12
Other	1
Family Income	
Below US\$5,000	7
US\$5,000-11,999	4
US\$12,000-15,999	4
US\$16,000-24,999	3
US\$25,000-34,999	4
US\$35,000-49,999	17
US\$50,000-74,999	24
US\$75,000-99,999	26
US\$100,000 and greater	67
Disability	
ADHD	5
Depression and/or Anxiety	3
Other	8

Note. $N = 204$. Participants were an average of 19.66 years old ($SD = 1.29$).

Participants were recruited from random NCAA Division I, II, and III colleges and universities via their coaches and university compliance officers. Only 159 of the 6,192 coaches and compliance officers agreed to share the survey link with their college athletes (2.57% response rate from coaches and compliance officers). Although this creates an additional barrier to participant recruitment (i.e., coaches and

compliance officers acted as gatekeepers and had the opportunity to decide whether college athletes received the research invitation), it is considered ethical practice for participant recruitment. Contact information for coaches and compliance officers were publicly available on college/university athletic websites. Therefore, this process avoided cold-calling prospective participants (see Tyrer et al., 2003) and was able to gain approval from an Institutional Review Board. Data were collected between November 2019 and January 2020.

Measures

Athletic Identity Measurement Scale. The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer & Cornelius, 2001), a seven-item instrument (e.g., “I consider myself an athlete”), was used to measure AI. It uses a seven-point Likert scale ($1 = \textit{Strongly Disagree}$; $7 = \textit{Strongly Agree}$). The authors found that this version had strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .81$) and construct validity. The Cronbach coefficient alpha for AIMS in the present study was $\alpha = .76$. Scores were calculated by averaging all items.

Activist Identity and Commitment Scale. AICS then was measured with the Activist Identity and Commitment Scale (AICS; Klar & Kasser, 2009). The AICS consisted of eight items (e.g., “Being an activist is central to who I am”) measured on a seven-point Likert scale ($1 = \textit{Strongly Disagree}$; $7 = \textit{Strongly Agree}$). To ensure accurate interpretations of activism, participants were provided a short description and examples of activism adopted from Klar and Kasser (2009) prior to completing this scale. The authors also demonstrated that the AICS has high internal consistency ($\alpha = .96$) and construct validity. The Cronbach coefficient alpha for AICS in the present study was $\alpha = .98$. Scores were calculated by averaging all items.

Stress Control Mindset Measure. SCM was measured with the Stress Control Mindset Measure (SCMM; Keech et al., 2018) which is based on the Stress-Mindset Measure (Crum et al., 2013), and embraces the idea that stress “can be” enhancing rather than “is” enhancing. This measure has 15 items (e.g., “Stress can be used to enhance your performance and productivity”) focused on

performance and productivity, learning and growth, health and vitality, and general stress. It is measured on a six-point Likert scale ($1 = \textit{Strongly Disagree}$; $6 = \textit{Strongly Agree}$). The original measure that the SCMM is based on has strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$), discriminant validity, and criterion validity. The Cronbach coefficient alpha for SCMM in the present study was $\alpha = .92$. To score the SCMM, negatively worded items were reverse coded and then the average of all items was calculated.

Sports Mental Toughness Questionnaire.

MT then was measured with the Sports Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ; Sheard et al., 2009). It consists of 14 items (e.g., “Under pressure, I am able to make decisions with confidence and commitment”) and uses a four-point Likert scale ($1 = \textit{Not at all true}$; $4 = \textit{Very true}$). Sheard and colleagues (2009) demonstrated discriminant and content validity along with reliability for each of its subscales: confidence ($\alpha = .80$), constancy ($\alpha = .74$), and control ($\alpha = .71$). The Cronbach coefficient alpha for the SMTQ subscales in the present study were $\alpha = .71$, $.62$, and $.64$ (confidence, constancy, and control, respectively). Negatively worded items were reverse coded and total scores were calculated by averaging all items.

Perceived Stress Scale. PS was measured with the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983). It consists of 14 items (e.g., “in the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?”) measured on a five-point Likert scale ($0 = \textit{Never}$; $4 = \textit{Always}$). The authors provided evidence for concurrent and predictive validity as well as strong internal consistency in three different samples ($\alpha = .84$, $.85$, $.86$). The Cronbach coefficient alpha for PSS in the present study was $\alpha = .85$. Scores were calculated by summing all items.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were presented first. Correlations for each measure then were provided and used to evaluate the relationship between the SCMM and SMTQ. Then, separate multiple regression analyses were used to test the main and interaction effects of AI, AIC, and PS on SCM and MT.

