

Fall 2022

## Attitudes Toward Social Activism by Professional Athletes

Aaron M. Flores  
*San Jose State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd\\_theses](https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses)

---

### Recommended Citation

Flores, Aaron M., "Attitudes Toward Social Activism by Professional Athletes" (2022). *Master's Theses*. 5333.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.mazy-xa3y>  
[https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd\\_theses/5333](https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/5333)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@sjsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@sjsu.edu).

ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL ACTIVISM BY PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Kinesiology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Aaron M. Flores

November 2022

© 2022

Aaron M. Flores

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL ACTIVISM BY PROFESSIONAL  
ATHLETES

by

Aaron M. Flores

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

November 2022

Cole Armsrong, Ph.D.	Department of Kinesiology
Ted Butryn, Ph.D.	Department of Kinesiology
Emily H. Wughalter, Ph.D.	Department of Kinesiology

## ABSTRACT

### ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL ACTIVISM BY PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES

by Aaron M. Flores

Many professional athletes have raised awareness about and publicly protested social injustices. Athlete activism research has generally supported that such activism results in harsh backlash against the athletes, stemming from beliefs that politics and social justice protests do not belong in sports; patriotic/nationalistic values leading individuals to view such protests as un-American; and racial beliefs and attitudes, especially towards African American athletes. While robust, much of this research is theoretical or qualitative in nature and mainly examined reactions towards Black football players, with less focus on White athletes or those in different sports. To address these gaps, the current research used quantitative methods to examine attitudes towards a Black or White athlete who advocates for social justice. Social Identity Theory was applied to explore the relationships between fans' own patriotic beliefs, level of sports identification, and their athlete activist attitudes. Participants' scores on the Modern Racism Scale were assessed to examine the influence of these racial beliefs on athlete activist evaluations. Results yielded no impact of athlete's race, sports league, or their interaction on participants' athlete attitudes. However, consistent with hypotheses, relationships were found between social justice beliefs, level of sports fandom, patriotic beliefs, and Modern Racism beliefs. Implications of these findings, limitations, and future research directions were discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Cole Armstrong, my graduate advisor, for guiding me through this thesis process. His wisdom, patience, and encouragement have helped me tremendously during my time in the graduate program at San Jose State University. I appreciate his taking time out of his busy schedule to provide me with insightful comments on multiple drafts of my thesis that greatly improved its depth and quality. Next, I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Ted Butryn and Dr. Emily H. Wughalter. The lessons I learned from them helped me to develop a Master's thesis study and allowed me to apply the knowledge I gained from both my quantitative and qualitative research methods courses to my own research project. I would also like to thank my undergraduate mentor at Menlo College, Dr. Sean Pradhan. I am especially grateful for his confidence in me and for always challenging me to strive for higher goals. His mentorship greatly inspired my interest in the research process and led me to attend graduate school to pursue a Master's degree in Sports Management. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support in my pursuit of a higher education. Their constant love, encouragement, and compassion have been my main source of strength in this process. Without the guidance and support of all these people, I would not have been able to complete my academic journey. Thank you again. I appreciate you all!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	viii
List of Figures .....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	5
Athlete Activism .....	5
Race/Racism .....	9
Beliefs about Sports/Athlete’s Role.....	14
Social Justice Attitudes .....	15
Patriotism/Nationalism .....	17
Fan Identification/Sports Fandom.....	18
Theoretical Framework.....	21
Social Identity Theory (SIT).....	21
Social Identity Threats .....	21
Limitations of Literature and Research Aims.....	26
Overview of Thesis Study and Hypotheses .....	33
Hypothesis 1.....	34
Hypothesis 2.....	34
Hypothesis 3.....	34
Hypothesis 4.....	35
Hypothesis 4a - 4d .....	35
Method .....	38
Participants and Design.....	38
Manipulation of Athlete Articles .....	38
Althete's Race .....	38
Sports League.....	38
Dependent Measures .....	39
Impression Judgments.....	39
Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire.....	40
Social Justice Scale - Attitudes Subscale.....	41
Sports Fandom Questionnaire.....	41
Patriotism/Nationalism Scale.....	41
Modern Racism Scale .....	42
Demographic Questionnaire .....	42
Procedure .....	42

Results.....	44
Tests of Hypotheses .....	44
Correlational Analyses.....	47
Discussion.....	52
Summary and Discussion of Findings .....	52
Limitations .....	63
Contributions.....	64
Implications.....	66
References.....	71
Appendices.....	78
Appendix A: Athlete Photographs .....	
Appendix B: ESPN Athlete Articles: Black NFL, White NFL, Black NBA, & White NBA .....	
Appendix C: Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ – 19 items).....	
Appendix D: Social Justice Scale (SJS) – Attitudes Subscale (11 items) .....	
Appendix E: Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ – 5 items).....	
Appendix F: Patriotism/Nationalism Scale (PNS – 11 items).....	
Appendix G: Modern Racism Scale (MRS -- 7 items).....	
Appendix H: Demographic Questionnaire.....	



LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Univariate Results for Dependent Measures of Attitudes Toward Athlete Activist .....	45
Table 2 Correlation Matrix Among Participants' Overall Average Impressions, Mean ATAAQ Scores and Average Scores on Social Justice, Sports Fandom/Identity, Patriotism/Nationalism, and Modern Racism Scales.....	49

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Mean Attitude toward Athlete Activism scores (ATAAQ) as a function of Athlete's Race and Sports League ..... 47

## **Introduction**

Although athlete activism has occurred since the early 1900s, there has been a recent increase of professional athletes using their public platforms to voice their opinions about ongoing social injustices globally, and specifically in the United States. Whether it be in support of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement or to raise awareness about systemic racism, numerous athletes have acted, such as kneeling during the playing of the national anthem to advocate for social change (Hylton, 2020). One of the most notable examples of recent athlete activism occurred in 2016 when Colin Kaepernick, then starting quarterback for the National Football League's (NFL) San Francisco 49er's, knelt during the playing of the national anthem. Kaepernick explicitly stated his actions were to raise awareness about systemic racism in America and to protest instances of police brutality towards Black people of color. After his initial protest, other players across the NFL, as well as from other professional sports leagues, began to support Kaepernick's protests and draw attention to causes and issues they support. For example, athletes in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) began to wear t-shirts and hoodies with victims' names of police violence while warming up on the court before games.

Also, to protest the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Jacob Blake (both of whom were African American) at the hands of law enforcement, games were cancelled in both the NBA and WNBA as well as in Major League Baseball (MLB) as many athletes refused to play. Black NASCAR driver Bubba Wallace painted his race car with the Black Lives Matter logo to bring awareness to police brutality towards Black people and other people of color. Women's tennis champion, Naomi Osaka, wore face masks with victims' names of police

violence and withdrew from the Western and Southern Open tournament in New York in protest. In addition to protesting racial injustices, athletes in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) have fought for many years to raise awareness about and achieve pay equity between women's and men's soccer.

Although many in the public supported such protests, these acts of athlete activism also resulted in strong negative reactions and criticism from factions of fans, teammates/coaches, the media, and even the President of the United States. For example, President Trump increased the backlash toward these athlete activists when he stated that NFL owners should fire players who knelt during the national anthem. In this highly publicized 2017 speech, Trump called athletes who kneel "un-American", "whiny", and questioned the intelligence of Black athletes who protested. After NBA players LeBron James and Kevin Durant spoke critically about the president, Fox News host Laura Ingraham responded by telling the athletes to stop making political comments, be quiet and just dribble (Chavez, 2018). Comments such as these clearly show that athletes are targets of hostility and anger when they engage in social activism.

Although some in the public may think athlete activism is a recent occurrence, it began early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1908, for example, Jack Johnson became the first Black heavyweight boxing champion of the world after defeating James J. Jeffries, a White former undefeated world champion, in what was called the "Fight of the Century." Johnson's victory stunned Black and White communities across the country and sparked violent race riots, where many victims of the violence were Black. Johnson's accomplishments are notable since his athletic success came during a time when racism was common. More importantly,

he was one of the first Black athletes to shed light on this issue and break barriers for other Black athletes to follow (Morse, 2020).

During the civil rights era of the 1960s, athlete activism increased. Many professional athletes of this era publicly protested the Vietnam War, racism, and other types of social injustices (Kaufman, 2008). Research on past athlete activism also supports recent findings that athlete activists typically experience harsh criticism and damaging consequences to their careers. In addition, researchers attribute these negative outcomes to the view certain individuals hold that athletes should “stick to what they know best” (i.e., playing their sport), and the belief that political protests and other types of social activism have no place in sports (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015).

Though much has been learned about athlete activism, much of this research is qualitative or theoretical in nature, with fewer studies using quantitative methods or measures. In addition, research has focused on Black athlete activists, while the consequences White athletes may or may not face because of their activism has not been widely examined (Kaufman, 2008). Although Fox News reporter Laura Ingraham told NBA athletes LeBron James and Kevin Durant (both of whom are Black) to “shut up and dribble,” her response to Drew Brees (a White NFL athlete) was very different. When Brees spoke about his views on social/political injustice, Ingraham commented that he was “allowed to have an opinion,” suggesting that reactions towards White athletes may differ from those towards Black athletes. Female athletes, such as Megan Rapinoe, (White professional female soccer player) have also been targets of harsh criticism due to their activism (Schmidt et al., 2018a). In contrast, White male athletes, such as Nate Boyer (former Green Beret and ex-NFL athlete),

who inspired Kaepernick to kneel (instead of sit) during the anthem, according to Barua (2021) have experienced less negative criticism for their actions. In addition, more recently research on athlete activism has focused specifically on activism that has occurred within professional football (NFL) because of the widely publicized protests by Kaepernick and other NFL players. Athlete activism in other professional sports (e.g., NBA, MLB, NHL) has not been widely explored.

To address these gaps in the literature, the current thesis experiment used quantitative methods and measures to investigate whether an athlete's race influenced fans' attitudes towards an athlete activist. In addition, to explore whether racial attitudes and beliefs play a role in reactions to and evaluations of athlete activists, a measure of such racial beliefs was included in the study. Participants completed the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986) to directly examine the relationship between their racial beliefs and their athlete activist attitudes. The study attempted to address whether the sport in which the athlete activist participated affected evaluations as well. To add theoretical depth, principles of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) were applied to determine if perceived threats to fans' identities as sports fans or if their own patriotic/nationalistic beliefs impacted their reactions toward an athlete activist. An examination of these ideas in research suggests that engaging in social activism not only influences fans' attitudes towards athletes, but also may impact consumption behaviors of the athlete-associated merchandise and endorsed brands (Mudrick et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020).

## **Literature Review**

### **Athlete Activism**

Much of the scholarly literature on athlete activism has described and examined the negative outcomes athletes face when they advocate for social justice. Kaufman (2008), for example, examined reactions to ten well-known professional athletes who actively protested war and racism and examined two main themes in his analyses. The first theme was “type of activism” and centered on the kind of activism in which athletes participated. The second theme, “reactions to activism,” described the reactions and responses they received. One of the athletes included in the study was Muhammad Ali, one of the greatest professional boxers of all time. In 1966, Ali was the reigning heavyweight world champion when he was drafted for the Vietnam War. At the time, Ali refused to join the military and was strongly criticized by the press and the public. Consequently, the FBI wiretapped Ali’s phone, he lost his championship status, and was sentenced to five years in jail for evading the draft. In addition, Ali was banned from boxing for three years and lost millions of fans and endorsement deals (Kaufman, 2008).

Kaufman (2008) also discussed SJSU’s John Carlos and Tommie Smith who conducted their world-renowned protest at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. After winning the 200-meter race, both athletes raised their fists in respect to the Black Power movement that began during the fight for civil rights in America. Like Ali, both Smith and Carlos faced intense negative backlash for their actions. They were banished from the Olympic Village, stripped of their medals, attacked in the media, and harassed when they returned to the United States. In addition, both athletes lost countless sponsorship opportunities, struggled to find work,

and in 1977, Smith's wife committed suicide partly because of the backlash of the Olympic protest. In short, Kaufman's (2008) study demonstrated that early athlete activists faced many negative consequences including hostile, critical backlash from the public, their peers, and in the press.

Recent research findings further demonstrate this negative reaction towards athlete activism. Sanderson et al. (2016) conducted a thematic analysis of 1,019 user-generated Facebook comments from the "Boycott the St. Louis Rams" Facebook page and 452 tweets using the Twitter hashtag "#BoycottRams." Fans created this Facebook page and Twitter hashtag after Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African American male, was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a White police officer, in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. Three months afterward, a grand jury did not indict the White police officer for his involvement in the killing. When the verdict became public, protests and violent clashes between protestors and police officers took place in Ferguson. Then, the Sunday after the verdict, five African American players from the NFL franchise St. Louis Rams entered the stadium during player introductions locked arm in arm, with their hands up in the air. These athletes stated their action was meant to symbolize the "hands up don't shoot" pose that protestors in Ferguson used to bring attention to police brutality & violence.

Although their protest generated some praise, the public's reaction to the five Rams players' gesture was mostly outrage and harsh criticism. Also, on the day of their protest, a Facebook group was started, called "Boycott the St Louis Rams," and a Twitter hashtag was created (#BoycottRams) for fans to react to the players' protest. Sanderson et al.'s (2016) analyses found several themes within the public's comments. One of these themes was a



“Renouncing Fandom” theme where comments focused on how the “hands up” gesture made by the athletes negatively influenced their fandom and connection to the team. Another theme was deemed “Punishment Commentary” and focused on comments about what the appropriate punishment should be for the players. Comments also indicated a “Racial Commentary” theme, with some comments being overtly racist. Finally, analyses also revealed a “General Criticism” theme which included brief critical comments of the Rams players.

Arguably, the most infamous (and highly publicized) act of athlete activism in recent history occurred in 2016, when Colin Kaepernick (then starting quarterback for the NFL San Francisco 49ers) first sat on the bench and then later knelt during the playing of the national anthem in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and to bring awareness to racial injustice in America. As previously discussed, his actions received intense hostile criticism from the public (including the President of the United States) and cost Kaepernick his professional football career. Schmidt, et al. (2018a) attempted to understand the response and conducted a qualitative study investigating the content of Facebook users’ narratives about Kaepernick. The study included 85,649 users’ comments collected and analyzed for themes regarding the quarterback and his activism. Results revealed four general themes: American Values, Shunning, Racial Discussion, and Masculinity. Within the “American Values” theme, comments centered on strong views of patriotism/nationalism and contained discussion about whether Kaepernick’s act was patriotic or anti-American. In addition to views that Kaepernick was being anti-American, users commented that his kneeling and not standing for the anthem threatened American values and was disrespectful. A second theme

revealed in the comments was “Shunning.” This theme included discussion about the consequences Kaepernick should face for kneeling during the anthem with many users feeling that the appropriate punishment for Kaepernick was to leave the country because he had violated America’s national values and if he did not like what goes on in America, then he should live somewhere else. A third theme that emerged included a “Racial Discussion” where users debated about whether there was a real racial problem in America. Comments within this theme reflected the view that racism is not a real issue in America and Kaepernick is protesting a problem that does not exist. Lastly, the fourth theme was a discussion about “Masculinity” or what it means to be a man and the appropriate actions of a real man. Some comments within this theme suggested that if an athlete knelt for the anthem or refused to stand, they were less of a man than athletes who stood for the anthem.

