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Exploring how Student Athletes Balance Athletic, Academic, and Personal Needs Through Learned Needs Theory.

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Keywords

College of Business, authentic assessment, assessment, Bloom's taxonomy, higher order thinking, practical evaluation

Exploring How Student Athletes Balance Athletic, Academic, and Personal Needs Through Learned Needs Theory

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Abstract

The attempt to balance the requirements of athletic and academic demands prompts extensive research agendas from higher education and athletic stakeholders to examine how extrinsic and socio-environmental factors affect the desired outcomes of student-athletes. Reputable motivation literature describes needs as the starting point of motivation and influences behaviors embedded within cultural and systematic structures. Thus, this study aims to understand how sport participation influences athletic and academic performance through Learned Needs Theory (LNT). This study provides insight into processes of motivation that contribute to knowledge, practical implications, and research that translates to research-based approaches to increase and consider the varying need fulfillment of student-athletes.

Keywords: College of Business, authentic assessment, assessment, Bloom's taxonomy, higher order thinking, practical evaluation

Introduction

Practitioners and scholars have long examined the ways intercollegiate athletic participation influences student-athlete behavior, focus, and decision-making during and post-eligibility (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2015; Coakley et al., 2011; Dorsch et al., 2022; Harper et al., 2013; Harper, 2018; Rutledge, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022; Simpson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021; Singer, 2008). The literature also highlights how the commercialization and professionalization of revenue-producing (i.e., men's and women's basketball, football) intercollegiate sports influence academically inconsistent practices in student-athletes' development (Anderson, 2010; Hsu et al., 2022). As a result, intercollegiate athletics and higher education enterprises have developed competing demands that place student-athletes in jeopardy

of receiving defective outcomes in their athletic, academic, and personal pursuits (Donnor, 2005; Newell, 2015; Quaye et al., 2019; Watt & Moore, 2001).

Furthermore, for many student-athletes, college is seen as an avenue to solely garner athletic success rather than a mechanism to prepare them to dualistically thrive in their adult lives (Donnor, 2005; Feterl, 2019). The need to attain professional stardom for many student-athletes is clear; however, this goal is only achievable for 1.8% of student-athletes that compete in intercollegiate athletics (Brown et al., 2019; Coffey & Davis, 2019; NCAA, 2019a, 2019b). In addition, the minimized probability of advancing to the professional ranks is highlighted because only one professional revenue-producing sports organization within the United States (U.S.) has successfully drafted an athlete immediately after high school since 2005 (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, 2018). Also, when considering competition level, many revenue-producing sports draftees played in conferences and universities that attain the best talent and resources globally (Belzer, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2018; Mossovitz, 2019). This furthers the need for intercollegiate student-athletes to attain a foundation that leads them to a peaceful future outside their respective sports (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, 2018; Edwards, 1985; Eitzen, 2000).

To prepare student-athletes for life post-eligibility, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has, over the years, implemented measures and metrics to increase accountability and ensure academic success from affiliated athletic departments (Dawkins et al., 2008; Donnor, 2005; Johnson et al., 2021; Steinberg et al., 2018; NCAA, 2019a). These accountability measures include Academic Progress Rates (APR) scores, Graduation Success Rates (GSR) scores, and even the CHAMP Life Skills program (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, 2020; Goddard, 2004; NCAA, 2018; 2019a, 2019b; Quinaud et al., 2022). Since the 2020 pandemic, however, updates in rules and regulations have seemingly diluted the importance placed on success post-eligibility and have added additional pressing issues (Kunkel et al., 2021; Mayne & Forer, 2023; Somlomon et al., 2022). For example, the transfer portal has created an avenue allowing student-athletes to advance and succeed in their athletic careers; however, this path jeopardizes graduation (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022).

Although the transfer portal provides clear guidelines for progress toward degree (PTD) requirements, APR scores and GSR rates are affected due to the influence of the transfer portal

(Bailey, 2017; Ingram, 2021; Johnson et al., 2012). In addition, the recent passage of name, image, and likeness (NIL) laws and deals has further complicated the need to place importance on academics (Mayne & Forer, 2023; Somlomon et al., 2022). The ability to earn revenue is a timely benefit for student-athletes considering the professionalized approach of intercollegiate athletics. However, the need for an amicable education must precede student-athletes' lives (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Ferris et al., 2004; Meyer, 2005; Tessitore et al., 2021).