Results

A multiple regression analysis first was conducted to test a model that predicts SCM. In this model, AI, AIC, and PS each were listed as independent variables. Note that PS should be interpreted as a control variable in its inclusion in the model. The model was statistically significant, $F(3, 200) = 5.470, p < .01, R^2 = .076$. Only PS, though, was a significant predictor of SCM, $\beta = -.027, t = -3.76, p < .001$. This suggests that those with lower PS scores had higher SCM scores. Neither AIC ($\beta = .072, t = 1.92, p = .056$) nor AI ($\beta = .035, t = .597, p = .551$) were significant predictors. Interestingly, when PS was removed, the model no longer was significant, $F(2, 201) = 1.070, p = .345, R^2 = .011$. This further suggests that AI and AIC were unrelated to SCM.

Interaction terms then were created to test the interaction effects between AI, AIC, and PS. These new variables were AI x AIC, AI x PS, AIC x PS, and AI x AIC x PS. The model remained significant after adding these new terms, $F(7, 196) = 3.168, p < .01, R^2 = .102$. However, none of the new interaction terms were significant predictors. Therefore, Hypothesis ‘a’ was not supported.

A second multiple regression then was conducted to test the predictive abilities of AI, AIC, and PS on MT where PS again should be interpreted as a control variable. The model was statistically significant for MT, $F(3, 200) = 30.561, p < .001, R^2 = .341$. Both AI ($\beta = .066, t = 2.515, p < .05$) and PS ($\beta = -.030, t = -9.378, p < .001$) were significant predictors. AIC ($\beta = -.001, t = -.082, p = .935$), however, was a nonsignificant predictor. This suggests that those with higher AI and lower PS scores had higher levels of MT. Interestingly, when PS was removed, the model no longer was significant, $F(2, 201) = 1.305, p = .274, R^2 = .013$, providing further support for the significance of PS in the model and further suggesting that AIC is unrelated to MT.

The aforementioned interaction terms then were added to the model. The model remained significant, $F(7, 196) = 13.554, p < .001, R^2 = .326$, but none of the interaction terms were significant predictors. Therefore, Hypothesis ‘b’ was not supported.

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 2. These findings allowed us to explore the secondary aim of the present study. In-

deed, SCM and MT have a weak positive correlation, $r = .281, p < .001$, suggesting that the two variables are related, but distinctive constructs. Hypothesis ‘c’ was supported.

Table 2
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. AI	5.30	.92	-	-.068	.103	.005	.091
2. AIC	2.76	1.45		-	.104	.102	-.073
3. PS	26.93	7.62			-	-.241**	-.541***
4. SCM	2.84	.41				-	.281***
5. MT	3.32	.80					-

Note. AI = Athletic Identity; AIC = Activist Identity and Commitment; PS = Perceived Stress; SCM = Stress Control Mindset; MT = Mental Toughness
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The present study aimed to extend the conversation about athlete activism into the sport psychology literature by exploring the relationships between AI, AIC, SCM, and MT. Most of the research on athlete activism, though, exists within sport management and sport sociology (e.g., Agyemang et al., 2010; Cunningham & Regan, 2012). Only a few athlete activism studies exist within sport psychology (e.g., Sappington et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016).

The initial findings found a weak-to-moderate positive correlation between SCM and MT, suggesting that the two have some distinctiveness. A strong correlation would have suggested the two are aligned and may be measuring the same concepts. This finding provides some initial evidence to continue studying the two constructs separately, although more research is necessary. Additionally, the weak-to-moderate correlation suggests the two constructs are distinct but still related. Because they are still related, SCM also should be studied as a possible indicator or moderator of resilience alongside MT. Indeed, according to several resilience scholars (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012), resilience incorporates reappraising a threat as a challenge. SCM

embodies this critical component by reappraising stress as positive (i.e., enhancing) instead of negative (i.e., debilitating), which should allow athletes to experience health and performance boosts from stress (e.g., Crum et al., 2013). In other words, SCM may enhance an athlete's stress response and strengthen their resilience.

Apart from this unique, but secondary purpose of the study, the primary findings of the present study largely lacked support for the main hypotheses. Specifically, only lower PS, and not AI or AIC, predicted higher SCM. Meanwhile, results yielded partial support for hypothesis 'b' (i.e., athletes with higher levels of AI and AIC would be more likely to have a strong MT than athletes with lower levels of AI and AIC). In hypothesis 'b,' it was predicted that both AI and AIC would predict higher levels of MT. However, only lower PS and higher AI, but not AIC, predicted higher MT. The lack of association between AIC and MT may be due to the low levels of AIC reported among the participants. The connection between low PS and high MT corroborates previous findings by Gerber et al. (2018). The connection between AI and MT when PS is included in the model is unsurprising given previous arguments that both AI and MT are related to indicators of high sport performance (e.g., Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002; Horton & Mack, 2000).

