

College Student-Athletes in Career Development: A Comparison of Career Decision-Making, Role Salience, and Values

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ABSTRACT

Student athletes are faced with a variety of struggles not encountered by their non-athletic peers. Chief among these struggles are the development of a personal identity, socialization, and self-worth that is separate and distinct from their athletic lives. Decisions regarding career choices are related to developmental success in identity formation and self-efficacy. Student-athletes at NCAA Division I schools have been found to be significantly different from non-athletes in their readiness to make career decisions. This investigation explores whether similar deficiencies exist with student-athletes at a small private NCAA Division II university. This study compares career decision-making, role salience, and values of student-athletes and non-athletes.

Students who choose to compete in intercollegiate athletics face a unique set of challenges and circumstances, namely, (a) balancing athletic and academic roles, and (b) planning for athletic retirement (Jordan & Denson, 1990). The difficulty in negotiating these challenges can often be traced back to the degree to which the individual's identity development and self-worth are defined by his/her participation and achievement in sports. (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982). Athletes who focus solely on sports activity to the exclusion of involvement in other activities develop a self-identity that can be characterized as unidimensional. Ogilvie and Howe (1986) coined the phrase "role restricted" to characterize athletes whose socialization process occurs primarily in the sports environment. As a result, alternative role-taking following termination from the sports context can be inhibited or limited (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Pearson and Petitpas (1990) suggest that without input from their sport, these athletes have little to support their sense of self-worth.

The lack of a non-athletic identity and social system may have profound developmental effects on the individual when compared with his/her peers. Career development is one area in which this developmental distinction between athletes and non-athletes has been evident. Smallmen (1993) found that student-athletes at NCAA Division I schools were significantly different from non-athletes in their readiness to make career decisions. This difference in readiness regarding career decisions may have particularly significant consequences for an athlete whose world view has been isolated to sports. Another common theme in the research literature concerning athletes is the denial of student-athletes' inevitable termination from sports. The denial not only exacerbates natural difficulties in the transition from sports, but can also create a potentially negative and threatening situation in terms

of self-identity, self-efficacy, and learned helplessness. Athletes may suddenly find themselves confronted with issues concerning reconstructing an identity outside athletics, developing personal competencies, and developing career-life plans.

Career-life planning can address developmental deficiencies and raise career consciousness. This awareness illuminates possibilities of new identities, develops new competencies, facilitates short and long range goal setting, and creates decisions based on new data.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was concerned with potential developmental deficiencies of Division II level student-athletes in career decision-making, role salience, and career values as compared to non-athletes. Previous studies investigating career-life concerns of student-athletes have focused on NCAA Division I schools and have included revenue sports. This study examined student-athletes and non-athletes at a small private NCAA Division II university where there is no large revenue sport.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study proposed the following questions:

1. Do student-athletes and non-athletes differ on: (a) attitudinal components (i.e., career exploration and combined attitudinal scale), (b) knowledge components (i.e., decision-making skills, knowledge of the world of work, and combined knowledge skills), and (c) career maturity, as measured by the Career Development Inventory (CDI) (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Meyers, 1981)?
2. Are the attitudes and knowledge associated with progress and satisfaction in occupational careers the same for student-athletes and non-athletes as measured by the CDI?
3. Are there significant gender and athletic status interactions (i.e., simple effects) on the dimensions as measured by the CDI?
4. Do student-athletes and non-athletes differ on participation commitment and values expectation scores as measured by the Salience Inventory (SI) (Super & Nevill, 1985a)?
5. Are there significant gender and athletic status interactions for these scores as measured by the SI?
6. Do student-athletes and non-athletes differ on values as measured by the Values Scale (VS) (Super & Nevill, 1985b)?
7. Do males and females differ on values as measured by the VS?

From the preceding questions, the following three hypotheses were proposed:

- (1) there will be no differences between the athletes and non-athletes attributed to the Career Development Inventory (CDI), Salience Inventory (SI), or the Values Scale (VS);
- (2) there will be no significant differences that can be attributed to the interaction of the gender and athletic status regarding the CDI, SI, VS;
- (3) there will be no differences between male and female student variables attributable to the CDI, SI and VS.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects

Fifty-three full-time undergraduate student-athletes were selected at random from a pool of 165 student-athletes. Fifty-one undergraduate non-athletes were selected at random from a pool of approximately 2015 students. Subjects were contacted by mail, the purpose of the study was explained, and their cooperation was requested.