Regardless of rule changes and regulations, student-athletes at all levels of intercollegiate competition experience the dualistic athletic and academic demands that higher education institutions, institutional personnel, and institutional stakeholders place on them while expecting success in both areas (Cooper, 2016; Curs et al., 2022; Dexter et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2012). Furthermore, to achieve success in both areas, many intercollegiate student-athletes believe that effort, commitment, acquiring necessary physical and psychological attributes, and executing behaviors and decision-making skills comprise the essential factors that they need to successfully balance the rigorous athletic and academic demands and lead them to positive life outcomes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Cooper, 2016; Jowett & Spray, 2013; Simpson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Because of this, research demonstrates that sports participation reflects motivational efforts that maximize personal skills, effort exertion, and personal development (Harper et al., 2013; Harper, 2018). Research also validates that intercollegiate sport participation shows positive relationships between commitment, discipline, and focus (Coakley et al., 2011; Dorsch et al., 2022; Lameiras et al., 2014). Thus, these behaviors must be studied to create concrete criteria to evaluate success, competition, and positive life outlook post-eligibility (Kavussanu et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2021). In addition, these factors can be analyzed to create norms that foster principles in positive actions and behaviors that influence the creation and reproduction of cultures that require practice, time, and commitment to be successful (Dweck, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Rutledge, 2015, 2019). In attempts to understand these factors, motivational research is the starting point to identify factors that highlight how intercollegiate athletic participation influences the long-term development of student-athletes (Min & Bin, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The effects of intercollegiate sport participation have led many scholars and practitioners within higher education to debate approaches that lead student-athletes toward positive development and livelihoods post-eligibility (Brown, 2021; Harper et al., 2013; Harper, 2018; Negrin, 2022). Because the platform and gateway to professional stardom go through higher education, research and practitionership create avenues to effectively identify critical developmental components that influence life outcomes (Coakley et al., 2011). Thus, this study aimed to understand how sport participation relates to positive experiences during intercollegiate participation and post-eligibility through the application of Learned Needs Theory (LNT). In addition, this study highlighted and explored the participants' needs, successes, and challenges because they participated in intercollegiate athletics. Furthermore, this study will provide insight into processes that contribute to knowledge, practical implications, and literature that translates to research-based approaches and best practices that consider the varying needs of intercollegiate student-athletes.

Theoretical Framework

Motivation

Over 100 years of research detail how motivation applies to human behavior (Dwivedi et al., 2022; McClelland, 1975, 1985; Freud, 1976; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Reputable literature describes motivation as the starting point of how unconscious and psychological mechanisms control and influence observable manifestations in human behavior (Denhardt et al., 2008; Freud, 1976; Min & Bin, 2010). Within this, Herzberg et al. (1959), Maslow (1954), and Ryan and Deci (2000) notably produced seminal articles that identified and highlighted how internal and external motivation influence mental processes and efforts that activate drive, the willingness to achieve goals, and satisfy self-fulfillment. These works confirm the fact that motivation occurs when intrinsic, extrinsic, and socio-environmental criteria mesh to create effort exertion and behaviors toward goal attainment, performance outcomes, and decision-making over time (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Herzberg et al., 1959; Maslow, 1954; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Steers et al., 2004). Accordingly, Amabile (2001), furthered by Osemeke & Adegboyega (2017), states that intrinsic motivation results from task engagement based on enjoyment, interest, satisfaction of curiosity, self-expression, and personal challenge in performed tasks.

These internal factors increase effort, engagement, and environmental fit in socio-environmental contexts (Amabile, 2001; De Molli, 2019; Julmi, 2017; Rybnicek et al., 2019; Sescousse et al., 2013).

Alternatively, extrinsic motivation emerges through external perceptions and stimuli that influence and impact task engagement, which also has the potential to control initiation, performance and encourage action (Deci et al., 1999; Rybnicek et al., 2019). In addition, extrinsic motivators can consist of people, places, aesthetic visuals, rewards, incentives, and reinforcements (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Hoyenga & Hoyenga, 1984). Furthermore, empirical evidence supports the use of extrinsic reward systems to enhance performance and increase creativity in task completion (Byron & Khazanchi, 2012; Jenkins et al., 1998).

Sociological theories have also become popular in highlighting motivation due to changing societal, organizational, and systematic infrastructures that have surfaced over the years and in various contexts (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Latham & Pinder, 2005). These theories detail how the changing natures in social environments influence diversity, information access, technology, creative production, power distributions, hierarchies, social and topographic navigation, and globalization (Rybnicek et al., 2019; Steers et al., 2004).

Learned Needs Theory

An extensive literature review revealed that needs theories emerged in the 20th Century from motivation and personality studies (Sari, 2015; Schneider & Schmalt, 2000). Murray (1938), McClelland et al. (1953), and McClelland (1985), all prominent works regarding human needs, described needs as motivations that stimulate, facilitate, and manifest behaviors that lead to self-fulfillment and external rewards because of congruencies in actions determined by socio-environmental and external criteria. Within this, pragmatic personality and organizational scholarship studies highlight the differences in human behavior, needs, and motivations which result in differentiating approaches toward goal attainment (Beckmann & Heckhausen, 2018; Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017; Royle & Hall, 2012). As a result, LNT was developed to expound on the nourishment of human needs through achievement, power, and affiliation (McClelland, 1975, 1985).