In general, the themes revealed in comments to the St. Louis Rams football players and to Kaepernick clearly demonstrate the harsh backlash and hostile criticism directed toward athlete activists. These themes are like those found in earlier research which also showed that athlete activism results in negative criticism from fans, the public, and the media (Kaufman, 2008; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). In addition, the athlete activist suffers damaging consequences to their professional careers through the loss of endorsements, decreased popularity of athlete-related merchandise, and in the case of Kaepernick, the loss of their professional sports career. Because of these findings, researchers, in response, have attempted to determine factors that impact these negative outcomes.

## **Race/Racism**

As suggested by the research of Sanderson et al. (2016) and Schmidt et al. (2018a), one potential contributing factor to the negative backlash experienced by Black athlete activists, are fans' racial beliefs and attitudes. A major finding of social psychological research examining race is that White middle-class culture is seen to be the norm in America, whereas other non-White cultures are considered to be deviant since these cultures are perceived to be different from White American culture (Kite & Whitley, 2016). Social psychologists, for example, have found strong and consistent support for the idea that being "American" is strongly associated with being "White," with this association being particularly strong on implicit measures (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010). The belief that White culture is the norm in America has consequences for how non-White individuals are perceived, evaluated, and treated. For example, extensive social psychological research on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination shows that people hold very different beliefs about Black and White people in general, therefore affecting their attitudes, feelings, and behavior towards these groups (Kite & Whitley, 2016). Further research discussed by these authors also demonstrates that people tend to hold more negative beliefs about, have more unfavorable attitudes towards, and behave more negatively towards members of groups to which they do not belong (i.e., out-group members) than members of their own groups (i.e., in-group members). Therefore, because of the White norm in our country, racial groups who do not conform to this norm are considered out-groups and are judged and treated differently from groups who conform to the White norm and perceived to be in-group members.

The idea that White culture is perceived as the dominant racial norm in America also extends to the sports world. Feagin (2013), for example, argued for the idea of the White racial frame being the “ideal” in sports. Because societal structures typically favor White identity, he proposed that the dominant in-group in sports is White, with Black and other people of color perceived as out-groups. Smith (2019) also argued for a Whiteness norm in the sports media as it typically portrays Whiteness as superior compared to media portrayals of Blackness. She further suggested that the archetypical sports hero never includes a racial identity, but the public typically believes the prototypical sports hero to be White. Smith, like Feagin (2013), also contends that the dominant in-group in sports is White, with Black and other persons of color falling into the out-group. Therefore, when Whites are challenged by Black athlete activists, they are likely to feel discomfort, irritation, and antagonism.

Furthermore, because Black athletes deviate from the White racial norm in sports, they may also be more likely to face racial stereotypes such as being a “jock” who is “athletic,” “lazy,” and “unintelligent.” Therefore, Black athletes might be ignored, taken less seriously, and judged more negatively when they speak about social injustice and politics (Kaufman, 2008). Also, Black athletes’ messages may be less accepted and more likely to receive negative criticism than when the same message comes from White athletes (Smith, 2019). In contrast, White athletes’ political opinions and beliefs about social injustice may be taken more seriously and evaluated more positively because the racial stereotypical traits associated with Whites include “intelligent,” “hard-working,” and “independent” (Kite & Whitley, 2016).

Other researchers make similar arguments regarding differential reactions to White compared to Black athlete activists. For example, Frederick et al. (2017) proposed that when athletes speak out on social issues, such as racism, they challenge existing power structures which tend to favor White people over Black people. This opposition can then create discomfort and tension for fans, leading them to tell athletes to “stick to sports” and “just play” and not talk about politics. Giardina and Newman (2011) also explain that cultural stereotypes of Black people contribute to the belief that a Black male athlete is not supposed to think for himself. Instead, he is supposed to be more interested in gold chains, fancy cars, and lots of women. Stereotypic beliefs that Black athletes and other athletes of color (excluding Asians) are less intelligent than White athletes are common and held by many in the public (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Hodge et al., 2008). So, when a Black male athlete takes a stand on social/political issues, he challenges the stereotype of a “dumb jock” who should just focus on the game and not have an opinion other than what sneaker to wear or sports drink to buy.

Reactions towards Black female athletes and other female athletes of color are not only influenced by such racial beliefs, but also by societal beliefs regarding gender roles (Kasken & Ho, 2016). Schultz (2005), for example, discussed the effects of the intersectionality of race and gender for Black female athletes and argued that not only are they compared to stereotypes regarding their race, but they are also held to restrictive gender beliefs which expect women to be feminine, delicate, nurturing, and submissive. Therefore, a Black female athlete activist who asserts her opinions and actively speaks out against social injustices may

face negative reactions from the public if she is perceived to challenge the beliefs and expectations associated with either her race and/or gender.

Furthermore, De B'beri and Hogarth (2009) discussed the idea that many sports fans believe that Black and other minority athletes should be grateful for their opportunities and not question the social or political system from which they are lucky to benefit. So, when athletes of color show any social or political opposition, they are targets of harsh criticism and negative backlash from the public because it is perceived to be ungrateful and disrespectful.

In addition to these racial stereotype beliefs, another contributing factor to differential evaluations of Black athlete activists may be negative prejudice towards Black people. Prejudice is generally defined in the social psychological literature as an attitude, evaluation, or emotional response directed toward an entire social group or individuals who are members of that group (Kite & Whitley, 2016). When prejudice is based on a group's race/ethnicity, it is considered racial/ethnic prejudice or racism. In general, most of the social science research on prejudice/racism has focused on anti-Black prejudice, reflecting the history of racial prejudice in the United States. The vast social psychological literature on this topic also includes many different theories and measures of racial prejudice. However, one common theme within this literature is the distinction between what is called "old-fashioned" versus more contemporary, "modern" forms of prejudice or racism. "Old-fashioned" racism refers to overt hostility and negative feelings towards Black people and the beliefs that they are inferior to White people. Because these openly negative emotions and beliefs about Black people have become socially unacceptable to most Americans (although they have not

disappeared), many social psychologists argue that traditional “old-fashioned” racist attitudes and behaviors have been replaced by more covert, subtle forms of prejudice/racism (Kite & Whitley, 2016). Of these contemporary theories, one, McConahay et. al’s (1986) “Modern Racism Theory” may be especially relevant in understanding people’s attitudes towards Black (versus White) athlete activists.

Modern racism is proposed to be a more subtle and indirect form of racism than the traditional, old-fashioned version. McConahay (1986) argues that modern racism stems from mild to moderate anti-Black emotions and genuine support of the principle of racial equality. Therefore, modern racists are assumed to experience a conflict between beliefs that racism/discrimination are wrong and their negative feelings towards Black individuals. These negative emotions, however, are not the strong feelings of hostility/hatred usually felt by old-fashioned racists, but less intense emotions such as anxiety, dislike, and resentment. Furthermore, McConahay et al. (1986) suggests these negative feelings come from strong beliefs in traditional (White) American values such as hard work, individualism, and self-reliance which lead to the perception that Black people fail to comply with these values because of their use of public assistance and government aid. McConahay proposed three principles that contribute to this type of “modern racism”: (a) denial of continuing discrimination towards Black people as a whole – individuals who hold modern racist views genuinely believe that racism and discrimination no longer exist in America and is no longer an issue for Black people in our country; (b) antagonism towards Black individuals’ demands for equal rights – because they deny that racism is a real problem in our country, modern racists feel hostility and animosity when Black people complain about continuing racial

inequalities, and (c) resentment about special favors for Black people as a group – individuals who hold modern racist views believe Black people receive attention from the government that is undeserved and unnecessary. Finally, researchers suggest that individuals who endorse these modern racism principles may not be consciously aware of their negative feelings towards Black people and do not consider themselves to be biased/prejudiced since racism is seen in its old-fashioned form only and they truly believe that racism/discrimination no longer exists in America (Kite & Whitley, 2016; McConahay et al., 1986).

This type of modern racism may be particularly relevant in understanding some people's attitudes towards Black (versus White) athlete activists since the three contributing principles have been revealed in comment themes found in qualitative athlete activism research. For example, in both the Sanderson et al., (2016) and Schmidt et al., (2018a) studies examining public Facebook and Twitter comments toward the St. Louis Rams' players and Kaepernick, strong "Racial Commentary" and "Racial Discussion" themes were present. Comments within these themes included the view that racism is not a "real" issue in America so these athletes are perceived to be protesting something that does not exist. Commenters also voiced their beliefs that Black athletes should not complain and should just be grateful for the opportunities that have been given to them.

### **Beliefs about Sports/Athlete's Role**

Another factor demonstrated to contribute to the negative consequences experienced by athlete activists are beliefs regarding sports in general and perceptions of an athlete's role within their sport (Dreier & Candaele, 2004; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). For example, a general belief surrounding sports is that it should remain neutral, and politics or protests have



no place in professional sports. So, when professional athletes engage in social activism, they are targets of criticism because of the belief that this type of activity does not belong in sports. In addition, activist acts are perceived to be outside of the behavior usually performed by athletes (i.e., athlete activism is non-normative or deviant) because they are expected to stick to their sport and not get involved in social activism. Athletes should play and not preach because the playing field is no place for social protests (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010).

To explore these beliefs, Giardina and Newman (2011) examined participants' responses to athletes who made statements on political issues unrelated to their sport. Their analyses showed that athlete activists were criticized by the public, were more likely to lose endorsement contracts, and were targets of media headlines that supported the belief that athletes should "stick to sports" and "just play." Therefore, these findings support the idea that athletes are expected to keep their opinions about anything other than the game to themselves. Another example of these beliefs was demonstrated by Jim 99 (2011), who authored an article titled "Monday morning musings: Professional athletes need to shut up and just play." In his article, Bransfield (2011) discussed the view that athletes should just stick to what they know about -- sports. In general, when athletes are not neutral and voice their opinions and social/political issues, they face backlash from both the media and the public because of the general belief that athletes should keep their social and political views separate from their athletic lives because sports and politics do not mix.

### **Social Justice Attitudes**

Reactions and responses toward athlete activists may also depend on individuals' own beliefs and attitudes towards political issues and social injustices. For example, Mudrick et

al. (2019) demonstrated that fans' prior beliefs toward a U.S. president influenced their attitudes and consumption behavior toward an athlete activist who supported or opposed those beliefs. Participants in their study read a message supposedly written by an athlete activist and were assigned to one of four conditions: (a) participant supports president/athlete message supports president; (b) participant supports president/athlete message criticized president; (c) participant does not support president/athlete message supports president; and (d) participant does not support president/athlete message does not support president. Results indicated that when the athlete activist's message was consistent with fans' prior beliefs (i.e., participant supports/athlete supports president; participant does not support/athlete does not support president), they were more likely to report they would buy apparel with the player's name and number for themselves. More importantly however, participants liked the athlete activist more when the athlete's message was consistent with their own prior beliefs (i.e., when both participant and athlete's message supported the president; and when both participant and athlete were critical of the president).

MacIntosh et al. (2020) provides additional evidence that prior beliefs toward social justice activism is a key factor influencing athlete activist attitudes and the likelihood that student athletes would engage in such activity themselves. These researchers surveyed 2,092 collegiate student-athletes about their attitudes toward social justice activism and were interested in how gender and ethnicity/race influenced these attitudes. Social-justice attitudes were measured using the Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012) and results showed that student-athletes of color held more positive social justice attitudes compared to White athletes. In addition, female athletes had the most favorable beliefs toward social

justice compared to male athletes. Finally, male, and White athletes reported to be least likely to engage in activism than females and athletes of color. Overall, these findings suggest that not only did prior beliefs toward social justice affect student-athletes' likelihood of engaging in activism behavior, but they could also influence their attitudes towards athlete activists as well.

### **Patriotism/Nationalism**

A fourth factor potentially contributing to the negative backlash directed towards athlete activists are patriotism or beliefs of nationalism. Kaufman (2008) argued that sports foster an increased sense of patriotism and a strong national identity within fans. Nationalism is traditionally referred to as an individual's strong positive attitudes toward their country, including uncritical support and pride of one's nation (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Individuals with strong nationalistic beliefs view their nation to be superior to other nations and are more likely to be blindly accepting of national, state, and political authorities. In contrast, patriotism may include a more critical view of one's nation, but the individual has love and pride of their country. Many qualitative studies demonstrated strong patriotism/nationalism themes within both the public and media responses to athlete activism (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson, et al., 2016). Also, even though Kaepernick and other athlete activists repeatedly claimed they were not protesting American ideals, critics of their protests often viewed their activism as un-American and anti-military.

More recently, Smith (2019) conducted a quantitative study to examine how nationalistic beliefs affected participants' views of athlete activists. In this experiment, participants read a news story about a Black or White college quarterback who knelt during the playing of the

national anthem. The news article contained either neutral (only facts about the event), positive (facts about the event and quotes of support from teammates/coaches), or negative language (facts about the event and quotes of criticism from teammates/coaches). After reading the news story, participants rated their emotional responses to the article and reported their levels of patriotism/nationalism. Results showed that participants who scored high on patriotism/nationalism reported more negative emotions in response to the athlete activism news article. Negative emotions included feelings of distress/upset, guilt, fear, hostility, irritation, and nervousness. These findings further support the idea that patriotic/nationalistic beliefs contribute to negative feelings and responses toward athlete activists.

### **Fan Identification/Sports Fandom**

A final factor to consider in understanding reactions and attitudes to sports activism is fans' level of identification with an athlete, team, or sport. Devlin and Billings (2016) refer to fan/sports identification as the extent to which an individual feels a psychological connection to an athlete, team, or sport. Wann (2006a) discussed three general causes of fan identification: psychological, environmental, and team-related factors. One psychological cause is individuals' general need for belongingness and affiliation. People have a general desire to feel unity and cohesion with others. Rooting for the same team in a crowded stadium or being a fan of the same sport with thousands of other people therefore provides people with a sense of community with others who are like themselves. An environmental cause of fan/sports identification is socialization with friends or family members (especially fathers) who are already fans of the team or sport. By interacting with people who are already sports fans, individuals gain knowledge and exposure to the team/sport, which in turn can

increase their psychological connection. Finally, fan/sports identification can also be formed through team-related factors, such as team performance (e.g., winning record), organizational characteristics (e.g., reputation of the team/sport), and player attributes (e.g., athlete popularity or similarity to oneself).

Reviews of fan identification/sport fandom research have discussed various consequences this connection has on fans' affective, behavioral, and psychological responses (Hirshon, 2020; Wann, 2006b). For instance, highly identified sports fans experience more intense emotional reactions to competitions involving their teams, with more positive emotions when their team wins and more negative emotions when they lose (Gantz & Wenner, 1995; Wann et al., 1994). Also, highly identified fans report feeling more anxiety when the competition is important, such as a championship game, compared to those who are not as strongly identified (Wann et al., 1998).