Overall, the findings contradict expectations. Specifically, we found that athletic identity only was related to mental toughness when perceived stress was included in the model and was unrelated to stress control mindset. Additionally, activist identity and commitment was unrelated to either stress control mindset or mental toughness. Perhaps, extraneous variables not included in the present study that are important in the development of resilience (e.g., social support, problem-focused coping strategies; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Keech et al., 2018) are more accurate predictors of SCM and MT and resilience more broadly than the experience of stress itself. Perhaps, these also are more accurate predictors of SCM, MT, and resilience than identifying with certain roles that exist within contexts that are capable of building resilience. More specifically, building resilience requires more complex processes than simply identifying as an athlete, activist, or athlete activist. Social support and problem-focused coping, along with other modera-

tors, are necessary within the contexts of sport and activism to experience a positive adaptation to a stressor associated with involvement in that respective context (e.g., Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012).

Moreover, given Beachy et al.'s (2018) findings that AI is unrelated to activism, the lack of significant findings was not entirely surprising. Nonetheless, Smith et al. (2016) asserted that AIC does not compensate AI. The findings in the present study, therefore, reinforce the findings from Beachy et al. (2018) and Smith et al. (2016). Indeed, AI is unrelated to both activism and AIC. While this is unsurprising, it is important for future research to continue to investigate the interaction of sport and activism by examining how they affect each other rather than their correlation. After all, research has revealed several overlaps between the two contexts (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Smith et al., 2016). Further, a more representative sample of minority athletes would have been more desirable, especially within the context of stress, resilience, and activism. Athletes from minority groups, for example, are more likely to experience additional stressors, including discrimination and other forms of social injustices than non-minority athlete peers (e.g., Meyer & Frost, 2013). Indeed, Kaufman and Wolff (2010) and Smith et al. (2016) explained that social awareness is a key prerequisite to strengthening AIC and experiences, and knowledge of social injustices may facilitate the needed social awareness. Therefore, minority athletes may be more likely to engage in activism or at least more likely to have an understanding for its importance.

Indeed, the professional athletes mentioned at the beginning of this paper all come from at least one marginalized identity (e.g., Black, LGBTQ+) while the college athletes in the present study mostly come from predominantly privileged backgrounds. While most participants were female, most also were white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and upper- or middle-class. The participants in the present study, according to minority stress theory, likely experienced less identity-based discrimination and, therefore, may be less aware of social issues. After all, Kimball and Freysinger (2003) found that African American, biracial, female, and lower social class college athletes each experienced unique stressors respective of their minority identity compared to other college athletes. Although most of the participants in the present study

were females, the intersectionality of their other salient identities may have played an important role in benefiting from privilege. If so, this privilege may have inhibited awareness of privilege and social injustices associated with the marginalization of others—and even of themselves as females.

It also is possible that the participants were aware of privilege and social injustices, but perceive the risks of activism to be too high. The participants, being college athletes, likely have not yet secured a professional job in or out of sport. Therefore, the participants may be cautious with activism since activism is associated with several risks to job attainment, security, and advancement. Indeed, the aforementioned professional athletes who have embraced activism (e.g., Megan Rapinoe) may have felt more secure in their athletic and social roles than many college athletes such as those in the present study. In other words, these professional athletes may be less concerned with the possible negative consequences of activism.

Indeed, the many barriers to athlete activism may help explain the relatively low scores on the AICS in the present study. While some participants may not have been aware of social issues, others may have been aware, but other barriers may have prevented them from participating in athlete activism. Candaele and Dreier (2004) and Cunningham and Regan (2012) identified several barriers to athlete activism including public criticism, worsened or loss of a positive public image, job loss, expected emotional regulation, and funding withdrawal—which may especially have been of concern in the present study considering many college athletes rely on athletic scholarships to stay in school. Other scholars also listed social awareness and perceived social influence as possible barriers for athletes (e.g., Agyemang, 2012; Fuller & Agyemang, 2018; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Smith et al., 2016). Indeed, such barriers may help explain why college athletes are less likely than non-athlete peers to participate in activism (Hoffman et al., 2015) and why college athletes commonly prioritize AI over other identities even if it risks academic and career success (e.g., Beron & Piquero, 2016; Brewer et al., 1993; Eckard, 2010). Perhaps, college athletes also may be less likely than professional athletes to engage in activism due to concern with these barriers.