Achievement Needs

Based on the criteria of LNT, the pursuit of excellence and perfectionism toward goal attainment fulfills achievement needs (McClelland et al., 1953; Rybnicek et al., 2019). Internal desires to excel and accomplish identified standards entail achievement-motivated individuals (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). Research demonstrates that these individuals perform at higher levels than peer groups, prefer concrete and identifiable markers of success, and have more satisfaction in tasks that require high levels of confidence and competence (Eisenberger et al., 2005; McNeese-Smith, 1999; Rybnicek et al., 2019; Robbins & Judge, 2009). Individual achievement needs also occur through actualization in purpose, proficiency, competitiveness and reflect desires to excel relative to themselves (Heintz, Jr. & Steele-Johnson, 2004; McClelland, 1975, 1985). In addition, high achievement needs drive individuals to seek informal accountability from others because this translates into higher performance evaluations and demonstrates proactive and appealing behaviors (Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020).

Affiliation Needs

Within LNT, affiliation needs to influence outcomes through establishing, maintaining, and developing personal relationships (Rybnicek et al., 2019). Participating in interdependent, interactive, and cooperative team-based activities that void competition also influences favorable behavior outcomes from individuals high in affiliation needs (McClelland, 1975, 1985; Royle & Hall, 2012). Also, individuals with higher affiliations need positively identify with surrounding socio-environmental contexts and enjoy comradery (Arifin et al., 2020; McClelland et al., 1992; Robbins & Judge, 2009). Furthermore, affiliation needs also influence the degree to which individuals seek acceptance and approval from others (McClelland, 1985; McClelland et al., 1992; Robbins & Judge, 2009; Sari, 2015; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Studies show positive relationships between high affiliation needs, social interaction, behavioral norms, and reciprocity, suggesting that people may exchange information due to obligation and the need to foster social interaction (McNeese-Smith, 1999; Royle & Hall, 2012).

Power Needs

Power needs flourish because of overwhelming internal motivations to pursue goal attainment (Pinder, 2014). Individuals with high power needs have extreme concern for impact, prestige, social power, and risk-taking (Rybnicek et al., 2019). These individuals prefer

competition and status-driven situations and gather status symbols to increase self-fulfillment (Rybnicek et al., 2019; Veroff, 1992). Individuals motivated by power have high affiliation and achievement needs; however, these needs often manifest themselves in overt attempts to influence behavior that seek the approval of embedded cultural and systematic structures (McClelland, 1975; Veroff, 1992; Robbins & Judge, 2009). Individuals with a high power need also attempt to influence accountability and funnel the accumulation of resources to enhance status (McAdams, 1994; Veroff, 1992).

Learned Needs Theory and Intercollegiate Student Athletes

LNT, derived from motivation and personality research, details internal and external factors that contribute to task engagement based on sustained and consistent behaviors (Adie et al., 2012; Deci & Ryan, 2011; Hetland et al., 2011; Sari, 2015). Thus, intercollegiate student-athletes serve as a unique subpopulation within higher education study because of their daily actions, demands, contributions, and interactions with others (Min & Bin, 2010). Student-athletes must develop, change, and grow through time (Simons et al., 1999). In addition, research shows that the intercollegiate sport context tests mental and physical malleability. Training and competition influence athletes to persist through negative emotions and modify behaviors that influence career longevity, prevent injuries, and increase motivation (Dweck, 2014). Because of this, LNT is a useful theoretical framework that can be applied to this student population to understand how they achieve success during intercollegiate sport participation and post-eligibility (Brouwer et al., 2022; Valentine & Taub, 1999; Woods et al., 2019).

Accordingly, research regarding intercollegiate student-athletes, motivation, and LNT must analyze how the need and motivation to attain athletic, academic, and personal success serves as essential criteria in achievement, performance, and task engagement (Astin, 1993; Sari, 2015; Smith, 2020). Furthermore, to research and investigate how LNT applies to intercollegiate student-athletes, an understanding of their demands and the obstacles that influence goals and performance must be studied to examine factors that affect their outcomes (Anderson, 2010; Demiroz, 2020; Hsu et al., 2022). Furthermore, many statistics report significant differences in the academic performance of intercollegiate student-athletes and the general student population (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2015; Kong, 2021; Woods et al., 2019). This fact furthers the need to include LNT to highlight student-athlete performance and create innovative practices that

lead student-athletes to positive experiences during and post-eligibility (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; Quaye et al., 2019).

