

DEVELOPING CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROFILES OF STUDENT-ATHLETES: A COMPARISON WITH NON-ATHLETES

H. Ray Wooten, Jr.
St. Mary's University

Clair Hamilton Usher
Southwest Texas State University

W. Larry Osborne
University of North Carolina, Greensboro

ABSTRACT

Student-athletes' and non-athletes' scores on several career-related assessments are compared. Results of two-way ANOVAs indicated that student-athletes highly value physical activity and spend more time in leisure activities than non-athletes. No differences in career maturity scores were found. Implications for programming to accommodate the special needs of student-athletes are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The literature is explicit in describing the developmental deficits, transitional problems, and academic deficiencies of student-athletes on our college campuses (Lang, Dunham, & Alpert, 1988; Lanning, 1982; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988; Remer, Tongate, & Watson, 1978; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981). These depictions of student-athletes are mixed reports of developmental concerns that manifest themselves in personal, academic, and career problems. Educators have responded with an array of developmental and psycho-educational programs emphasizing skill training and developing personal competencies for student-athletes (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988).

A major vehicle for implementing skills and psycho-educational training for student-athletes is through career/life planning courses. Career/life planning addresses deficits of career exploration and decision-making that can subsequently be transferred into interpersonal and other life skill areas. Wooten and Hinkle (1992) describe the process as facilitating student-athletes to become purposefully active in the career/life planning process through exploring careers, assessing personality variables that affect the process, gathering and analyzing information concerning the world of work, developing a process of decision-making for educational and career plans, and developing skills for academic, career, and life planning. The career/life planning process for student-athletes facilitates the active exploration of various life, identity, and career alternatives and possibilities that have heretofore been narrowly defined. If implemented early, the process can serve as a preventive program in assisting student-athletes to acquire resources (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, and skills) that can help them make a successful transition from sport, given that only a small percentage of student-athletes progress to professional ranks.

CAREER/LIFE ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive theoretical framework for describing a person's career/life development is Super's (1957) life-span developmental theory. Super proposes that people enter into occupations which allow for the greatest amount of self-expression reflecting the self-concept. The behaviors manifested to implement that self-concept are a function of the individual's stage of career/life development. A developmental approach to career assessment and counseling ascertains the student-athlete's attitudes about career planning and exploration, knowledge of occupational requirements and opportunities, decision-making skills, values, salience of work roles, interests, aptitudes, and the individual's understanding of how this information relates to developmental tasks currently and in the future (Super, Osborne, Walsh, Brown, & Niles, 1992). Based on this approach, a contemporary assessment battery that outlines the important factors for career/life planning has been proposed (Super et al., 1992).

The majority of current career/life models are based on the career development needs of non-athletes. Subsequently, little research has investigated the student-athlete's career/life development profile. As a result of working with student-athletes in the classroom, the investigators of the present study believed that exploratory inquiry into the comparisons between student-athletes' career/life development as compared to non-athletes' would lead to more effective counseling strategies for student-athletes. Such a profile could determine the special needs of student-athletes and direct programming for this particular student population.

PURPOSE

In this study, a comparison was made between student-athletes' and non-athletes' scores on several career development inventories suggested by Super, Osborne, Walsh, Brown, & Niles (1992). Seven research questions were posed for this study:

1. Do student-athletes and non-athletes differ on any of the 21 values assessed by the Values Scale (Super & Nevill, 1985b)?
2. Do male and female students differ on any of these values?
3. Are there significant student-athlete by gender interaction effects on any of these values?
4. Do student-athletes and non-athletes differ on the participation, commitment, and values expectation scores for each of the five life roles (study, work, family, community service, and leisure) as assessed by the Saliency Inventory (Super & Nevill, 1985a)?
5. Are there significant gender or interaction effects on these saliency scores?
6. Do student-athletes and non-athletes differ on the attitudinal components (career planning, career exploration, and combined attitudinal scale) or knowledge components (decision-making skills, knowledge of the world of work, and combined knowledge scale) of career maturity as assessed by the Career Development Inventory (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1981)?
7. Are there significant gender or interaction effects on these CDI scores?

METHOD

Participants

During the 1990-91 academic year at a medium-sized, state-supported university in the South, a sample of 41 student-athletes (83% males and 17% females) and 178 non-athletes (29% males and 71% females) completed the Values Scale (Super & Nevill, 1985b), Career Development Inventory (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1981), and Saliency Inventory (Super & Nevill, 1985a). Completion of these instruments was required for a semester-long, three-credit course in career/life planning. The student-athletes were non-revenue scholarship athletes representing an NCAA Division II institution in soccer, basketball, and tennis. Both groups contained students representing all class ranks, with a majority in both groups being white (93% of the student-athlete group and 69% of the non-athlete group).

Measures

The Values Scale (VS) (Super & Nevill, 1985b) is an inventory which yields results on 21 scales that include both extrinsic and intrinsic values. The scales are Ability Utilization, Achievement, Advancement, Aesthetics, Altruism, Authority, Autonomy, Creativity, Economic Rewards, Economic Security, Lifestyle, Personal Development, Physical Activity, Physical Prowess, Prestige, Risk, Social Interaction, Social Relations, Variety, Working Conditions, and Cultural Identity. Scores on each scale range from "1" to "4."