However, one of the most frequently studied consequence of fan/sport identification relates to its influence on fan behavior. This research focuses on two areas. First are studies that examine the relationship between fan identification and consumption. In a review of this research, Wann (2006a) states that level of fan identification is arguably the most important factor predicting sport consumption. In general, studies show that strongly identified fans are more likely to attend games (Wann et al., 1999; Williamson et al., 2003); purchase team merchandise (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002); and have positive perceptions of team sponsors (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) than weakly identified fans. The second area of research examines the relationship between fan/sport identification and sport fan aggression. Research in this area reveals that fan aggression and parental violence at youth sporting events are

impacted by high levels of fan/sport identification. Strongly identified fans, for instance, are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior, such as a greater willingness to injure opposing players and coaches (Wann et al., 2003). Wann (2001) also demonstrated that high levels of identification for their child athlete and his/her team lead many parents to act in an abusive or violent manner at youth sporting events.

Lastly, fan/sport identification has also been shown to have consequences for fans' psychological well-being through its influence on self-esteem as well as through the sense of belonging/community individuals feel when they associate with similar others. BIRGing (basking in reflected glory), a well-documented phenomenon in sports literature, suggests that fans increase their psychological connection with a successful team to boost their self-identity and self-esteem (Cialdini et al., 1976). Therefore, when fans strongly identify with successful or winning teams, they can bask in the glory of their team's success and experience an increase to their self-esteem (End et al., 2002). In addition, sports researchers have shown that identification with sports teams can lead to positive psychological outcomes, such as lower levels of loneliness and higher levels of self-esteem because of the benefits associated with the sense of community individuals feel when they associate with similar others (Kelley & Tian, 2004; Wann, 2006b).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

To gain a fuller understanding of how fan/sport identification and other reviewed factors may contribute to the negative backlash experienced by athlete activists, Social Identity Theory (SIT), found within the social psychological literature (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides a useful framework. Tajfel (1974) originally defined social identity as the part of an individual's self-concept which stems from their membership of a social group(s) and the emotional significance attached to that membership. Within this theory, group membership is argued to be an important part of an individual's self-concept because identifying with groups who are like oneself (i.e., in behaviors, thoughts, or attitudes) can increase one's own self-esteem and sense of belongingness/connection to others. Social Identity Theory also contends that individuals are motivated to maintain positive perceptions of the groups to which they identify (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) since these favorable views have consequences for individuals' own self views. Therefore, thinking favorably about one's own group(s) leads to favorable perceptions of oneself.

Although individuals belong to many different social groups (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, etc.), SIT proposes that people are more likely to identify with groups who are favorably perceived and who share similarities with oneself because of the positive effects it has for self-esteem. Lock and Heere (2017) discuss several factors affecting the accessibility of group identities for individuals. One factor is the importance of a specific group identity for a person since these self-important group identities are more prominent in memory and lead individuals to apply them as a frame of reference in understanding their

everyday lives (Lock & Funk, 2016). If a person strongly identifies with their racial group because this identity is important to his/her self-concept, for instance, then racial beliefs and norms will be applied in understanding and processing social information, judgments, and behavior. In addition, in-group and out-group symbols, related words and images to each, and in-group and out-group members may provide stimulus cues increasing the accessibility of specific group identities (Turner et al., 1994). For example, encountering an individual wearing a t-shirt with the words “Black Lives Matters” might lead someone to think of their own racial group identity. Also, group identities can be salient because they offer distinctiveness in relation to other groups in a social context (Forehand et al., 2002). Attending a Hispanic cultural festival might lead a non-Hispanic individual to think about their own racial group identity because it is unique in this particular context.

When applying these ideas to the world of sports, SIT contends that being part of a group who views sports favorably or identifying with a group of fans of a particular sport, team, or athlete has consequences for sport fans’ sense of connection/belongingness to others and their own self-esteem. More specifically, SIT suggests that highly identified sports fans view sports as a central and important part of their self-concept. Because of their strong identification with and psychological connection to sports, highly identified fans may use their favorite sports, teams, or athletes to maintain favorable self-concepts and positive self-esteem. In fact, sports researchers have applied SIT to explain why fans who strongly identify with sports teams exhibit higher levels of personal and collective self-esteem, an increased tendency toward positive emotions, a decreased tendency toward negative emotions, and lower levels of alienation and depression than fans who are not strongly



identified (Lock & Heere, 2017; Wann et al., 2001). In addition, SIT has been offered as a framework to explain why highly identified fans are more likely to engage in BIRGing (i.e., *basking in reflected glory* – “we won”) after their favorite team’s success, but will CORF (i.e., *cutting off from reflected failure* – “they lost”), and psychologically distance themselves when their team loses (Wann & Branscombe, 1990).

### **Social Identity Threats**

When positive perceptions of one’s own groups are challenged, however, individuals may experience a threat to their social identity (Branscombe et al., 1999). Branscombe and colleagues distinguish between two forms of social identity threats. One type is a value threat or something that threatens the shared values, norms, or practices of a group. The second type is a distinctiveness threat, which is anything that is viewed as undermining unique characteristics of a group. Because an individual’s social identity is strongly tied to group membership, when social identity threats occur, people will respond negatively and act to maintain positive perceptions of their group (Walton & Cohen, 2007). It is also interesting to note that some research has demonstrated that individuals react more negatively to threats to their social identity when it comes from a member of their own group (i.e., in-group member) than one from someone who is not a group member (i.e., outgroup member). Marques et al. (1988) referred to this phenomenon as the “*black sheep effect*” and demonstrated that “deviant” in-group members (i.e., group members who do not conform to in-group norms and behaviors) are evaluated more negatively than outgroup members who behave in the same way.

The ideas of social identity threats and the “*black sheep effect*” have noteworthy implications for sports generally and athlete activism in particular. Research has demonstrated that strongly identified sports fans are vulnerable to these types of social identity threats and will react negatively towards that threat to maintain positive perceptions of their team. For example, Sanderson et al., (2016) argued that athlete activists may be perceived as a threat to sports fans’ beliefs that social activism does not belong in sports and that authority and law enforcement should not be questioned. Therefore, the actions of athlete activists are considered “deviant” and pose as a value threat, especially to those who highly identify with sports. In reaction to this threat to their fan/sports identity, strongly identified sports fans should respond negatively to maintain positive perceptions of their team/group, especially when the threat comes from an in-group member (i.e., an athlete or another sports fan). The findings of Sanderson et al., (2016) were also consistent with the idea that some fans perceived the Rams’ players’ protest as a threat or attack on group values. Once these values were violated, some Rams’ fans showed their disapproval on Facebook and Twitter, including renouncing their fandom of their team.

Other sports research provides further support for the idea that perceived threats to strongly identified sports fans’ values contribute to negative reactions towards athlete activism. Devlin and Billings (2016), for example, showed that highly identified fans of professional soccer (a sport which tends to promote a keen sense of patriotism and national identity) reported higher levels of patriotism/nationalism beliefs than low identified fans. Therefore, highly identified sports fans (especially those who are fans of sports which are associated with strong patriotism/nationalism beliefs such as soccer or the NFL) may also be

more likely to view an athlete's social/political protest as violating cherished American values and "un-American" than those who are not highly identified sports fans (Smith, 2019). Therefore, using SIT as a guiding theoretical framework aids in understanding how social identity threats to important values and/or self-identities (i.e., beliefs about race, views about sports, social justice attitudes, patriotism, or sports/fan identification) may influence individuals' attitudes toward athlete activism and/or an athlete activist specifically.

## **Limitations of Literature and Research Aims**

Although past research has contributed much to understanding public reaction toward athlete activism, one limitation of this body of research is that it has mainly used qualitative methods and measures (Agyemang et al., 2010; Sappington et al., 2019). Many studies have examined online reactions to athlete protests to identify common themes present in social media postings (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a). However, although some quantitative studies have been conducted, these experiments tend to focus more on how athlete activism influenced fans' perceptions of brands endorsed by athlete activists, purchase intentions of endorsed brands, or liking of those brands (Schmidt et al., 2018b). For example, Park et al. (2020) conducted two quantitative experiments to examine how different news media framings (i.e., whether athlete activism was portrayed positively by CNN or negatively by FOX News) affected participants' attitudes toward a brand endorsed by an athlete activist (i.e., Nike). Results showed that participants had more negative attitudes towards an athlete-endorsed brand when they read a negatively framed news story about an athlete activist. In contrast, after reading a positively framed news story, participants' attitudes were more favorable.

One reason for the lack of quantitative research specifically measuring fans' attitudes towards athlete activists was the absence of a valid or reliable measure available of such attitudes. Quantitative studies on athlete activism have generally focused on purchase intentions (Schmidt et al., 2018b) or liking of brands endorsed by athlete activists (Park et al., 2020); consumption intentions toward the athlete activist (Mudrick et al., 2019); or emotional responses toward the athlete activist (Smith, 2019). However, Sappington et al., (2019)

recently developed the “Attitudes toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire” (ATAAQ) to specifically measure attitudes toward athlete activism across a range of competitive levels of sport (i.e., professional, Olympic, collegiate, amateur, or high school). Beginning with an initial pool of 40 items, Sappington et al., (2019) used exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to verify a 19-item five factor model demonstrated to be psychometrically strong with high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88). The five factors included in the ATAAQ include: (a) affective reactions (five items), which measure emotional responses (i.e., angry, upset, annoyed) to athlete activism; (b) perceived conflict with team (four items), which reflects the belief that athlete activism conflicts with team success or cohesion; (c) athlete role (three items), which assesses individuals’ beliefs about whether social activism is part of an athlete’s job or responsibility; (d) lack of political qualification/credibility (three items), which measures beliefs that athletes or not credible or knowledgeable about political/social issues; and (e) desired consequences/punishments (four items), which assesses individuals’ beliefs that athlete activists should be punished or face negative consequences due to their actions. Because the ATAAQ was only recently developed (2019), it was not available to researchers prior to this date. In the current thesis experiment, the ATAAQ was used as one of the main dependent measures to directly assess participants’ attitudes toward an athlete activist. Therefore, one primary purpose of the present study was to use both quantitative methods and measures to further investigate this issue. The use of quantitative methodology and assessments allowed for more experimental control of the manipulated variables, helped to ensure internal validity, and increased the likelihood of drawing causal conclusions from the data.

Another limitation of previous athlete activism research is that it mainly focuses on reactions and responses toward Black athletes, mostly because these athletes are more likely to engage in activism due to their being more directly affected by social injustices. However, much less is known about the consequences faced by White athlete activists. It is interesting to note that Schmidt et al., (2018a) also examined Facebook comments directed toward Megan Rapinoe, a White professional female soccer player for the Seattle Reign of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) and U.S. Women's National Soccer Team (USWNT). Rapinoe openly identifies as White, lesbian, and female and knelt during the playing of the national anthem during an NWSL game in 2016. She explicitly stated multiple times that her actions were in support of Kaepernick and to represent the oppression she has faced as a lesbian. As a result of her protests however, U.S. Soccer instituted a 2017 policy requiring all players to stand during the national anthem. It should be noted, however, that this policy has since been revised in 2020 allowing players to stand, kneel, or even remain in the locker room during the playing of the anthem. The analyses of Schmidt et al., (2018a) revealed three major themes in the Facebook comments toward Rapinoe. The first theme focused on beliefs regarding an athlete's role and conveyed the view that athletes and political stances do not mix. There was also a strong theme around Rapinoe's representation of America as a member of the USWNT, with many comments stating that Rapinoe should be respectful of the national anthem and the country because of her position on the USWNT. Finally, there were comments about freedom of speech and what that means in America. Interestingly, these comments supported Rapinoe and suggested that Americans should be free to voice their opinions and take a stand against social injustices.

Most importantly, however, were the major differences in comments directed toward Kaepernick (Black bi-racial male straight athlete) versus Rapinoe (White female lesbian athlete) —Kaepernick received personal attacks on his racial and gender identities, but Rapinoe did not. Kaepernick’s comments included hostile messages about the color of his skin and his gender. Again, these types of racial messages are common toward Black male athlete activists (Sanderson et al., 2016). In contrast, Rapinoe’s comments rarely mentioned sexual orientation and never mentioned race. Her comments focused more on discussion of an athlete’s role in professional sports.

However, because this study compared reactions toward a Black male or White female athlete activist, it is unclear whether the differential comments were due mainly to the athlete’s race or their gender. Research directly examining activism by Black female athletes is limited so much less is known about fans’ attitudes and reactions towards them (Hartmann, 2019; Piper, 2022). Yet, some recent activism by Black female athletes suggest that female athletes of color may also experience the type of negative backlash and racial messages directed toward Black male athlete activists. In 2019, U.S. hammer thrower Gwen Berry (Black female athlete) faced harsh criticism in the public and by members of both the Senate and Congress after she turned away from the American flag and draped a t-shirt with the words “activist athlete” over her head while on the podium at the Olympic trials. As a result of her attempt to highlight social injustice in America, she lost some of her sponsorships and received a one-year probation from the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (Chavez, 2021). Also, in 2020, Naomi Osaka (the #1 ranked female professional tennis player at the time) began to engage in criminal justice reform activism in response to the increase of

police violence towards Black and other people of color. Osaka, like Kaepernick, is bi-racial (her father is Black Haitian, and her mother is Japanese), and identifies as Black, Haitian, Asian, and Japanese. Her activism has made her a target of racial stereotypes and negative comments about her race/ethnicity, like those experienced by Kaepernick (Deflem, 2022). Although she has received harsh criticism due to her activism, her actions have also garnered praise and has been looked upon favorably both in the public and by the media (Calow, 2021). In sum, the findings of Schmidt et al., (2018a) and others (Deflem, 2022; Sanderson et al., 2016) suggest that reactions and attitudes toward Black athlete activists may be qualitatively different from those directed towards White athletes who engage in similar social/political protests.

Extensive social psychological research suggests that Black athlete activists may be perceived, judged, and responded to differently than their White counterparts due to racial stereotypes, views about an athlete's role in sports, and beliefs in the principles of modern racism (Kite & Whitley, 2016; McConahay et al., 1986). Based on this literature, the current thesis experiment examined whether an athlete's race would influence people's attitudes about him and his activism behavior. In addition, to investigate whether endorsement of "modern racism" principles contribute to some individuals' attitudes and evaluations of Black athlete activists, the current experiment included a measure of modern racism to explore this possibility. The Modern Racism Scale mor(MRS) developed by McConahay (1986) was designed to evaluate the cognitive component of this form of covert racism. This scale includes seven belief statements which assess individuals' views on the three principles of modern racism on seven-point Likert scales, with higher scores indicating stronger



agreement. Examples of these belief statements include “Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States” and “Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve.” Researchers have found that the MRS possesses satisfactory reliability (Cronbach’s alpha coefficients  $> .70$ ) as well as test-retest stability (Morrison & Kiss, 2017).