In addition, students and student-athletes rely heavily on visible progression towards markers of success, such as the achievement of awards that enhance status while enrolled in their respective universities and thereafter (Abdelrahman, 2020; Darby & Lang, 2019; Lang, 2021; McGuire, 2015). Within this, these markers highlight their successes, such as statistics, influencing persistence through training, competition at higher levels, and increasing social recognition (Joshi et al., 2022; Min & Bin, 2010). Also, research that investigates self-fulfillment through identifiable and quantifiable performance measures is a valid mechanism for determining ways to improve positive academic performance within higher education (Coakley et al., 2011; Dorsch et al., 2022). For example, Malloch & Michael (1981), Geiger & Cooper (1995), Brady & Alleyne (2017), and Gupta & McCarthy (2021) all found that student-athlete Grade Point Average (GPA) is highly indicative of motivation and instrumentally constructs and predicts student performance. Furthermore, Vollmer (1986) and this seminal study investigated student preparation time, past grades, and perceived ability and found positive associations with subsequent grades. Research also demonstrates that higher student performance and overall GPA is positively associated with achieved scores (Belkaoui, 1986; Gupta & McCarthy, 2021; Harrell & Stahl, 1983). Thus, this positively influences goal attainment approaches to skill proficiency, recognition, and improved performance (Bureau et al., 2022; Min & Bin, 2010; Sari, 2015).

Methods

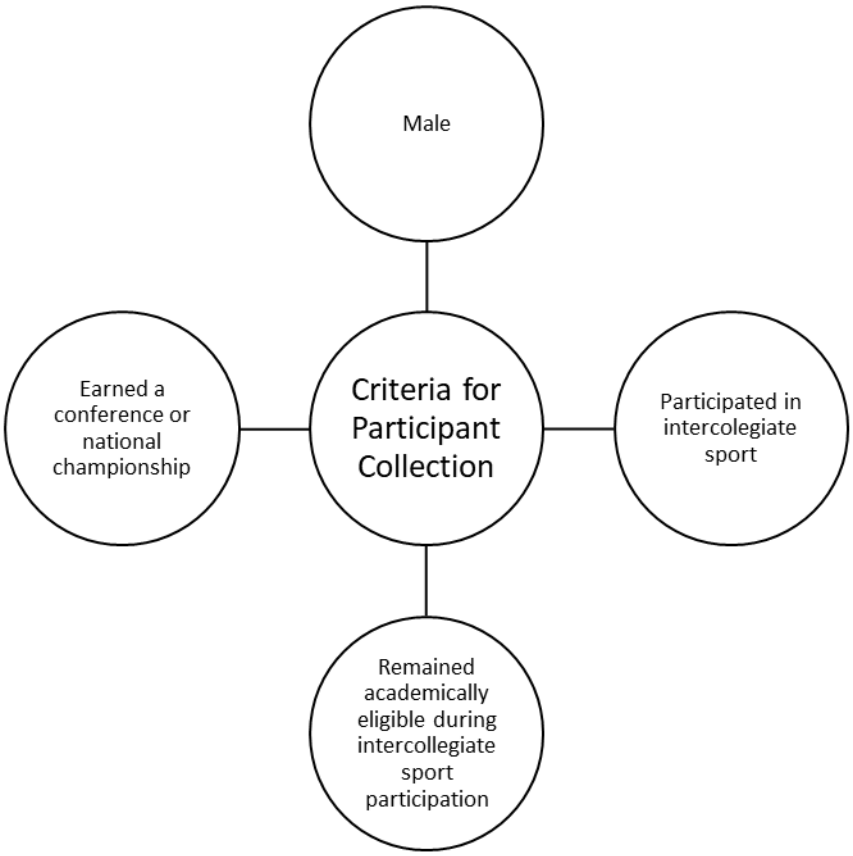
Qualitative research methods rationalized the purpose of this study to advance theory, topics of discussion, the research questions, and data that emerged in the study (Ayoko & Pekerti, 2008; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Imenda, 2014; Rutledge, 2022). This type of research practice and inductive process helps highlight experiences that apply to the purpose of the study and increase transparency (Brady & Alleyne, 2017; Fusch et al., 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Rutledge, 2022; Suryani, 2013; Warkineh et al., 2018). The qualitative inquiry also utilizes practices that uncover anthropological, sociological, and pedagogical interpretations of analysis, which helps develop an understanding of the theoretical framework applied to the study (Fusch, 2013; Fusch et al., 2017; McClelland, 1975).

Participants

This study investigated four individuals' athletic and academic experiences during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. This study also used ethnographic case study methods to generate knowledge about how LNT applies to the participants. Figure 1.1 shows the criteria for selection.