Further, Smith et al. (2016) suggested that

these barriers may induce additional stress that athletes worry will be distracting and require energy to manage (i.e., emotional regulation) that preferably would be sustained for other contexts (e.g., sport performance). Any possible barriers may even make it difficult for athletes to utilize activism as a context to build resilience (i.e., strengthen SCM and MT) while heightening AIC, which could further explain the lack of significance in the present study. Indeed, Brown and colleagues (2020), Fletcher and Sarkar (2012), and Galli and Vealey (2008) explored various moderators that are important to include to develop resilience. While reappraisal skills (e.g., SCM) and metacognition (e.g., MT) are included, so are other moderators such as social support and determination that were not included in the present study. Perhaps, these well-documented barriers are negative moderators between athlete activism and resilience. Future research should explore the negative and positive moderators of resilience in athlete activists.

Several scholars, for example, have found that activism is beneficial not just for society, but also for the activists. First, strengthening other roles besides one's AI facilitates a smoother transition out of sport (e.g., Lavalley, 2005; Smith et al., 2016; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Activism also has been specifically connected to greater well-being, positive affect, self-actualization, hope, meaning in life, life satisfaction, flourishing, confidence, and agency (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Rabkin et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, the present study provides a profile of AI, AIC, SCM, and MT of white, straight, able-bodied female college athletes from middle- and upper-classes. Future research should incorporate appropriate recruitment strategies to study athlete activism and resilience with a sample of more diverse college athletes. Additionally, while the present study did not add to the list of benefits to activism, it does provide greater understanding of athlete activism and resilience. Furthermore, the present study was the first to study SCM and MT simultaneously and provided evidence that the two are distinctive constructs.

Limitations & Future Directions

The present study is not without limitations. First, the present study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal and data were collected between Novem-

ber 2019 and January 2020. The newest Black Lives Matter protests that started in May 2020 may have impacted college athletes' AIC and resilience. Specifically, the United States saw many professional and college athletes participate in various activism-related efforts. Many professional and college athletes also began publicly discussing social justice issues, especially as these issues related to race. It is likely that the higher frequency of athlete activism has changed how athlete activism affects both society and the athlete activists.

Additionally, although the present study recruited participants from random institutions across the United States, participants lacked diversity in several ways; participants mostly were female, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and middle- or upper-class. The need for approval from coaches and/or compliance officers may have impacted the lack of diversity. Similarly, participants represented sports that receive little to no media coverage on major networks as compared to other sports such as football and basketball, potentially limiting perceived social influence, and thus, one's confidence to engage in activism.

The present study also failed to incorporate religious affiliation, an important aspect of identity that may impact attitudes toward many social issues, and thus, athlete activism as well as several moderators of athlete activism and resilience (e.g., social support, barriers). Adding more scales to the survey, though, may have hindered more coaches and compliance officers from permitting athletes to participate given their time already is limited and many may have been concerned about the sensitivity of studying activism and resilience.

Future studies, therefore, should utilize specific strategies to recruit athletes with greater diversity to be more representative of the college athlete population. Research is needed on interventions that facilitate activism engagement in athletes to examine its effects on psychological skills and resilience. These interventions should emphasize social support, metacognitive skills, reappraisal techniques, and other appropriate tools on how to navigate the many barriers and nuances of athlete activism to facilitate successful activism. Research also should ask about other identities and moderators that may be related to athlete activism and resilience such as religious affiliation, social support, and barriers to athlete activism.

Other scholars also should continue to explore SCM within sport as the present study is the first to do so to our knowledge. Importantly, scholars also should investigate both the positive and negative outcomes associated with athlete activism, as it likely impacts athlete activists in several ways. Athletes who engage in athlete activism should seek support from sport psychology professionals and/or other related resources to strengthen their psychological skills and become more successful in their activism. Finally, and relatedly, coaches and other sport stakeholders should consider supporting athlete activists to help boost the potential positive outcomes associated with athlete activism.

Conclusions

The present study provides initial evidence suggesting that stress control mindset and mental toughness are distinctive constructs that should be further explored in sport psychology and resilience studies. Although athletic identity was unrelated to stress control mindset and mental toughness, it did predict mental toughness when perceived stress was included in the model. The present study still provided further evidence to deepen the understanding of athlete activism. Future research should continue to explore both the positive and negative effects of athlete activism. Furthermore, sport psychology practitioners, coaches, and other sport personnel can use this information, in conjunction with other studies related to athlete activism and resilience, to begin important dialogues about issues related to social justice so all athletes feel included and supported.

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