Finally, another limitation of recent athlete activism research is that it has focused mainly on social justice activism within a specific sport—professional football (NFL). Again, this is mostly since many of the latest and most highly publicized incidences of athlete activism have been by NFL players (i.e., Kaepernick, St. Louis Rams players). More recently however, athletes in another professional sport, the National Basketball Association (NBA), have become more vocal in their efforts to raise awareness about racial inequities. This increased social activism by professional basketball players occurred because the NBA allowed athletes to customize the back of their jerseys to include other things besides their own last name. Most NBA players took advantage of this opportunity and included the names of victims of police brutality as well as the motto “Black Lives Matter” on their jerseys. In addition to these steps towards raising public awareness, the NBA postponed some games during their shortened 2020 COVID season in response to new cases of police brutality that occurred. Because much is unknown about the public’s reaction to these recent incidences of social activism within the NBA, the proposed experiment also examined whether attitudes towards an athlete activist would depend on the sports league (NFL or NBA) in which he competes.

Existing research suggests that the NFL and NBA differ in other ways besides the sport athletes play (Schmidt et al., 2018a). As previously mentioned, the NBA has taken a more progressive approach to athlete activism and has been mostly supportive of players who engage in social activism. In contrast, the NFL has been extremely critical of and actively condemned athletes who have done so (i.e., Kaepernick). Schmidt et al., (2018a) argue this negative reaction is due to extreme beliefs of patriotism/nationalism within the NFL. Nationalism is particularly strong within professional football, especially post 9/11. In fact, researchers have argued the NFL to be the most militaristic sport in America because of pregame rituals such as military flyovers, frequent calls to support the troops, and the grand production of the national anthem before each NFL game (Butterworth, 2008; Fisher, 2014; Giardini & Newman, 2011; Schmidt et al., 2018a; Smith, 2012). As a result, NFL fans may also hold strong beliefs of patriotism/nationalism since they have been exposed to them as they attend and watch professional football games. These beliefs may then lead fans to have more negative attitudes towards an NFL than an NBA athlete who protests social injustices, especially if the athlete is believed to be disrespectful of America or its military (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a; Smith, 2019). In addition, based on assumptions from Social Identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), participants with strong patriotism/nationalism beliefs and/or strongly identified sports/NFL fans may have more negative attitudes toward an athlete activist than those who are only weakly identified because of perceived value threats to beliefs central to their self-concepts as patriotic Americans or avid sports fans (Devlin & Billings, 2016; Smith, 2019).

## **Overview of Thesis Study and Hypotheses**

To address the limitations previously identified, the present thesis experiment used quantitative methods and measures to examine fans' evaluations of and attitudes toward an athlete activist. Participants were recruited online from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and were compensated \$0.25 for their participation in the experiment. Data were collected online using Qualtrics survey software.

Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (Athlete's race: Black or White) x 2 (Sports league: NFL or NBA) between-subjects factorial design and read a fictitious ESPN article of either a Black or White NFL or NBA professional athlete who engages in social activism. The article included basic facts/statistics about the athlete, information regarding the athlete's support for social justice and activism, and fictitious examples of social media posts made by the athlete raising awareness about political/social injustices. After reading the article, participants' overall evaluations of and attitudes towards the athlete were assessed from their mean ratings on three impression judgment questions and their average scores on the Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ -- Sappington et al., 2019). Participants also reported their own opinions toward social activism on the Social Justice Scale (SJS --Torres-Harding et al., 2012); their level of sports identification on the Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ -- Wann, 2002); their patriotism/nationalism beliefs on the Patriotism/Nationalism scale (PNS -- Li & Brewer, 2004); and their views toward the belief statements on the Modern Racism scale (MRS -- McConahay et al., 1986).

Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

### **Hypothesis 1**

A significant main effect for the athlete's race on participants' impressions of and attitudes toward the athlete activist was predicted so that participants were expected to have more negative evaluations of and attitudes towards the Black than the White athlete activist. This hypothesis followed from the racial stereotype research of Blacks and Whites (Kite & Whitley, 2016), the findings from qualitative studies which demonstrated strong racial themes directed toward Black athlete activists (Frederick et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a), and the "Whiteness" norm assumed to exist in sports (Giardina & Newman, 2011; Smith, 2019).

### **Hypothesis 2**

A significant main effect for the athlete's sports league on participants' impressions of and attitudes toward the athlete activist was also expected. This main effect was predicted to show that participants would have more unfavorable impressions of and negative attitudes towards the NFL than the NBA athlete due to the presence of strong patriotic/nationalistic beliefs present in and conveyed by professional football (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a; Smith, 2019).

### **Hypothesis 3**

However, it was also hypothesized that these two main effects would be qualified by a significant two-way interaction between the athlete's race and the sports league in which he competes. This two-way interaction was expected to show the difference in participants' attitudes towards the Black and White athletes to be greater within the NFL than within the NBA. In addition, it was expected that attitudes towards the Black NFL athlete would be

more negative than towards the Black NBA player because of the strong patriotic/nationalistic themes present in professional football (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a; Smith, 2019).

#### **Hypothesis 4**

Based on the reviewed literature, participants' impressions of and attitudes toward the athlete activist were also expected to be related to their own view about social activism, their own level of fan identification/sports fandom, their own patriotism/nationalism beliefs, and their endorsement of principles associated with modern racism beliefs. It is important to note that HIGHER mean scores on the ATTAQ indicate more NEGATIVE athlete activism attitudes.

#### ***Hypothesis 4a***

A positive relationship between participants' own view about social activism (i.e., higher mean scores on the SJS) and their overall impression of the athlete activist (i.e., higher mean scores on overall impression index) was expected. This relationship suggests that the more favorable participants' own views toward social activism were, the more positive their overall impressions of the athlete activist would be (MacIntosh et al., 2020; Mudrick et al., 2019). However, a negative relationship between participants' own view about social activism and their attitudes toward the athlete activist was predicted. This relationship should show that the more positive participants' own views are towards social activism (i.e., higher mean scores on the SJS), the more positive their attitudes would be toward the athlete activist (i.e., lower mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ).

#### ***Hypothesis 4b***

Hypothesis 4b predicted a negative relationship between participants' own level of sports fandom and their overall average impression of the athlete activist. This relationship suggests that the stronger participants' level of sports fandom (i.e., higher mean scores on the SFQ) the more negative their overall mean impressions toward the athlete activist should be (i.e., lower scores on the average impression index). However, this hypothesis expected a positive relationship between fan/sports identification and athlete activism attitudes such that participants with stronger sports fandom (i.e., higher mean scores on the SFQ) would have more negative attitudes toward the athlete activist (i.e., higher mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ) because of perceived value threats to their identity as a sports fan (Sanderson et al., 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Wann et al., 2001).

#### ***Hypothesis 4c***

A negative relationship between participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs and their overall average impression of the athlete activist was expected. This relationship suggests that the stronger participants' beliefs about patriotism/nationalism were (i.e., higher scores on the PNS), the more negative their impressions of the athlete activist should be (i.e., lower scores on the overall impression index). However, a positive relationship between participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs and their attitudes toward the athlete activist were predicted. This relationship suggests that the stronger participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs were (i.e., higher mean scores on the PNS), the more negative their attitudes toward the athlete activist would be (i.e., higher mean attitude scores on the

ATAAQ) because of perceived value threats to their identity as a patriotic American (Devlin & Billings, 2016; Smith, 2019).

***Hypothesis 4d***

Finally, Hypothesis 4d predicted relationships like Hypotheses 4b & 4c, such that participants' beliefs in the principles of modern racism were expected to be negatively related to their overall impression of the athlete, but positively related to their mean athlete activism attitudes on the ATAAQ scores. More specifically, the higher participants' scores on the Modern Racism scale (MRS), the more negative their overall impression of the athlete would be (i.e., lower overall mean impression ratings) and the higher their mean scores on the ATAAQ (i.e., more negative attitudes toward the athlete activist) due to their endorsement of the principles contributing to modern racism (McConahay et al., 1986).

## Method

### Participants and Design

A total of 205 participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (Athlete' race: Black or White) x 2 (Sports league: NF, NBA, WNBA) between-subjects factorial design. The sample consisted of 60% ( $n = 122$ ) male, 40% ( $n = 82$ ) female, and one participant who declined to state their gender. Most participants were between 25-34 years (45%,  $n = 93$ ); 24% ( $n = 50$ ) were between 35-44 years; 15% ( $n = 30$ ) were 45-54 years; and 10% ( $n = 20$ ) between 18-24 years. There were also 10 participants (5%) who were 55-64 years and another two (< 1%) were 65 or over years. Although participants varied in age, they were homogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity: 91% White ( $n = 186$ ); 3% Asian ( $n = 6$ ); 3% Hispanic/Latinx ( $n = 6$ ); 2% Native American/Alaskan ( $n = 5$ ); and 1% Black/African American ( $n = 2$ ).

Participants were recruited online from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and were compensated \$0.25 for their participation in the experiment. Data were collected online using Qualtrics survey software.

### Manipulation of Athlete Articles

#### *Athlete's Race*

Participants read a fictitious ESPN article about the athlete, adopted from descriptions used by Park et al., (2020) and Schmidt et al., (2018b). The articles included basic facts including statistics about the athlete, information regarding the athlete's support for social justice and activism, and fictitious examples of social media posts made by the athlete raising awareness about political/social injustices. The athlete's race was manipulated by including a photograph of the athlete chosen from the Chicago Face Database, which is a free stimulus



set of faces and norming data available online (Ma et al., 2015). The photographs of the Black and White athlete were headshots with neutral facial expressions, with both males approximately the same age and level of attractiveness (mean attractiveness ratings: Black male = 4.07; White male = 4.03, on 7-point Likert scales, with higher ratings indicating higher attractiveness). In addition, the athlete's race was also manipulated by varying his name. This name manipulation was used successfully in social psychological research and was demonstrated to be effective in varying individuals' race (Bodenhausen et al., 1994). In the present study, the Black athlete's name was "De'Shawn Taylor", and the White athlete's name was "Hunter Taylor" (see Appendix A for the Black and White athlete photographs.).

### ***Sports League***

The sport's league that the athlete competed in was varied within the athlete article. Half of the participants read an article describing the athlete who competed in professional football (NFL) and the other half read the athlete competed in professional basketball (NBA). Four versions of the athlete article were constructed: (a) Black NFL athlete; (b) White NFL athlete; (c) Black NBA athlete; and (e) White NBA athlete (see Appendix B for the athlete articles).

### **Dependent Measures**

#### ***Impression judgments***

After reading the athlete article, participants' impressions of the athlete were assessed through their responses to three items on 7-point Likert scales. These three items were included as one of the main quantitative assessments of participants' attitudes toward the athlete activist. The first question asked participants to rate their general evaluation of the

athlete, where 1 = very bad and 7 = very good. Next, participants were asked their impressions of the athlete, where 1 = very negative and 7 = very positive. Finally, participants reported their liking of the athlete, where 1 = did not like at all and 7 = liked very much. Higher scores on these general impression items thus indicated a more positive overall impression of the athlete.

### ***Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire***

The second measure of participants' attitudes toward the athlete activist was the 19-item Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ; Sappington et al., 2019). This questionnaire is a reliable and valid scale (Cronbach's alpha range from .84 -.97) and includes five subscales: affective reactions, perceived conflict with team, athlete role, lack of political credibility/qualifications, and desired consequences/punishment. Items on this instrument were scored on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. It is important to note that **higher** scores indicate more **negative** attitudes towards athlete activism due to the wording of the items. Some examples of these items include: *"It bothers me when athletes speak out on political or social issues"* (affective reaction); *"When athletes speak out publicly on political or social issues, I think it causes tension among teammates"* (perceived conflict with team); *"I don't think athletes have a duty to speak out publicly on political or social issues"* (athlete role); *"I don't think that athletes have the necessary expertise to speak out on political or social issues"* (lack of political credibility/qualifications); and *"I think that athletes who speak out on political or social issues should be benched"* (desired consequences/punishment) (see Appendix C for full scale items).

### ***Social Justice Scale – Attitudes Subscale***

The Attitudes subscale of the Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012) contains eleven items that measure participants' own attitudes toward social justice and activism. This scale has been demonstrated to be reliable with high internal validity (Cronbach's alpha range from .82 -.95). All items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 =strongly agree. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards social justice/activism. Example items include "*I believe it is important to act for social justice*"; "*I believe that it is important to talk to others about societal systems of power, privilege, and oppression*"; and "*I believe that it is important to respect and appreciate people's diverse social identities*" (see Appendix D for all 11 sub-scale items).

### ***Sports Fandom Questionnaire***

The Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ; Wann, 2002) is a five-item measure of sport fandom/identification. Participants responded to items using a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Higher overall total scores indicate a higher level of sport fandom/identification. The SFQ has an internal consistency of alpha = .96 (see Appendix E for all items).

### ***Patriotism/Nationalism Scale***

Questions from Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989) Patriotism and Nationalism scales (PNS) as adapted by Li and Brewer (2004) were used to assess participants' patriotism/nationalism beliefs. The 11-item PNS was scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Higher scores on the PNS scale indicate stronger

patriotism/nationalism beliefs. Li and Brewer (2004) reported an internal consistency of alpha ranging from .73 - .86 (see Appendix F for all items).

### ***Modern Racism Scale***

The Modern Racism Scale (MRS; McConahay et al., 1986) is a 7-item measure of participants' endorsement of the beliefs associated with modern racism. All ratings were made on 7-point likert scales where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. In general, McConahay et al. (1986) reported an internal consistency of alpha over .70. Higher scores indicate stronger endorsement of beliefs contributing to modern racism. Examples of items on the MRS include: "*Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States*" and "*Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.*" See Appendix G for all scale items.

### ***Demographic Questionnaire***

On the demographic questionnaire participants reported their age in years, gender, and ethnicity (see Appendix H for the demographic questionnaire).

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and compensated \$.25 for their participation. The experiment took 15-20 minutes to complete. After obtaining participants' informed consent, they were told they would have five minutes to read an ESPN article about a professional athlete. Participants were then randomly presented with the photograph of either the Black or White athlete and read one of the four athlete articles depending on experimental condition: Black NFL player, White NFL player, Black NBA player, or White NBA player. After reading the athlete article, participants first

indicated their overall impressions of the athlete by responding to the three questions intended to assess their general evaluation of the athlete activist. After these impression questions, participants completed the 19-item Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ) specifically to assess their attitudes toward athlete activism. After the ATA AQ, participants completed the Attitude subscale of the Social Justice Scale (SJS) to assess their own beliefs about social justice. Next, participants indicated their level of fan/sports identification on the Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ), their own patriotic/nationalistic values on the Patriotism/Nationalism scale (PNS), and their endorsement of Modern Racism beliefs (MRS). Finally, participants reported basic demographic information, were debriefed about the true nature of the study, given instructions about how they would receive their compensation, and thanked for their participation.