Figure 1.1

Criteria for Participant Collection



Each participant received pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. Table 1 gives the background of the participants, followed by a brief description of the participants.

Table 1
Background of Participants

Name	Age	Parental Background	High School	College Sport	Undergraduate Degree/Graduate Degree	Current Profession
Walter Love	30	Single parent	City of Champions	Football	BA/JD	Attorney
Nolan Justin	29	Mother and father	Funky Town	Football	BS/MS	Musician
Nico Paolo	32	Grandparents	Texas Tradition	Football	MS/M.Ed.	Principal
Jaquez Moses	25	Mother and father	Texas Speed	Track	BS/MBA	Accountant

Walter Love is a former NCAA intercollegiate athlete who participated in football at the Football Championship (FCS) level. During his time as an athlete, he won one Southland Conference championship. He is an attorney representing football players who enter the National Football League (NFL) Draft. Nolan Justin is also a former FCS-level football student-athlete from Ft. Worth, TX. During his time as an intercollegiate athlete, he was a three-year starter contributing to the number-one-ranked Southland Conference defense. He also won a conference championship in his junior year of college. The next participant is Nico Paolo. This participant competed at the FCS level and is a San Antonio, TX, native. He is currently a principal in K-12 in Waco, TX. Lastly, Jaquez Moses was an NCAA Division I (DI) track & field athlete that competed in the Big Twelve Conference. He is from Okinawa, Japan, and he competed in the 800 meters as an intercollegiate athlete. While competing, his team ranked number one in NCAA during all four years of intercollegiate competition. He also won eight championships and ranked number one in the world multiple times in his career.

Research Questions

Informed consent was given before the interview process, and after the consent forms were signed, I conducted 45-90-minute interviews. To guide the interview process, five

operating research questions formulated conversations and dialogue that highlighted their lived experiences. The research questions include the following:

1. In what ways does sports participation influence interactions with family?
2. In what ways does intercollegiate sport participation influence interactions with teammates and athletic personnel?
3. In what ways does intercollegiate sport participation influence interactions with the general student population?
4. In what ways do intercollegiate student-athletes sustain behaviors that fulfill achievement, affiliation, and power needs through athletic responsibilities?
5. In what ways do intercollegiate student-athletes sustain behaviors that fulfill achievement, affiliation, and power needs through academic responsibilities?

Data Collection

The interview protocol covered participants' experiences throughout the entirety of their lives. Within this, athletic and academic experiences, familial backgrounds, social interactions, decisions, and the recruiting process were covered throughout the interview. Each participant also expressed how these experiences contributed to life outcomes after intercollegiate sport participation. The average interview time was 70 minutes, as the time variation increased or decreased based on participant responses that required additional questions and answers (Rutledge, 2019). Field notes helped organize personal feelings and statements about the research. The reflexive journal helped identify personal biases that impact data interpretation through reflection during the days away from the site (Rutledge, 2022). I then transcribed data from the interviews and uploaded it to Atlas T.I. (Rutledge, 2022). The data produced 64 pages of transcripts and 30 data units. Follow-up interviews occurred on an as-needed basis to clarify original responses.

Data Analysis

The participants and I reviewed the transcripts and interview summaries to determine the accuracy and establish trustworthiness and validity to triangulate the data (Turner, 2004). The coding process occurred next, which consisted of data immersion to gather ideas and statements that pertain to the guiding research questions. Internal and external coding systems enabled a respondent-centered analysis and provided answers to questions referenced in previous research,

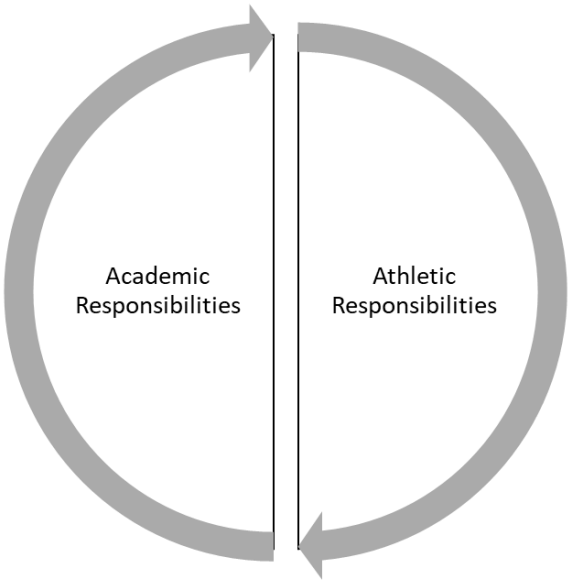
academic literature, societal phenomena, and various academic disciplines (Rutledge, 2020, 2022; Spickard, 2017). Charting was then used to summarize the data under each theme, and triangulation confirmed reliability and validity and linked data with evidence from a wide range of sources (Mays & Pope, 1995; Rutledge, 2022). The coding process yielded 30 data units, ten codes, and two themes. The units of analysis consisted of applying the ten codes to the theoretical framework. Context and likeness in experiences and participant responses guided coding and theme structure. Finally, the coding process concluded with withdrawn conclusions to deconstruct the themes.