The Career Development Inventory (CDI) (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1981) yields standard scores on attitudes and knowledge believed to be associated with progress and satisfaction in occupations (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1992). The two attitudinal scales are career planning (CP) and career exploration (CE), and the two cognitive scales are decision-making (DM) and knowledge of the world of work (WW). Also computed for each person are a knowledge of preferred occupational score (PO); a combined attitudinal scale (CDA, a combination of CP and CE); a combined cognitive score (CDK, a combination of DM and WW); and a combined total career maturity score (COT, a combination of CP, CE, DM, and WW).

The Saliency Inventory (SI) (Super & Nevill, 1985a) evaluates an individual's orientation to life by measuring the relative importance of five life roles: studying, working, community service, home/family, and leisure activities. Saliency of each of these roles is measured in three ways: (1) actual participation or time spent in the role; (2) emotional commitment to the role; and (3) values one expects to meet in each role in the future. Thus, the inventory yields a participation, commitment, and values expectation score for each of the five life roles. The scores range from "1" to "4."

Data Analysis

Two-way analyses of variance were conducted on each scale score from VS, CDI, and SI. The three classification variables were student-athlete versus non-athlete, gender, and student-athlete by gender interaction. Because most of the student-athletes were male and most of the non-athletes were female, gender was included in the models to examine the possibility of significant differences attributed to this factor. An experimentwise error rate of .05 was set for each series of analysis; the Bonferonni correction was used to determine the significance level for each dependent variable.

RESULTS

VS Results

On the VS, student-athletes and non-athletes differed only on the value for physical activity ($F(1,174) = 16.44, p < .002$). Not surprisingly, the mean score on physical activity for student-athletes (3.15) was significantly higher as compared to non-athletes (2.40). There were no significant main effects for gender or significant interaction effects on the VS scores.

SI Results

On the SI, only one significant main effect for athlete status was found ($F(1,189) = 16.04, p < .003$). The student-athletes had significantly higher mean scores on participation in the leisure role ($M = 3.36$) than non-athletes ($M = 2.84$). Thus, it appears that student-athletes could be expected to spend more of

their time in leisure activities than non-athletes. There were no significant main effects for gender or significant interaction effects on the SI scores.

CDI Results

On the CDI, there were no significant main effects for athlete status. Only one significant gender effect was found: females had a higher score on the combined knowledge scale ($M = 100.29$) than males ($M = 85.16$) ($F(1,138) = 8.43, p < .006$). The combined knowledge scale score is a linear combination of scores in decision-making and world-of-work information. This result indicates that females may be better able to apply career development principles to decision-making scenarios as well as demonstrate more knowledge of what it takes to get a job and succeed. The higher scores of females on these scales is consistent with the findings elsewhere that females tend to make higher scores on other cognitive measures such as academic achievement (Thompson & Lindeman, 1981). No significant student-athlete by gender interaction effects were found on the CDI variables.

DISCUSSION

A comparison of the inventory results portrays a strikingly similar profile between student-athletes and non-athletes. Student-athletes have a stronger propensity towards physical activity and leisure than non-athletes but do not differ in their attitudes about career planning, exploration, and knowledge regarding the world of work and decision-making principles. Responses from student-athletes suggest that the emphasis on leisure is due to stress, namely the physiological and psychological fatigue resulting from sport activity. Many student-athletes feel that most of their time is controlled by others (e.g., coaches, practice, classes); as a result, time for leisure is a premium for escape.

Both the student-athletes' and non-athletes' mean scores for all the CDI scales (except the CE and CDA scores) were below the mean scores for freshmen in the undergraduate sample upon which the instrument was normed, indicating a need for further programming to stimulate career planning and exploration with both student groups.

For student-athletes, a link must be made between exploring career/life options that more adequately fit their expectations and roles (i.e., leisure) and understanding their underpreparedness for making career decisions. The emphasis by student-athletes on leisure activity must be combined with their commitment, participation, and knowledge to attain that particular role. A complementary balance of the worker and student roles is essential to attain their value expectations through leisure. In this case student-athletes may be committed to a particular role (i.e., leisurite) but at this time not understand the avenues to attain that role. Further career/life assessment would allow exploration in understanding and engaging in work as a way to gain opportunities for leisure.

Student-athletes in the sample have a greater propensity towards physical activity than non-athletes. Where career/life development is concerned, this extrinsic value suggests an active orientation towards "doing" rather than a passive approach of intellectualizing or investigating. This emphasis suggests that inventories, questionnaires, and games that get student-athletes directly involved in the career planning process may be an effective strategy for career exploration and decision-making.

Results of the inventories reveal a similar career development profile for student-athletes and non-athletes. Both profiles indicate a need for further exploration into the career/life planning process. Student-athletes must prepare themselves for life after collegiate or professional sports. Regardless of the possibilities of a professional sports career, however, career/life planning can assist student-athletes in developing the skills to cope and adapt appropriately to an ever-changing environment.

The career planning process would encourage personal growth through self-expression and exploration of interests, values, roles, and decision-making. Student-athletes could discover personality orientations, examine and develop career-related skills, understand developmental changes, and anticipate future transitions. Increased self-awareness and understanding develops increased self-efficacy in the planning of and follow-through on life and career aspirations (Wooten & Hinkle, 1992).

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Ray Wooten, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, and currently serves as the chair of the Sports Counseling Interest Network in the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision. His interests are psychoeducational counseling and training with student-athletes.

Claire Hamilton Usher is an assistant professor in the counseling and guidance program at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. Her research interests include career development for student-athletes, minority students, and counseling supervision.

Larry Osborne is a member of the counselor education faculty at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has worked for the past six years with Dr. Donald E. Super on developing the Career Development, Assessment and Counseling (C-DAC) model and has current professional interests that include career and leadership development counseling.