## Results

### Tests of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1 through 3 were evaluated using a 2 (Athlete's race: Black or White) x 2 (Sports league: NFL or NBA) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with participants' level of sports fandom, beliefs of patriotism/nationalism, and levels of modern racism as covariates. Two indices were created and used as the main dependent variables in the analyses. First, participants' overall impression of the athlete was computed by taking the average of participants' ratings on the three questions assessing their general impression of the athlete activist. These items included participants' ratings of how bad/good they thought the athlete was, whether they evaluated the athlete negatively/positively, and how much they liked the athlete. All impression ratings were made on 7-point Likert scales where higher scores indicated a more positive impression of the athlete. This average overall impression index showed high reliability amongst the 3 items (McDonald's  $\omega = .81$ ). Next, participants' average score on the Attitudes toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATTAQ) was computed to include as the second dependent variable in the analyses. As described earlier, ratings to the 19 items on the ATAAQ were made on 7-point Likert scales where higher scores indicated a more NEGATIVE attitude toward athlete activism. This ATAAQ average score also showed high reliability amongst the 19 items used to create this index (McDonald's  $\omega = .97$ ).

In Table 1 the ANCOVA summary table is presented. Hypothesis 1 predicted a significant main effect for the athlete's race on participants' impressions of and attitudes toward the athlete activist such that participants were expected to have more negative

impressions and attitudes towards the Black than the White athlete activist. As seen in Table 1, there was no significant main effect of the athlete's race on participants' overall impression of the athlete activist,  $F < 1$ . However, there was a marginal effect of the athlete's race on participants' average ATAAQ score,  $F(1,198) = 3.44$ ,  $p = .065$ . Although participants reported having more negative ATAAQ attitudes toward the Black ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = .09$ ) than the White athlete ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = .08$ ) as expected, the post-hoc comparison revealed this mean difference was not statistically significant,  $t(198) = 1.01$ ,  $p(\text{tukey}) = .31$ .

**Table 1**

*Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Univariate Results for Dependent Measures of Attitudes Toward Athlete Activist*

IV	DV	SS	df	MS	F	p
Athlete	Impression	.074	1	.074	.091	.763
	ATAAQ	2.46	1	2.46	3.44	.065
Sport	Impression	.715	1	.715	.874	.351
	ATAAQ	14.10	1	14.10	19.68	<.001*
Athlete x Sport	Impression	.029	1	.029	.036	.850
	ATAAQ	.208	1	.208	.299	.591

*Note.* Statistical values for covariates omitted. \* $p < .05$

Hypothesis 2 predicted a significant main effect for the athlete's sports league such that participants were expected to have more negative impressions of and attitudes towards the NFL than the NBA athlete. As shown in Table 1, there was no significant main effect of the athlete's sports league on participants' overall impression of the athlete activist,  $F < 1$ . Again, however, the ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect of the athlete's sports

league on participants' average ATAAQ score,  $F(1,198) = 19.68, p < .001$ . Contrary to predictions, participants reported more negative ATAAQ attitudes toward the NBA athlete ( $M = 4.99, SD = .09$ ) than the NFL athlete ( $M = 4.77, SD = .08$ ). The post-hoc comparison showed this mean difference to be only marginally significant,  $t(198) = 1.78, p(tukey) = .08$ .

Hypothesis 3 predicted a significant two-way interaction between the athlete's race and the sports league in which he competed such that the difference in participants' impressions of and attitudes towards the Black and White athletes was expected to be greater within the NFL than within the NBA. In addition, impressions and attitudes towards the Black NFL athlete were expected to be more negative than towards the Black NBA player. The ANCOVA summary table showed that the predicted two-way interaction was not statistically significant both for participants' overall impression of the athlete activist and the average scores on the ATAAQ, both  $F_s < 1$ .

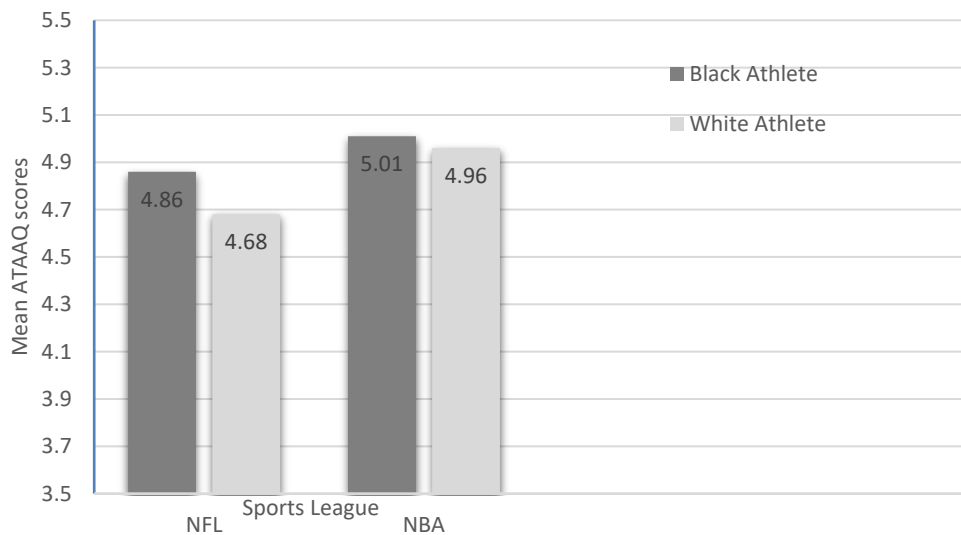
Post-hoc comparisons were also conducted to specifically examine the mean differences between participants' average ATAAQ scores. The relevant means included in these analyses are shown in Figure 1. These analyses revealed that although the mean difference in ATAAQ scores was greater for the Black NFL ( $M = 4.86, SD = .12$ ) than the White NFL athlete ( $M = 4.68, SD = .12$ ) as expected, this difference was not statistically significant,  $t(198) = 1.11, p(tukey) = .68$ . Participants also reported more negative average ATAAQ attitudes toward the Black NBA ( $M = 5.01, SD = .13$ ) than White NBA player ( $M = 4.96, SD = .12$ ), however, this mean difference was not statistically significant,  $t(198) = .33, p(tukey) = .99$ . Finally, contrary to predictions, participants reported more negative ATAAQ attitudes toward the



Black NBA ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = .13$ ) than Black NFL athlete ( $M = 4.86$ ,  $SD = .12$ ), although this difference was not found to be statistically significant  $t(198) = .88$ ,  $p(\text{tukey}) = .81$ .

### Figure 1

*Mean Attitude toward Athlete Activism scores (ATAAQ) as a function of Athlete's Race and Sports League*



### Correlational Analyses

Hypotheses 4a - 4d predicted that participants' attitudes toward and impressions of the athlete activist would be related to their own views about social activism, their own level of fan identification/sports fandom, their own patriotism/nationalism beliefs, and their own endorsement of modern racism beliefs. To examine these relationships, four new indices were created to compute participants' average score on the Social Justice Scale (SJS – 11 items); their average score on the Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ – 5 items); and their mean scores on the Patriotism/Nationalism (PNS – 11 items) and Modern Racism Scales (MRS – 7 items). All four of the average score indices showed high reliability amongst the

items used to compute them: SJS average (McDonald's  $\omega = .91$ ); SFQ average (McDonald's  $\omega = .84$ ); PNS average (McDonald's  $\omega = .82$ ); and MRS average (McDonald's  $\omega = .74$ ). Correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between these four average indices and participants' mean overall impressions of the athlete as well as their average scores on the ATAAQ. Again, note that higher mean scores on the ATTAQ indicate more NEGATIVE athlete activism attitudes.

In Table 2 the results of the correlational analyses are summarized. Hypothesis 4a predicted a positive relationship between participants' own view about social justice/political activism (i.e., higher mean scores on the SJS) and their overall impression of the athlete activist (i.e., higher mean scores on overall impression index). Consistent with this relationship, participants' average SJS scores were positively related to their overall average impressions of the athlete activist (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .66, p < .001$ ), suggesting that the more favorable participants' social justice attitudes were, the more positive their overall impression was of the athlete activist. Hypothesis 4a also predicted a negative relationship between participants' own view about social justice/political activism and their attitudes toward the athlete activist, such that the more positive participants' views are towards social activism (i.e., higher mean scores on the SJS), the more positive their attitudes should be toward athlete activism (i.e., lower mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ). Contrary to this prediction however, participants' average SJS score was positively related to their average mean ATAAQ scores (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .40, p < .001$ ), suggesting that the more positive social justice/activism attitudes participants held, the more negative their attitude towards athlete activism was. Therefore, results provided only partial support for Hypothesis 4a.

**Table 2**

*Correlation Matrix Among Participants' Overall Average Impressions, Mean ATAAQ Scores and Average Scores on Social Justice, Sports Fandom/Identity, Patriotism/Nationalism, and Modern Racism Scales*

		Impression	ATAAQ	SJS	SFQ	PNS	MRS
Impression	Spearman's rho						
ATAAQ	Spearman's rho	0.27***					
SJS	Spearman's rho	0.66***	0.40***				
SFQ	Spearman's rho	0.58***	0.50***	0.68***			
PNS	Spearman's rho	0.52**	0.58**	0.54***	0.68***		
MRS	Spearman's rho	0.39***	0.78***	0.46***	0.59***	0.66***	

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Hypothesis 4b predicted a negative relationship between participants' own level of sports fandom and their overall average impression of the athlete activist. This relationship suggests that the stronger participants' level of sports fandom (i.e., higher mean scores on the SFQ) the more negative their overall mean impressions toward the athlete activist should be (i.e., lower scores on the average impression index). Contrary to this prediction, participants' average SFQ scores were positively related to their overall average impressions of the athlete activist (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .58, p < .001$ ), suggesting that the higher participants' level of sports fandom was, the more positive their overall impression was of the athlete activist. Hypothesis 4b also predicted a positive relationship between fan/sports identification and athlete activism attitudes so that participants with stronger sports fandom (i.e., higher mean

scores on the SFQ) should have more negative attitudes toward the athlete activist (i.e., higher mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ) because of perceived value threats to their identity as a sports fan. As seen in Table 2, analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between these two variables, as predicted (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .50, p < .001$ ), providing support for this part of the prediction.

Hypothesis 4c predicted a negative relationship between participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs and their overall average impression of the athlete activist. This relationship suggested that the stronger participants' beliefs about patriotism/nationalism were (i.e., higher scores on the PNS), the more negative their impressions of the athlete activist should be (i.e., lower scores on the overall impression index). However, as seen in Table 2, a statistically significant positive relationship between participants' average PNS score and their overall impressions of the athlete was found (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .52, p < .001$ ), which was contrary to predictions. Hypothesis 4c also expected a positive relationship between participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs and their attitudes toward the athlete activist, suggesting that the stronger participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs were (i.e., higher mean scores on the PNS), the more negative their attitudes toward the athlete activist should be (i.e., higher mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ) because of perceived value threats to their identity as a patriotic American. This relationship was found to be statistically significant (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .58, p < .001$ ), providing support for this part of Hypothesis 4c.

Finally, Hypothesis 4d predicted relationships like Hypotheses 4b & 4c, such that participants' level of Modern Racism was expected to be negatively related to their overall

impressions of the athlete activist, but positively related to their mean athlete activism attitudes on the ATAAQ scores. However, contrary to predictions, participants' average Modern Racism scores were positively related to their overall impressions of the athlete activist (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .39, p < .001$ ). But as predicted, participants' mean levels of Modern Racism were strongly positively related to their average ATAAQ scores (*Spearman's*  $\rho = .78, p < .001$ ). Therefore, analyses revealed partial support for Hypotheses 4d.

## Discussion

### Summary and Discussion of Findings

In sum, one aim of the present thesis study was to use quantitative methods and measures to examine fans' evaluations of and attitudes toward an athlete activist. Because most athlete activism research has been qualitative in nature and focuses more on reactions towards Black athlete activists, experimental studies on this topic are limited and less is known about reactions to White athletes who engage in such activism (Kaufman, 2008). Two quantitative measures were included as the main dependent measures in the experiment to assess participants' impressions of and attitudes toward an athlete activist. The first measure assessed participants' overall impression of the athlete activist and the second measure, the Attitudes toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ; Sappington et al., 2019) assessed beliefs toward athlete activism. One independent variable of the study varied the athlete activist's race, while keeping other facts/statistics about him constant (i.e., age, athletic accomplishments, attractiveness). This race manipulation made it possible to directly compare participants' attitudes toward him depending on whether he was a Black or White athlete. Manipulation of the athlete's race also allowed examination of the roles racial beliefs and attitudes (Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a) and the "Whiteness" norm in sports may play in influencing reactions toward an athlete activist (Feagin, 2013; Smith, 2019).

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, results revealed no significant main effect of the Athlete's race on participants' overall impressions of the athlete activist. There was, however, a marginally significant main effect for the Athlete's race on participants' mean ATA AQ scores. More

specifically, this finding showed that participants reported more negative ATAAQ scores toward the Black than the White athlete, as predicted from the racial stereotype research regarding Black and White people (Kite & Whitley, 2016), the findings from qualitative studies which demonstrated strong racial themes directed toward Black athlete activists (Frederick et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a), and the “Whiteness” norm assumed to exist in sports (Feagin, 2013; Giardini & Newman, 2011; Smith, 2019). This finding provides additional support for the idea that fans’ racial beliefs regarding Black athletes as “dumb jocks” who should just “stick to sports” and not speak out on social issues contribute to more negative reactions directed toward a Black athlete activist compared to his White athlete counterpart (Giardini & Newman, 2011; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Hodge et al., 2008). Also, a Black athlete activist may be perceived as challenging existing power structures which favor White over Black people, further contributing to negative evaluations and criticism from fans (Frederick et al., 2017). Although this result was partially consistent with Hypothesis 1, a post-hoc comparison further showed the difference between these two mean scores was not statistically significant. Therefore, the impact of the Athlete’s race on participants’ mean ATAAQ scores must be interpreted with caution. Possible reasons for the lack of a meaningful effect of the athlete’s race on participants’ impressions and evaluations are further described in the “Limitations” section later in the discussion section.

The second independent variable in the current experiment varied the Sports league in which the athlete activist competed. Much of the recent athlete activism research and the most highly publicized incidences of activism have focused mainly on professional football

players. Less research or media attention has been given to athlete activists who compete in other sports. The Sports league manipulation was included to further examine whether the league in which an athlete activist competes impacted participant's impressions of and attitudes toward an athlete activist. This independent variable therefore allowed a comparison between a professional sports league (i.e., NFL) that has been critical of social activism by its players and conveys a strong presence of patriotism/nationalism beliefs (Butterworth, 2008; Fisher, 2014; Giardini & Newman, 2011; Schmidt et al., 2018a) with a league that has been more accepting of athlete activism and less nationalistic in its views (i.e., NBA).