Findings

This study sought to uncover how intercollegiate sport participation relates to positive experiences during and post-eligibility through the application of LNT. Each need is affiliated with LNT, how LNT aligns with the student-athlete literature, and corresponding insights comprise this section. Furthermore, this section includes a more in-depth analysis of insights and how LNT applies to positive life experiences for intercollegiate student-athletes. Nonetheless, two themes emerged from the coding process and data analysis that highlighted how LNT connects positive life experiences and outcomes (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Themes



Academic Responsibility

Ten of the 30 data units confirmed that academic responsibilities fulfilled all three needs associated with LNT. The data analysis revealed that achievement, affiliation, and power needs facilitated approaches and behaviors exhibited while attaining academic goals. In addition, extrinsic motivators facilitated achievement needs and intrinsic approaches toward academic goal attainment. For example, focus on academic responsibilities increased due to existing psychological impulses, institutional structures, and other external forces influencing behavior. This agrees with the literature in that Simons et al. (1999) administered a 300-item survey to 361 DI university student-athletes and found athletic commitment highly influenced academic performance and motivation for revenue-producing and non-revenue-producing student-athletes. As the data was saturated, Walter stated that academic assessments, accomplishments, and performance influenced athletic confidence and play-making ability on the field. Furthermore, the interview process revealed that all participants remained in good academic standing with the NCAA and respective institutions during intercollegiate sport participation. In addition, it was found that no participant failed a class during their time as an intercollegiate athlete.

Ten data units also identified how P-12 activities, families, and social interaction increased achievement needs. Academic responsibilities occurred throughout P-12 and intercollegiate sport participation and through expired eligibility. Familial influence highly impacted academic achievement, affiliation, and power needs. The data analysis also revealed that all participants identified as first-generation students, which increased intrinsic achievement needs. This finding highly influenced their need to obtain a scholarship to attend college. Walter states:

> Mama… you know [name anonymous] ... you know [anonymous] said his parents are going to pay for school… and my mama said, "What!" I do not have any money to pay for college! So you better make sure you get a scholarship!" So furthermore, I was like, ok… So I have to get a scholarship… one way or another…

Jaquez reflected on his competitive nature and stated he wanted to be academically top-ranked in his class. This statement demonstrates achievement, affiliation, and power needs. Furthermore, Jaquez demonstrated high achievement needs as he continuously sought achievement throughout goal attainment. The data also showed that affiliation needs affected

eligibility, and power needs increased self-fulfillment. This agrees with the literature that career and athletic motivation are significant predictors of academic achievement (Anderson, 2010; Hsu, 2022).

Accordingly, five data units represented how social interactions fulfilled affiliation needs. All the participants stated that they did not participate in harmful activities outside of intercollegiate sports, which suggests that social interaction did not negatively impact achievement needs academically. The data analysis also revealed that two participants had positive social interactions with the general student population, making affiliation needs more dynamic through strong general student population connections. These connections positively affected academic performance. Nolan noted that his A.P. class experiences consisted of the same teachers and students for most of his P-12 experience, which increased opportunities to participate in academic preparation activities. This need also increased recognition of academic skill development. Nolan also expressed that task rigor and intensity increased due to his connection with academically gifted students. This constant competition maximized the need for achievement and affiliation in the academic domain. Thus, social interaction positively affected need fulfillment in both academics and athletics.

This agrees with the literature that positive social interaction contributes to achievement motivation and the academic successes of intercollegiate student-athletes (Brown, 2021; Simpson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). This also agrees with the literature that social interaction influences feelings of self-worth and positive associations with campus climate (Gollwitzer & Keller, 2016; Keller et al., 2020). Another investigation of social interaction in the student-athlete population explored 238 first-semester first-year students and found that social interaction positively influenced academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and task value (Allen et al., 2018; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). On the other hand, Walter noted that outside of football and academics, dating his girlfriend primarily influenced his GPA, which remained over 3.7 during college.

High Athletic Responsibilities

This theme consisted of 20 data units that identified all needs within LNT and are based on the athletic responsibilities that shaped behaviors and experiences, the intricacies involved with sport participation, and the factors that define the demanding nature of intercollegiate sport

participation. The data analysis revealed that athletic commitment facilitated interactions between internal and external motivations. All participants began sport participation before age eight, and extrinsic motivators contributed to the psychological impulses that created internal motivation throughout career longevity. Continued participation increased internal motivation, achievement needs, and affiliation needs became more dynamic and attached to specific tasks, skills, socio-environmental contexts, and organizations.

Familial experiences also contributed to athletic responsibilities. For example, Jaquez had extensive autonomy in sport specialization, which increased the need for achievement and affiliation internally. This finding coincides with the literature in that the participants increased rigor in athletic tasks (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Cooper, 2016; Lundy et al., 2019). In addition, the findings show that affiliation and power need to be increased, which also agrees with the literature because individuals who spend excessive amounts of time in task engagement to increase the likelihood of success over periods of time feel less pressure and resentment in completing tasks (Moore, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020).

Furthermore, recruiting experiences increased internal motivation and all needs within LNT. Data saturation revealed that recruiting also influenced and increased focus toward athletic talent, school choice and athletic exposure, and each school's social quality of life. For instance, Nolan noted television appearances as the driving recruiting force, and three participants identified universities due to academic requirements. Nolan also expressed that he received excellent treatment and exposure on many recruiting visits to top-tier schools. Walter had a valuable backup plan and was intrinsically motivated to attend graduate school. The recruiting process incepted more power needs from the participants, nonetheless, since they had the commitment and desire to use intercollegiate athletics as a platform to attain future goals. This type of intrinsic motivation resulted in higher task engagement intensity, persistence over time, and competitiveness.

Externally, parents, coaches, and peers also reaffirmed and rewarded athletic accomplishments from P-12 through intercollegiate sport participation. Within this, however, data saturation revealed that the most influential extrinsic motivator to athletic performance were their coaches. Coaches influenced knowledge receptivity, decision-making, skill recognition, and skill refinement. Coaches also controlled behavior and time to a substantial degree. One of the

four participants began sport participation because of childhood coaching interactions. At the same time, Jaquez noted that athletic participation resulted from a coach noticing him running at school and telling him he needed to run track. Furthermore, the extrinsic motivation derived from coaches increased intrinsic motivation. For example, Jaquez revealed how challenging coaching experiences fueled achievement needs to persist toward goal attainment. These experiences were carried with him throughout his tenure as an intercollegiate athlete and post-eligibility, which helped him progress through challenging situations. As a result, Jaquez accomplished all his intercollegiate athletic goals, became an All-American twice, an Academic All-American once, and ran under his goal for a specific time in his final race. He states:

> I was so committed to getting ice baths after a workout… getting the right amounts of sleep, and getting the right amount of food, I would do two-a-days… I would go to the gym in the mornings… I would do cardio… weights… all on my own because it was a part of me… I needed to do this… it became the focal point of my college career from when I was about 21; I would go and have my private sessions. Do my jump rope, do my power cleans… As soon as I started doing this… at two points in my career… I was number one in the world… and I directly attribute that to those two daily sessions. These accomplishments made his career gratifying.

Jaquez also noted that he kept a journal to identify goals. He states:

> This was back when I ran the 100 meters. In retrospect, I wanted to be the fastest 100-meter runner in the 200 meters. I wanted to break all these records. Like, have gold medals. I was immersed in the potential that I was perceived to have.

This finding agrees with the literature that reflection influences refinement and approaches toward future goal attainment by effectively planning and organizing behavior (Ivanišević et al., 2017). This also increased achievement and affiliation needs because of external motivations such as coaches and real external motivations influencing approaches toward goal attainment (Royle & Hall, 2012). This finding also demonstrates that internal and external motivators can facilitate athletic performance (Dweck, 2014; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020).

Data saturation also revealed that collective hubris within the athletic culture and participation extrinsically influenced the participants and increased intrinsic motivation. The participants competed at championship levels, and three of the participants received team captain awards. Research shows that individuals with high affiliation needs make great team players and fit well within cooperative socio-environmental contexts (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017).

Hubris also satisfied the needs of achievement, affiliation, and power. Winning cultures enhanced hubris, which raised interest in power need fulfillment. Identifiable markers of success also influenced power and achievement needs simultaneously.

Furthermore, three participants led the NCAA in statistical measures identifying superior performance. These measures include stats, wins, and individual successes in official competitions. In addition, continued winning increased commitment to athletic tasks. This finding demonstrates how external motivators increase intrinsic motivation (Coakley et al., 2011; Dorsch et al., 2022; Dweck, 2014).

Social interactions outside intercollegiate participation did not affect athletic participation because of high athletic achievement goals. In turn, achievement and affiliation need to increase because of winning. Winning increased self-fulfillment, which helped the participants monitor their behavior. This also increased affiliation needs and defined how this need influences individuals' cognitive and emotional capacities across socio-environmental contexts (Le Crom et al., 2009; Letawsky, 2003; Nichols et al., 2019).