Hypothesis 2 predicted a significant main effect for the Sports league in which the athlete competed such that participants were expected to have more unfavorable impressions of and negative attitudes towards the NFL than the NBA athlete due to the presence of strong patriotic/nationalistic beliefs in and conveyed by professional football (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a; Smith, 2019). Again, this main effect was not significant for participants' overall impression of the athlete. However, analyses revealed a significant main effect for Sports league on participants' mean ATAAQ scores. Interestingly, this main effect was opposite to predictions since participants reported more negative attitudes toward the NBA than the NFL athlete. This finding is inconsistent with past research suggesting that extreme patriotic/nationalistic beliefs present in and conveyed by the NFL is a contributing factor to negative reactions towards athlete activists (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a; Smith, 2019). It is unclear why participants held more unfavorable attitudes toward the NBA versus the NFL athlete, but one possibility (discussed in the "Limitations" section below) may be that participants may not have



remembered the sport league in which the athlete competed, therefore decreasing the effectiveness of this manipulation. Another possibility may be that participants did not perceive any difference in patriotism/nationalistic beliefs between the NFL and NBA, so these views had no influence on their attitudes toward the athlete activist. Lastly, a third factor may have been the recent highly publicized activism by NBA players (i.e., LeBron James) and cancellations of NBA games in response to incidences of police brutality towards Black citizens. Because media coverage of these events occurred during the time this experiment was conducted, participants' evaluations of the NBA athlete activist may have been impacted.

Manipulations of the Athlete's race and Sports league also provided the opportunity to explore whether athlete activist attitudes were influenced by the interaction of these two factors. Hypothesis 3 expected a significant two-way interaction between the Athlete's race and Sports league such that the difference in participants' attitudes towards the Black and White athletes was expected to be greater within the NFL than within the NBA. In addition, attitudes towards the Black NFL athlete were expected to be more negative than towards the Black NBA player because of the strong patriotic/nationalistic themes present in professional football (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018a; Smith, 2019).

However, the ANCOVA analyses did not demonstrate this predicted two-way interaction to be significant for either participants' overall impressions of the athlete or their mean scores on the ATAAQ. The lack of a significant interaction between the Athlete's race and Sports league suggests that activist attitudes toward the Black and White athletes were the same regardless of whether they competed in the NFL or the NBA. Also, the Black NFL athlete

activist was evaluated similarly to the Black NBA athlete, contrary to Hypothesis 2. Again, however, possible limitations of the manipulations of the independent variables (see “Limitations” section) may have likely contributed to the lack of statistically significant results. But the non-meaningful two-way interaction between the independent variables may also suggest that athlete activist attitudes do not depend on an athlete activist’s race or the professional sports league in which he competes.

In addition to the manipulation of the independent variables, another research aim of this experiment was to examine the role several participant beliefs play in influencing evaluations of and attitudes toward an athlete activist. More specifically, participants’ own beliefs regarding social justice activism, their own levels of sports fandom/identity, their own patriotism/nationalism beliefs, and their endorsement of views contributing to Modern Racism were assessed. Correlational analyses were then conducted to examine the relationships between these participant views and their overall average impressions of the athlete activist as well as their mean ATAAQ scores.

Hypothesis 4a predicted a positive relationship between participants’ own view about social justice/political activism (i.e., higher mean scores on the SJS) and their overall impression of the athlete activist (i.e., higher mean scores on overall impression index). This relationship suggested that the more favorable participants’ own beliefs toward social justice/political activism were, the more positive their overall impressions of the athlete activist would be (MacIntosh et al., 2020; Mudrick et al., 2019). Consistent with this hypothesis, results revealed a significant positive correlation showing that the more positive participants’ social justice views were, the more favorable their impression of the athlete

was. However, Hypothesis 4a also predicted a negative relationship between participants' own social justice/political activism views and their mean ATAAQ scores, such that the more favorable their own views were toward social activism, the lower their mean ATAAQ scores (i.e., more positive mean athlete activism attitudes). Contrary to this aspect of Hypothesis 4a, participants' own beliefs about social justice/activism were positively related to their mean ATAAQ scores, showing that the more favorable beliefs they held toward social justice, the more negative their attitudes were toward athlete activism (note again that higher scores on the ATAAQ reflect more negative attitudes). One factor affecting this result may be that participants may have quickly rushed through the scale items and did not read or process them carefully. Additional research is needed to understand this relationship more clearly.

Hypothesis 4b predicted a negative relationship between participants' own level of sports fandom and their overall average impression of the athlete activist. This relationship suggests that the stronger participants' level of sports fandom (i.e., higher mean scores on the SFQ) the more negative their overall mean impressions toward the athlete activist should be (i.e., lower scores on the average impression index) because of perceived value threats to their identity as a sports fan (Sanderson, et al., 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Wann et al., 2001). Results of the correlational analyses did not support this prediction since participants' mean SFQ scores were positively related to their overall mean impressions of the athlete activist. This positive relationship suggested that strongly identified sports fans of the NFL or NBA had more positive impressions of the athlete activist than less identified fans. Although the finding was contrary to expectations, this positive relationship may suggest that because strongly identified fans of the NFL or NBA are aware of the statistics and athletic

achievements of players who compete in those sports leagues, this knowledge may have contributed to their positive evaluations of the athlete activist based on the athletic accomplishments they read about in the athlete article.

Hypothesis 4b also predicted a positive relationship between fan/sports identification and athlete activism attitudes such that participants with stronger sports fandom (i.e., higher mean scores on the SFQ) would have more negative attitudes toward the athlete activist (i.e., higher mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ) because of perceived value threats to their identity as a sports fan (Sanderson et al., 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Wann et al., 2001). The correlational analyses demonstrated support for this part of Hypothesis 4b, suggesting that highly identified fans of the NFL or NBA may have perceived the actions of the athlete activist as a value threat to their strong identity as a sports fan and therefore reacted more negatively towards such activism.

The next hypothesis, Hypothesis 4c, predicted a negative relationship between participants' own patriotism /nationalism beliefs and their overall average impression of the athlete activist. This relationship suggests that the stronger participants' beliefs about patriotism/nationalism were (i.e., higher scores on the PNS), the more negative their impressions of the athlete activist should be (i.e., lower scores on the overall impression index) because of perceived value threats to their identity as patriotic Americans. Contrary to this expectation, findings demonstrated a positive correlation between participants' mean score on the Patriotism/Nationalism scale (i.e., higher scores on the PNS) and their mean overall impression of the athlete (i.e., higher scores on the overall impression index). This finding shows that participants' impressions of the athlete activist were not negatively

influenced by any perceived threat to their identities as patriotic Americans. Rather, participants' overall impressions of the athlete may have been based primarily on his overall athletic skill/achievements described in the ESPN article.

However, Hypothesis 4c also predicted a positive relationship between participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs and their attitudes toward the athlete activist as measured by the ATAAQ. This relationship suggests that the stronger participants' own patriotism/nationalism beliefs were (i.e., higher mean scores on the PNS), the more negative their attitudes toward the athlete activist would be (i.e., higher mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ) again because of perceived value threats to their identity as a patriotic American (Devlin & Billings, 2016; Smith, 2019). The correlational analyses revealed support for this aspect of the hypothesis since a positive relationship was found between participants' mean PNS scores and their mean attitude scores on the ATAAQ. This finding is consistent with the idea that participants who stronger patriotic/nationalistic views may perceive athlete activism as a threat to their identity as a patriotic American and disrespectful to the country they love so much. As a reaction against this value threat, these participants reacted more negatively and reported more unfavorable attitudes on the ATAAQ scale.

Lastly, Hypothesis 4d predicted relationships like Hypotheses 4b & 4c, such that participants' beliefs in the principles of modern racism were expected to be negatively related to their overall impression of the athlete, but positively related to their mean athlete activism attitudes on the ATAAQ scores. More specifically, the higher participants' scores on the Modern Racism scale (MRS), the more negative their overall impression of the athlete would be (i.e., lower overall mean impression ratings) and the higher their mean scores on

the ATAAQ (i.e., more negative attitudes toward the athlete activist) due to their endorsement of the principles contributing to modern racism. These modern racism beliefs include the view that racism and discrimination is no longer an issue for Black individuals in America, feelings of hostility and antagonism toward Black people who “complain” about continuing racial inequalities in our country, and resentment towards the American government giving undeserved (and unnecessary) “favors” to Blacks as a whole (McConahay et al., (1986). These negative feelings are believed to stem from strong beliefs in traditional (White) American values such as hard work, individualism, and self-reliance which lead to the perception that Black people fail to comply with these values because of their use of public assistance and government aid (McConahay et al., 1986). However, contrary to predictions and like the results for Hypotheses 4b and 4c, participants’ average Modern Racism scores were positively related to their overall impressions of the athlete activist, suggesting that these racial beliefs did not negatively influence participants’ general impression of the athlete. In contrast, but as predicted, there was a strong positive correlation between participants’ mean Modern Racism scores and their average ATAAQ scores, therefore providing support for this aspect of Hypotheses 4d. This positive correlation suggests that the more strongly participants endorsed beliefs and principles contributing to Modern Racism, the more negative their athlete activism attitudes were as measured by the ATAAQ.

Overall, correlational analyses demonstrated partial support for Hypotheses 4b - 4d, showing significant positive relationships between participants’ level of sports fandom/identity, patriotism/nationalism, and endorsement of Modern Racism beliefs and

their mean scores on the ATAAQ. More specifically, the more highly participants identified with the NFL or NBA or the stronger their patriotism/nationalism beliefs, the more negative their ATAAQ attitudes were because of perceived value threats to their identity as a sports fan (Sanderson, et al., 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Wann et al., 2001) or because of perceived value threats to their identity as a patriotic American (Devlin & Billings, 2016; Smith, 2019). Also, the stronger participants endorsed the principles contributing to Modern Racism, the more negative their attitudes were toward the athlete activist, as expected (McConahay et al., 1986). In fact, the relationship between participants' views of Modern Racism and their mean scores on the ATAAQ was the strongest of the correlations found (Spearman's  $\rho = .78$ ,  $p < .001$ ), further suggesting that beliefs in the core principles of Modern Racism is strongly related to attitudes toward athlete activism.

The expected relationships in Hypotheses 4b – 4d were only consistent with predictions for the average ATAAQ scores and not for participants' overall impression of the athlete. One likely reason for these findings could be because these two dependent measures were not strongly related to one another. As shown in the correlational analyses summarized in Table 2, the correlation between participants' overall impressions of the athlete and their average ATAAQ score was only .27, suggesting that although these two dependent measures were related, they may have assessed qualitatively different responses toward the athlete activist and therefore did not show parallel findings to one another. For example, the three impression judgment items were intended to assess participants' overall evaluation of the specific athlete described in the ESPN article (i.e., how bad/good they believed the athlete to be; whether their impressions of the athlete were negative/positive; and how much they liked

the athlete), where higher mean scores suggested a more favorable impression of that specific athlete. In forming these types of judgments, participants may have focused more on the athlete activist's skills and athletic successes described in the ESPN article, rather than on his activism activities, since the facts about the athlete's abilities in his sport may have been perceived to be more relevant in deciding how good or bad they believed the athlete was.

In contrast, participants' mean ATAAQ scores directly assessed participants' beliefs regarding athlete activism in general (i.e., participants' affective reactions, views regarding perceived conflict with the team, beliefs regarding an athlete's role and lack of political credibility/qualifications, and opinions regarding desired consequences/punishment for engaging in social activism), rather than toward the specific athlete activist participants read about in the article. Therefore, because the two main dependent measures were not strongly correlated and may also measure distinct aspects of participants' attitudes toward the athlete activist, results differed depending on the measure included in the analyses. Based on the reviewed literature (Devlin & Billings, 2016; Sanderson et al., 2016; Smith, 2019; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Wann et al., 2001), it might be that participants' own level of sports/fan identity, the strength of their patriotism/nationalism beliefs, and their endorsement of views contributing to Modern Racism are more strongly related to their attitudes toward athlete activism in general, but not necessarily to how they felt toward a specific athlete who engages in that activity. In general, results of these analyses suggest that it is important for researchers who study athlete activism to distinguish between participants' attitudes/reactions toward a specific athlete activist and their attitudes of athlete activism in general since these



evaluations may not necessarily be equal or may not be based on the same information or beliefs.

### **Limitations**

Although correlational analyses provided partial support for the hypotheses, there were several factors that may have limited the internal validity of this study and contributed to the lack of evidence in support of Hypotheses 1-3. First, it is important to note that the manipulation of the Athlete's race may not have been salient to participants and therefore may not have been effective. At the end of the experiment, participants were asked to indicate the race of the athlete they read about to check the effectiveness of the race manipulation. A review of this race manipulation check revealed that of the 205 participants, 83 of them answered incorrectly and could not remember the athlete's race, despite being presented with a picture of the athlete. Of the 83 participants who failed the manipulation check, 63 participants mistakenly indicated the Black athlete (De'Shawn Taylor) to be White, whereas only five participants erroneously stated the White athlete (Hunter Taylor) to be Black. The high number of participants who failed the race check calls into question the effectiveness of this manipulation and most likely contributed to the lack of meaningful effects due to the Athlete's race and its interaction with his Sports league.

Second, although the study included a manipulation check for the Athlete's race, it did not include an item asking participants to recall the Sports league in which the athlete competed. Without this item, there was no way to know if participants accurately recalled the athlete to be in the NFL or the NBA. Given that many participants could not remember the race of the athlete activist, it is also likely that some participants did not remember if he

played in the NFL or in the NBA. Again, if this was the case, then the lack of salience of the Sports league manipulation could also contribute to the finding that participants' mean attitudes toward the NBA athlete were more negative than their attitudes toward the NFL athlete – which was contrary to predictions. In addition, the possibility that participants could not recall the athlete's Sports league could have further contributed to the lack of a significant two-way interaction between the Athlete's race and Sports league.

Finally, another factor contributing to the lack of results supporting Hypotheses 1-3 may be the recent change in political climate in which large segments of the American population have attempted to distance themselves from using stereotypes or judgments based on ethnicity or race (Lentin, 2008; 2018). It could be that participants may be sensitized to racial issues and or actions protesting and/or raising awareness about social injustices due to race and are reluctant to report judgments based on an individual's race. In addition, it may also be that participants represent a shift in social and political views. In fact, participants' overall mean score on the Social Justice Scale was 5.46, on a 7-point scale, suggesting that in general, participants held mostly positive beliefs toward social justice and political activism. This positive shift in beliefs regarding activism may be based on recent events where injustices were uncovered toward members of ethnic minority groups (e.g., the George Floyd case, etc.). This exposure to injustices might have led participants to be more wary of making stereotypical judgments of members of ethnic minority groups.

### **Contributions**

Despite these limitations, one major contribution of this thesis study was that it used quantitative methods and measures to examine attitudes toward athletes who engage in social

activism. Because most of the research on athlete activism has been anecdotal or qualitative in nature, few studies have examined this topic quantitatively because of the lack of a reliable and valid quantitative measure of athlete activism attitudes. The Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ), one of the main dependent measures used in the current study, was only developed by Sappington et al., in 2019. Without this questionnaire, previous researchers did not have an experimentally valid and reliable way to assess participants' attitudes. The current study used the ATA AQ to examine how people feel about athletes who engage in social activism. Further, this experiment also included three additional items to assess participants' overall impression of the athlete activist. Examining both participants' mean attitude scores on the ATA AQ and their overall impression ratings of the athlete activist gave a more complete assessment of participants' evaluations of the athlete activist.

Another contribution of the present study was the use of quantitative methods to experimentally manipulate the independent variables of interest. Quantitative research methods allow for more experimental control, higher internal validity, and the ability to draw cause and effect conclusions from the results. Because of the limited number of quantitative research studies on this topic, the current study contributes to further understanding of and knowledge about this topic. Not only did the current experiment examine whether participants' impressions and attitudes of an athlete activist were influenced by an athlete's race, but it also considered the sports league in which he competed. Because both the NFL and NBA have wide appeal and enthusiastic fan bases, it is important to understand how fans of the different leagues react to athletes who engage in social activism.

A final contribution of this research was that it specifically examined the relationship between participants' beliefs about Modern Racism and their attitudes toward an athlete activist. Although past studies have implied that fans' racial attitudes and beliefs may play a role in their reactions to and evaluations of athlete activists, much of this research has not included a direct measure of such racial beliefs. However, the inclusion of the Modern Racism scale (McConahay et al., 1986) in the current study allowed for a direct examination of this relationship. Findings from the correlational analyses revealed a strong positive relationship between participants' average scores on the Modern Racism scale and their mean ATAAQ scores, as predicted. This relationship showed the higher participants' Modern Racism scores were, the more negative their attitudes were towards athlete activism, suggesting that beliefs in the principles of Modern Racism may be another contributing factor to the negative evaluations and reactions directed toward athlete activists.

### **Implications**

The present experiment also has theoretical implications for assumptions regarding social identity threats based on Social Identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT contends that when individuals experience a threat to their social identity or beliefs that are central/important to their identity, they will react more negatively towards those threats (Branscombe et al., 1999; Walton & Cohen, 2007). These types of social identity threats led to the prediction that participants who highly identify with the NFL or NBA or who have strong patriotism/nationalism beliefs should have more negative athlete activist attitudes than those who are only weakly identified because of perceived value threats to beliefs central to

their self-concepts as avid sports fans or patriotic Americans (Devlin & Billings, 2016; Smith, 2019).

Results from the correlational analyses generally supported these ideas. Participants who highly identified as NFL or NBA fans had more negative athlete activist attitudes as measured by the ATAAQ, suggesting that the athlete activist may have represented a threat to their fan identity and therefore reacted more negatively toward such activism. Similarly, participants who had strong patriotism/nationalism beliefs also reported more negative attitudes on the ATAAQ, further suggesting that the athlete's social activism may have represented a threat to their beliefs that America is the "best" country and authority figures (i.e., law enforcement) should be obeyed and respected (Kaufman, 2008; Sanderson et al., 2016; Smith, 2019).

One practical implication of the present experiment's findings relates to how fans' evaluations of a specific athlete activist may also influence consumption behaviors of athlete-associated merchandise and endorsed brands; team fandom and purchase of team merchandise, and game attendance (Mudrick et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020). For example, as more athletes advocate for social justice, this activism may lead some fans to be less likely to buy athlete-specific merchandise or brands endorsed by these activists. In addition, negative evaluations of athlete activists may spillover to impact attitudes and behaviors towards the athletes' teams, making it less likely that some fans would buy team merchandise or watch games either live or via media outlets. Also, other athletes, teams, or even some sports leagues may refrain from or be less likely to speak out against social injustices for fear of losing some of their fan base, decreased game consumption, or to avoid criticism from some

in the public or in the media. It is therefore important to understand the factors that contribute to negative attitudes and criticism directed toward athlete activists since they may not only impact the athlete, but his or her team may be affected as well.

Understanding the factors that lead to negative backlash directed toward athlete activists or sports activism in general, can also inform athletes, teams, or sports leagues how to lessen the amount of harsh criticism directed towards them due to such activism. Again, findings from the correlational analyses suggest that if athlete activism could be done in a way so that it is perceived to be less threatening to fans' sports identity or their identity as patriotic Americans, it might lessen the negative reactions and evaluations directed toward athlete activists. It is unclear as to whether this is possible or how exactly athlete activism can be perceived as less threatening to these highly valued social identities. However, the results of the present study provide a starting point to this discussion.

### ***Future Directions***

Although the current research makes both empirical and theoretical contributions to the athlete activism literature, there are numerous opportunities for future research. New lines of research would be to examine attitudes towards athletes of other racial groups (i.e., Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, etc.), towards female athletes, as well as towards athletes in non-professional sports (i.e., collegiate, Olympic). It would be interesting to compare whether attitudes towards and evaluations of female athletes is the same or different from reactions towards male athletes and if reactions differ depending on whether the activism was performed by a professional versus an amateur athlete.

In addition, exploring attitudes towards athletes in other traditionally male sports leagues such as the MLS (Major League Soccer), the MLB (Major League Baseball), and NASCAR (National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) and in traditionally female sports leagues like the WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) or NWSL (National Women's Soccer League) would be interesting, but also necessary. It would also be exciting to examine how race and gender of an athlete activist within the same sport might interact to influence fans' attitudes toward the athlete (i.e., Asian or White, male or female athlete who competes in professional golf).

Another extension of this research would be to explore fan attitudes toward coaches or team owners who engage in social activism to determine whether public reactions are the same or different from those directed toward athlete activists. In recent years for example, some notable professional and collegiate coaches (e.g., Steve Kerr, Head Coach for the Golden State Warriors; Gabe Kapler, Manager for the SF Giants; Dawn Staley, Head Women's Basketball Coach for the University of South Carolina) have been very vocal about their views regarding social injustices. It would be of interest to explore whether coaches who advocate for social justice are perceived in the same way as athlete activists and whether these perceptions might affect fans' loyalty toward the sports team itself.

Lastly, the current study revealed that several of participants' own views and beliefs were related to their evaluations of an athlete activist. These included their own views about social justice; their level of sport/fan identity; their own patriotism/nationalistic beliefs; and their endorsement of beliefs contributing to Modern Racism. Future research could further explore other individual difference variables such as participant race, gender, age, political affiliation,

as well as include other measures of participants' racial attitudes to determine how these factors impact attitudes towards athlete activists.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, many professional athletes have used their wide public platform to raise awareness about and protest social injustice in our country. Over the past few years, more athletes and sports leagues have become more actively engaged in and outspoken about what is happening in the world outside of sports. The multiple incidences of violence and police brutality towards Black citizens in recent years has raised awareness about systemic racism and corruption in America. As a result, more and more athletes have been advocating for social justice and protesting racial injustices within the criminal justice system, which may alienate some in the public and contribute to negative attitudes toward the athlete activists, draw fans away from that team or sport, and impact sport consumption behaviors such as purchasing athlete/team merchandise or attending games live or watching them through various media outlets. However, although much of the athlete activism research describes the harsh backlash and criticism experienced by athletes, some athlete activists (i.e., Naomi Osaka) have been praised by some in the public and by the media for their activism efforts because such activity shows the “human” side of the athletes who are aware of and care about problems/issues present in our society. Therefore, it is important to examine and understand the numerous factors contributing to the range of reactions and attitudes toward athletes who voice their opinions and engage in social activism. In the end, athletes who engage in such activism are only trying to encourage others to make the world a better, fairer, and safer place for everyone.



## References

- Agyemang, K., Singer, J. N., & DeLorme, J. (2010). An exploratory study of black male college athletes' perceptions on race and athlete activism. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 45(4), 419-435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690210374691>
- Barua, A. (2021, February 3). *Nate Boyer: The man behind the kneel*. The Tufts Daily. <https://tuftsdaily.com/sports/2021/02/03/nate-boyer-the-man-behind-the-kneel/>
- Bodenhausen, G. V., Kramer, G. P., & Süsler, K. (1994). Happiness and stereotypic thinking in social judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(4), 621–632. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.66.4.621>
- Branscombe, N. R., Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (1999). The context and content of social identity threat. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity* (pp. 35–58). Blackwell.
- Bransfield, J. (2011, May 8). *Monday morning musings: Professional athletes need to shut up and just play*. The Middletown Press. <https://www.middletownpress.com/news/article/Monday-Morning-Musings-Professional-Athletes-11863854.php>
- Butterworth, M. (2008). Fox Sports, Super Bowl XLII, and the affirmation of American civil religion. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32(3), 318-323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723508319715>
- Calow, E. (2021). 'Well, what was the message you got?': The discursive power of Naomi Osaka and her peaceful protest at the 2020 U.S. Open. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 19(6), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2021.2001171>
- Dreier, P., & Candaele, K. (2004, June 10). *Where are the jocks for justice?*. The Nation. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/where-are-jocks-justice/>
- Chavez, C. (2018, February 16). *Fox News' Laura Ingraham: LeBron should 'shut up and dribble' after criticism of President Trump*. Sports Illustrated. <https://www.si.com/Nba/2018/02/16/fox-news-laura-ingraham-lebron-james-president-donald-trump=-shut-dribble>
- Chavez, N. (2021, July 6). *Black women athletes still being scrutinized ahead of the Olympics despite their successes*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/06/us/black-women-athletes-treatment-olympics-spt/index.html>
- Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thorne, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. (1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34(3), 366–375. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.34.3.366>

- De B'beri, B. E., & Hogarth, P. (2009). White America's construction of black bodies: The case of Ron Artest as a model of covert racial ideology in the NBA's discourse. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 2(2), 89–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513050902759496>
- Deflem, M. (2022). The criminal justice activism of Naomi Osaka: A case study in the criminology of celebrity culture. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-022-09681-w>
- Devlin, M. B., & Billings, A. C. (2016). Examining the world's game in the United States: Impact of nationalized qualities on fan identification and consumption of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 60(1), 40–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2015.1127243>
- Devos, T., & Banaji, M. R. (2005). American = white? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(3), 447–466. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.3.447>
- End, C. M., Dietz-Uhler, B., Harrick, E. A., & Jacquemotte, L. (2002). Identifying with winners: A reexamination of sport fans' tendency to BIRG. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32(5), 1017–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb00253.x>
- Feagin, J. R. (2013). *The White racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Fischer, M. (2014). Commemorating 9/11 NFL-style: Insights into America's culture of militarism. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 38(3), 199-221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723513515889>
- Forehand, M., Deshpande, R., & Reed, A. (2002). Identity salience and the influence of differential activation of the social self-schema on advertising response. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(6), 1086-1099. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.6.1086>
- Frederick, E., Sanderson, J., & Schlereth, N. (2017). Kick these kids off the team and take away their scholarships: Facebook and perceptions of athlete activism at the University of Missouri. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 10, 17–34.
- Gantz, W., & Wenner, L. A. (1995). Fanship and the television sports viewing experience. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12, 56–74.
- Giardina, M. L., & Newman, J. (2011). The physical and the possible. *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies*, 11(4), 392-402.
- Gwinner, K., & Swanson, S. R. (2003). A model of fan identification: Antecedents and sponsorship outcomes. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 17(3), 275–294. <https://doi.org/10.1108/08876040310474828>

- Harrison, C. K., & Lawrence, S. M. (2004). College students' perceptions, myths, and stereotypes about African American athleticism: A qualitative investigation. *Sport, Education and Society*, 9(1), 33-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332042000175809>
- Hartmann, D. (2019). The Olympic "revolt" of 1968 and its lessons for contemporary African American athletic activism. *European Journal of American Studies*, 14(14-1). <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.14335>
- Hirshon, N. (2020). Social identity theory in sports fandom research. In R. Dunn (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on media fandom* (pp. 172-191). IGI Global.
- Hodge, S. R., Kozub, F. M., Dixson, A. D., Moore, J. L., III, & Kambon, K. (2008). A comparison of high school students' stereotypic beliefs about intelligence and athleticism. *Educational Foundations*, 22(1-2), 99-119.
- Hylton, K. (2020). "Black Lives Matter in Sport...?" *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 40, 41-48. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-07-2020-0185>
- Kaskan, E. R., & Ho, I. K. (2016). Microaggressions and female athletes. *Sex Roles*, 74(7), 275-287. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0425-1>
- Kaufman, P. (2008). Boos, bans, and other backlash: The consequences of being an activist athlete. *Humanity and Society*, 32(3), 215-237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016059760803200302>
- Kaufman, P., & Wolff, E. (2010). Playing and protesting: Sport as a vehicle for social change. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 34(2), 154-175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372350936021>
- Kelley, S.W., & Tian, K. (2004). Fanatical consumption: An investigation of the behavior of sports fans through textual data. In L. R. Kahle & C. Riley (Eds.), *Sports marketing and the psychology of marketing communication* (pp. 27-65). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kite, M. E., & Whitley Jr., B. E. (2016). *Psychology of prejudice and discrimination* (3rd ed.). Taylor & Francis.
- Kosterman, R., & Feshbach, S. (1989). Toward a measure of patriotic and nationalistic attitudes. *Political Psychology*, 10(2), 257-274. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791647>
- Kwon, H. H., & Armstrong, K. L. (2002). Factors influencing impulse buying of sport team licensed merchandise. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 11(3), 151-163.
- Lentin, A. (2008). After anti-racism? *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(3), 311-331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549408091846>

- Lentin, A. (2018). Beyond denial: 'Not racism' as racist violence. *Continuum*, 32(4), 400-414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2018.1480309>
- Li, Q., & Brewer, M. B. (2004). What does it mean to be an American? Patriotism, nationalism, and American identity after 9/11. *Political Psychology*, 25(5), 727-739.
- Lock, D., & Funk, D. (2016). The multiple in-group identity framework. *Sport Management Review*, 19(2), 85-96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2015.10.001>
- Lock, D., & Heere, B. (2017). Identity crisis: A theoretical analysis of 'team identification' research. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 17(4), 413-435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1306872>
- Ma, D. S., Correll, J., & Wittenbrink, B. (2015). The Chicago face database: A free stimulus set of faces and norming data. *Behavior Research Methods*, 47(4), 1122-1135. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-014-0532-5>
- MacIntosh, A., Martin, E. M., & Kluch, Y. (2020). To act or not to act? Student-athlete perceptions of social justice activism. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 51, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101766>
- Marques, J. M., Yzerbyt, V. Y., & Leyens, J. P. (1988). The "Black sheep effect": Extremity of judgments towards in-group members as a function of group identification. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 18(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420180102>
- McConahay, J. B. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the modern racism scale. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 91-125). Academic Press.
- McConahay, J. B., Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (1986). *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism*. Academic.
- Morrison, T., & Kiss, M. (2017). Modern racism scale. In *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences* (pp.1-3). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8\\_1251-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1251-1)
- Morse, B. (2020, July 3). *Jack Johnson: The Black boxer who sparked race riots after heavyweight win*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/03/sport/jack-johnson-fight-of-the-century-110-anniversary-boxing-cmd-spt-intl/index.html>.
- Mudrick, M., Sauder, M. H., & Davis, M. (2019). When athletes don't "stick to sports": The relationship between athlete political activism and sport consumer behavior. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 42(2), 177-200.