The participants also sought a culmination of institutional and personal power. Winning fulfilled institutional power, while individual competition fueled personal power (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). The individual competition consisted of formal and informal competitions, including weight and speed training, film study hours, and individual plays during the competition. This agrees with the literature that those seeking institutional power become more successful and can create favorable conditions in various socio-environmental contexts (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017).

Jaquez showed many signs of competition throughout his interview. He noted that his competitive nature led him to want to achieve athletically. Nico stated that he carries over discipline and hard work from athletics. He states:

> Be disciplined enough to reach that goal… hard work – life is not easy at all, and sports prepares you for that… because you are out there every day, when everybody is in the dorms or at home in the A/C, and we are out there – it is three o'clock… in the middle of the day and we are working… with full pads on… sweating and hitting each other… that is hard… not many people can do that… that is why everybody cannot go to college and play football… because it is tough." He states "you can doubt, and you can come to a wall. However, nevertheless, how are we going to get over that wall – go over it… through it – however, you are going to do it – do it – get to the other side.

This statement is profound because it refutes literature that suggests individuals negatively react to stress by increasing absenteeism, quitting, or emotional exhaustion, which directly relates to stress and turnover (Lu et al., 2017; Belete, 2018; Hassan et al., 2020). Alternatively, it demonstrates permeability, increasing motivation in interpersonal atmospheres that support and respect individual needs (Brown, 2021; Dweck, 2014; Simpson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Hubris is further used as a motivator that carries over into current experiences. Nico noted that the student-athlete culture increases the need to execute tasks to improve the team's success. Nico states:

> We were held to a higher expectation than most… they expected more from us. We were put on a pedestal… so anytime we did anything – positive or negative – there was an awareness to it… they expected a lot from us because of the tradition of the district and the school… we were supposed to do right… we were supposed to be successful… on the field and in class.

Conclusions

The guiding research questions captured the experiences of four former intercollegiate sports student-athletes and revealed how those experiences aligned with LNT. The theoretical framework used in this study led to a thorough investigation of task engagement intensity, skill refinement, goal worth, and self-fulfillment (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). The analysis revealed that challenging situations surfaced in informal, formal, unofficial, official, athletic, and academic settings. In addition, this study shows the relationship between LNT, intercollegiate student-athletes and how needs and motivators correspond to socio-environmental contexts to create motivational force (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). As a result, the findings from this study contribute to knowledge within the motivational and LNT framework (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017).

This study reinforces the literature that suggests intercollegiate sports and higher education can be used as renowned platforms to fulfill needs, influence life outcomes, and attain successful incremental progression for intercollegiate student-athletes (Brady & Alleyne, 2017). In addition, this study provides descriptive insights into the demands of student-athlete life while enrolled in the university system and participating in intercollegiate sports (Rutledge, 2019). Therefore, LNT is suitable for analyzing student-athlete populations and creating ways to implement research-based practices within organizations that increase motivation and impact performance (Osemeke

& Adegboyega, 2017). Furthermore, the theoretical framework provides multiple layers of analysis, which adds to the existing social and cognitive layers of motivation theory (Rybnicek et al., 2019). This study also adds to the literature in that it suggests and allows for flexibility in approaches that assist this population and assessments of performance in various contexts (Coakley et al., 2011; Dorsch et al., 2022). Thus, this study continues the emergence of literature that addresses how student-athletes progress across life domains, increasing its validity (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017; Rybnicek et al., 2019).

Topics for Further Discussion

This study analyzed four former intercollegiate student-athletes across academic, athletic, and socio-environmental contexts. However, analyzing the educational attainment of multiple underrepresented student groups within higher education is warranted (Simpson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). In addition, studies that highlight student-athletes outside of Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and DI universities are warranted. Furthermore, highlighting professional or former athletes would also increase data and research regarding student-athlete motivation (Rutledge, 2017, 2020, 2022; Simpson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). In addition, this study can use the experiences of athletic and academic personnel, such as learning specialists and advisors, to strengthen the literature regarding student-athletes and positive life outcomes (Rutledge, 2015). This study also increases the need and importance of analyzing achievement testing for athletes (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015; Ivanišević et al., 2017). Furthermore, the Bridge Program, the Scholar Baller Program, and the LYFE Program have proven to be effective at collectively collaborating with educators to ensure and introduce new practices that advance the lofty athletic and academic goals of universities (Brown, 2021; Cross & Fouke, 2019; Locke & Latham, 2004; Martin, 2020; Rutledge, 2019, 2020, 2022; Simpson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021).

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