- Park, B., Park, S., & Billings, A. C. (2020). Separating perceptions of Kaepernick from perceptions of his protest: An analysis of athlete activism, endorsed brand, and media effects. *Communication & Sport*, 8(4-5), 629-650. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519894691>
- Piper, T. (2022). #NoJusticeNoLeBron and the persistence of messianic masculinity in Black athlete activism. *International Journal of Communication*, 16, 1197-1219.
- Sanderson, J., Frederick, E., & Stocz, M. (2016). When athlete activism clashes with group values: Social identity threat management via social media. *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(3), 301-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1128549>
- Sappington, R., Keum, B. T., & Hoffman, M. (2019). Arrogant, ungrateful, anti-American degenerates: Development and initial validation of the attitudes toward athlete activism questionnaire (ATAAQ). *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 45(3), 301-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1128549>
- Schmidt, S., Frederick, E.L., Pegoraro, A., & Spencer, T. C. (2018a). An analysis of Colin Kaepernick, Megan Rapinoe, and the National Anthem protests. *Communication and Sport*, 7(5), 653-677. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479518793625>
- Schmidt, S. H., Shreffler, M. B., Hambrick, M. E., & Gordon, B. S. (2018b). An experimental examination of activist type and effort on brand image and purchase intentions. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 27(1), 31-43. <https://doi.org/10.32731/SMQ.271.032018.03>
- Schmittl, A., & Sanderson, J. (2015). Talking about Trayvon in 140 characters: Exploring NFL players' tweets about the George Zimmerman verdict. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 39, 332-345.
- Schultz, J. (2005). Reading the catsuit: Serena Williams and the productions of blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 29(3), 338-357. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723505276230>
- Smith, L. (2019). Stand up, show respect: Athlete activism, nationalistic attitudes, and emotional response. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 22.
- Smith L. R. (2012). Winning isn't everything: The effect of nationalism bias on enjoyment of a mediated sporting event. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 5(2), 176-192. <https://doi.org/10.1123/IJSC.5.2.176>
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Sciences Information*, 13(2), 65-93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204>

- Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 33(1), 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.33.020182.000245>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–48). Brooks/Cole.
- Torres-Harding, S. R., Siers, B., & Olson, B. D. (2012). Development and psychometric evaluation of the social justice scale (SJS). *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1-2), 77-88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-011-9478-2>
- Turner, J., Oakes, P., Haslam, S., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: Cognition and social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 454-463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167294205002>
- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82-96. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.1.82>
- Wann, D. L. (2001, June). *Encouraging positive adult behavior at youth sporting events: Changing to a culture of FUN* [Conference session]. National Alliance for Youth Sport Summit, Chicago, IL, United States.
- Wann, D. L. (2002). Preliminary validation of a measure for assessing identification as a sport fan: The sport fandom questionnaire. *International Journal of Sport Management*, 3, 103-115.
- Wann, D. L. (2006a). The causes and consequences of sport team identification. In A. A. Raney & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Handbook of sports and media* (pp. 331–352). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Wann, D. L. (2006b). Examining the potential causal relationship between sport team identification and psychological well-being. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 29(1), 79-95.
- Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1990). Die-hard and fair-weather fans: Effects of identification on BIRGing and CORFing tendencies. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 14(2), 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372359001400203>
- Wann, D. L., Dolan, T. J., McGeorge, K. K., & Allison, J. A (1994). Relationships between spectator identification and spectators' perceptions of influence, spectators' emotions, and competition outcome. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 16, 347–364.
- Wann, D. L., Haynes, G., McLean, B., & Pullen, P. (2003). Sport team identification and willingness to consider anonymous acts of hostile aggression. *Aggressive Behavior*, 29(5), 406–413. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.10046>

- Wann, D. L., Melnick, M. J., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. G. (2001). *Sport fans: The psychology and social impact of sport spectators*. Routledge.
- Wann, D. L., Roberts, A., & Tindall, J. (1999). Role of team performance, team identification, and self-esteem in sport spectators' game preferences. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 89(3), 945-950. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pms.1999.89.3.945>
- Wann, D. L., Schrader, M. P., & Adamson, D. R. (1998). The cognitive and somatic anxiety of sport spectators. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 21(3), 322–337.
- Williamson, D. P., Zhang, J. J., Pease, D. G., & Gaa, J. P. (2003). Dimensions of spectator identification associated with women's professional basketball game attendance. *International Journal of Sport Management*, 4, 59–91.
- Yogeeswaran, K., & Dasgupta, N. (2010). Will the “real” American please stand up? The effect of implicit national prototypes on discriminatory behavior judgments. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(10), 1332-1345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210380928>

**APPENDIX A**

**Athlete Photographs**

BLACK ATHLETE – De'Shawn Taylor





*WHITE ATHLETE – Hunter Taylor*



## APPENDIX B

### ESPN Athlete Articles: Black NFL, White NFL, Black NBA, & White NBA

The screenshot shows the ESPN website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the ESPN logo and links for NFL, NBA, NHL, MLB, and other sports. Below that, there's a sub-navigation bar with links for Home, Draft, Teams, Players, Depth Charts, ESPN Draft Challenge, Scores, Schedule, and More. The main article title is "NFL Athlete De'Shawn Taylor Taking a Knee for Social Justice". The author is listed as "ESPN Staff". The article text describes Taylor as a 23-year-old American football running back of the NFL, drafted in 2017. It mentions his rookie season performance and his role as a starting running back. The article also discusses his advocacy for the Black Lives Matter movement, his social media presence, and his on-field actions, such as kneeling during the National Anthem and displaying the names of victims of police brutality on his uniform and cleats. Below the text, there are three tweets from De'Shawn Taylor (@DeShawnTaylor) related to the article's theme.

**NFL Athlete De'Shawn Taylor Taking a Knee for Social Justice**

ESPN Staff

De'Shawn Taylor is a 23-year-old American football running back of the National Football League (NFL). Taylor was drafted with the fifth overall pick in the 2017 NFL Draft. He rushed for 1,106 yards in his rookie season and was a finalist for Offensive Rookie of the Year by the Associated Press. Taylor has been the starting running back for his team since he was drafted.

Off the field, Taylor is a strong advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement and regularly uses his social media platform to raise awareness about continuing social injustices in the United States. On the field, Taylor chooses to kneel during the playing of the National Anthem before games and displays the names of victims of police brutality on his uniform and cleats.

Some of his recent Twitter posts can be found below.

**De'Shawn Taylor** @DeShawnTaylor  
I'm not gonna be silent on what's going on. I'm really just tired as hell [#RIPGeorgeFloyd](#) [#justiceforahmaud](#)

**De'Shawn Taylor** @DeShawnTaylor  
I'll never shut up and just play [#SayHerName](#)

**De'Shawn Taylor** @DeShawnTaylor  
I don't care if it's an 'acceptable' form of protest or not. Use your voice and fight for what's right! [#BlackLivesMatter](#)

# NFL Athlete Hunter Taylor Taking a Knee for Social Justice



Hunter Taylor is a 23-year-old American football running back of the National Football League (NFL). Taylor was drafted with the fifth overall pick in the 2017 NFL Draft. He rushed for 1,106 yards in his rookie season and was a finalist for Offensive Rookie of the Year by the Associated Press. Taylor has been the starting running back for his team since he was drafted.



Off the field, Taylor is a strong advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement and regularly uses his social media platform to raise awareness about continuing social injustices in the United States. On the field, Taylor chooses to kneel during the playing of the National Anthem before games and displays the names of victims of police brutality on his uniform and cleats.



Some of his recent Twitter posts can be found below.

 **Hunter Taylor**   
@HunterTaylor 

I'm not gonna be silent on what's going on. I'm really just tired as hell [#RIPGeorgeFloyd](#) [#justiceforahmaud](#)

 **Hunter Taylor**   
@HunterTaylor 

I'll never shut up and just play [#SayHerName](#)

 **Hunter Taylor**   
@HunterTaylor 

I don't care if it's an 'acceptable' form of protest or not. Use your voice and fight for what's right! [#BlackLivesMatter](#)

# NBA Athlete De’Shawn Taylor Taking a Knee for Social Justice



De’Shawn Taylor is a 23-year-old American point guard in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Taylor was drafted with the fifth overall pick in the 2017 NBA Draft. He had a 47.3% shooting average in his rookie season and was a finalist for Rookie of the Year. Taylor has been the starting point guard for his team since he was drafted.

Off the court, Taylor is a strong advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement and regularly uses his social media platform to raise awareness about continuing social injustices in the United States. On the court, Taylor chooses to kneel during the playing of the National Anthem before games and displays the names of victims of police brutality on his uniform and shoes.

Some of his recent Twitter posts can be found below.

**De’Shawn Taylor** @DeShawnTaylor  
I’m not gonna be silent on what’s going on. I’m really just tired as hell #RIPGeorgeFloyd #justiceforahmaud

**De’Shawn Taylor** @DeShawnTaylor  
I’ll never shut up and just play #SayHerName

**De’Shawn Taylor** @DeShawnTaylor  
I don’t care if it’s an ‘acceptable’ form of protest or not. Use your voice and fight for what’s right! #BlackLivesMatter

# NBA Athlete Hunter Taylor Taking a Knee for Social Justice



Hunter Taylor is a 23-year-old American point guard in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Taylor was drafted with the fifth overall pick in the 2017 NBA Draft. He had a 47.3% shooting average in his rookie season and was a finalist for Rookie of the Year. Taylor has been the starting point guard for his team since he was drafted.



Off the court, Taylor is a strong advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement and regularly uses his social media platform to raise awareness about continuing social injustices in the United States. On the court, Taylor chooses to kneel during the playing of the National Anthem before games and displays the names of victims of police brutality on his uniform and shoes.



Some of his recent Twitter posts can be found below.

**Hunter Taylor** @HunterTaylor  
I'm not gonna be silent on what's going on. I'm really just tired as hell #RIPGeorgeFloyd #justiceforahmaud

**Hunter Taylor** @HunterTaylor  
I'll never shut up and just play #SayHerName

**Hunter Taylor** @HunterTaylor  
I don't care if it's an 'acceptable' form of protest or not. Use your voice and fight for what's right! #BlackLivesMatter

## APPENDIX C

### Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ – 19 items)

All items scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. **HIGHER** scores indicate more **NEGATIVE** attitudes toward athlete activism.

#### **Affective Reactions**

When athletes speak out on political or social issues, it makes me upset.

When athletes speak out on political or social issues, it makes me angry.

It bothers me when athletes speak out on political or social issues.

It disgusts me when athletes speak out on political or social issues.

I get annoyed when athletes speak out on political or social issues.

#### **Perceived Conflict with Team**

When athletes speak out publicly on political or social issues, I think it causes tension among teammates.

I think that it creates issues in the locker room when athletes speak out on a political or social issue.

I think that it disrupts the team culture when athletes speak out on a political or social issue.

When athletes speak out on political or social issues I think it can hurt their team's performance.

#### **Athlete Role**

I don't think athletes have a duty to speak out publicly on political or social issues.

I think that it's not part of an athlete's job to speak out publicly on political or social issues.

I don't think it is important for athletes to speak out publicly on political or social issues.

#### **Lack of Political Credibility/Qualifications**

I don't think that athletes have the necessary expertise to speak out on political or social issues.

I don't think that athletes are informed enough to speak out publicly on political or social issues.

I don't think that athletes are intelligent enough to speak out on political or social issues.

### **Desired Consequences/Punishment**

I think that athletes who speak out on political or social issues should be cut from their team.

I think that athletes who speak out on political or social issues should face negative consequences.

I think that athletes who speak out on political or social issues should be benched.

When athletes speak out on political or social issues, I think they should be shunned by their teammates.

## APPENDIX D

### Social Justice Scale (SJS) – Attitudes Subscale (11 items)

All items scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. **HIGHER** scores indicate more **POSITIVE** attitudes towards social justice.

I believe that it is important to make sure that all individuals and groups have a chance to speak and be heard, especially those from traditionally ignored or marginalized groups.

I believe that it is important to allow individuals and groups to define and describe their problems, experiences and goals in their own terms.

I believe that it is important to talk to others about societal systems of power privilege, and oppression.

I believe that it is important to try to change larger societal conditions that cause individual suffering and impede well-being.

I believe that it is important to help individuals and groups to pursue their chosen goals in life.

I believe that it is important to promote the physical and emotional well-being of individuals and groups.

I believe that it is important to respect and appreciate people's diverse social identities.

I believe that it is important to allow others to have meaningful input into decisions affecting their lives.

I believe that it is important to support community organizations and institutions that help individuals and groups achieve their aims.

I believe that it is important to promote fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, obligations, and resources in our society.

I believe that it is important to act for social justice.



## APPENDIX E

### Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ – 5 items)

All items scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. **HIGHER** scores indicate more fan identification with the specific sport.

I consider myself to be a football (basketball) fan.

My friends see me as a football (basketball) fan.

I believe that following football (basketball) is the most enjoyable form of entertainment.

My life would be less enjoyable if I were not able to follow football (basketball).

Being a football (basketball) fan is very important to me.

## Appendix F

### Patriotism/Nationalism Scale (PNS – 11 items)

All items scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. **HIGHER** scores indicate stronger patriotism/nationalism beliefs.

I am proud of be an American.

I am emotionally attached to America and emotionally affected by its actions.

Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to the U.S. always remains strong.

The fact I am an American is an important part of my identity.

In general, I have very little respect for the American people (reverse-scored).

In view of America's moral and material superiority, it is only right that we should have the biggest say in deciding United Nations policy.

The first duty of every young American is to honor the national American history and heritage.

Other countries should try to make their government as much like ours as possible.

Foreign nations have done some very fine things, but it takes American to do things in a big way.

It is really NOT important that the U.S. be number one in whatever it does (reverse-scored).

People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong.

## Appendix G

### Modern Racism Scale (MRS -- 7 items)

All items scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. \*Reverse scored item. **HIGHER** scores indicate stronger Modern Racism beliefs.

1. Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States
2. It is easy to understand the anger of Black people in America. \*
3. Blacks have more influence upon school desegregation plans than they ought to have.
4. Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.
5. Blacks should not push themselves where they are not wanted.
6. Over the past few years, Black have gotten more economically than they deserve.
7. Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to Blacks than they deserve.

**APPENDIX H**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

1) What is your age?

18-24 years old \_\_\_\_\_

25-34 years old \_\_\_\_\_

35-44 years old \_\_\_\_\_

45-54 years old \_\_\_\_\_

55-64 years old \_\_\_\_\_

65 years or older \_\_\_\_\_

Decline to state \_\_\_\_\_

2) With what gender do you most identify?

Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

Decline to state \_\_\_\_\_

3) With what ethnicity do you most identify? (Choose one)

White/Caucasian \_\_\_ African American \_\_\_

Asian \_\_\_ Latinx \_\_\_

Other (please identify) \_\_\_\_\_

Decline to state \_\_\_\_\_