The sample consisted of 104 total subjects, of which 75 (72.1%) were female and 29 (27.9%) were male. Subjects were evenly distributed across the four classes of freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. The average age of the sample was 20.7 (SD 3.2), with subjects in both groups representing a variety of majors.

INSTRUMENTS

A demographic form and three instruments were used to collect the data. The Salience Inventory (SI), the Values Scale (VS), and the Career Development Inventory (CDI) were used due to their high reliability and validity, as well as their consistent use in career development research.

The Salience Inventory (SI) (Super and Nevill, 1985a) is a self-report instrument helpful in evaluating an individual's orientation to life roles, readiness for career decisions, and exposure to work and occupations. It measures the degree to which major life satisfactions are expected to be found in a particular role. The SI assigns a participation and commitment score by asking about attitudes toward the roles of student, worker, home/family, community service, and leisure.

The Values Scale (VS) (Super and Nevill, 1985b) seeks to discern the degree of importance an individual places on a variety of values. The VS contains a total of twenty-one scales: ability utilization, achievement, advancement, aesthetics, altruism, authority, autonomy, creativity, economic rewards, economics, security, life style, personal development, physical activity, physical prowess, prestige, risk, social interactions, variety, working conditions, and "cultural identity".

The Career Development Inventory (CDI) (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1981) assesses five areas that include: career planning, career exploration, decision-making, world of work information, and knowledge of preferred occupational group. The CDI indicates the kind of help a student needs to make career decisions, and thus, identifies those who need arousal, exploratory training, and improved decision-making skills. Subjects completed inventories at predetermined group administrations.

RESULTS

Factorial ANOVAs examined the main effects of the independent variables of athletic status (i.e., athlete vs. non-athlete) and gender on the dependent variable as measured by the CDI, the VS, and the SI. Factorial analysis also allowed the examination of interaction of the independent variables (i.e., gender x athletic status) to determine whether there were simple effects. For example, it was possible to determine whether there were differences in how female athletes and male athletes answered the items on the various dependent measures.

Hypothesis One investigated the differences between athletes and non-athletes on the CDI. The statistical results for the CDI indicated there were no statistically significant differences between athletes and non-athletes on career planning, career exploration, combined attitudinal scale, career decision-making, knowledge of world of work information, combined knowledge scale, and career maturity.

The statistical analysis of the Salience Inventory found no statistically significant differences between athletes and non-athletes on the variables of participation, commitment, and values expectations.

A statistical summary of the differences between athletes and non-athletes on the Values Scale found two variables statistically significant at the .0003 level. These two variables were life style and prestige. Life style refers to living according to one's ideas and prestige refers to being admired for one's knowledge and skills. This result rejects the null hypothesis, although interaction effects due to gender could not be isolated as they were not tested under this hypothesis.

Hypothesis Two stated there would be no significant differences between the interaction of athletic status and gender regarding the CDI, SI, and VS. Interaction effects for gender and athletic status for the variables on the CDI, SI, and VS respectively were not significant, thus confirming the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Three stated there would be no significant differences between male and female students that could be attributed to variables on the CDI, SI, and VS. Results indicated no significant differences between male and female students on the CDI. Results of the SI suggest no significant differences on the variables of Participation and Values Expectations. However, there was a significant difference between male and female students on the SI variable of Commitment at the .003 level of significance. Female students had significantly higher Commitment scores ($M=165.4$) than their male counterparts ($M=155.2$). Variables on the VS were found to be statistically insignificant except for the variable Cultural Identity which was significant at the .001 level. Female students produced statistically higher scores on the Cultural Identity scale ($M=17.6$) than male students ($M=14.8$). Based on the significance of the variables Cultural Identity and Commitment, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The comparison of athletes and non-athletes yielded a number of variables which approached significance. The Career Planning scale on the CDI examined the career planning in which one has engaged and the level of this engagement. Athletes had a lower mean score ($M=105.7$) than that of non-athletes ($M=114.2$). The F value and probability figures indicated a large, but not statistically significant difference. This difference may reflect tendencies toward deficient career planning.

Another area where results approached significance, but was not statistically significant, was between athletes and non-athletes in the World-of-Work Information. This scale examined two areas, namely, knowledge of career development tasks in the early stages and knowledge of occupations ranging from semi-skilled to professional. Athletes had a lower mean score ($M=78.2$) than non-athletes ($M=90.5$). The difference indicates that athletes may be lacking in the areas of planfulness, exploratory attitudes, decision-making, and world of work information as compared to their non-athletic counterparts.

The third area where the difference approached but was not statistically significant was between athletes and non-athletes in Career Development

Knowledge and Skills. This area examines how career decisions are made with knowledge of the world-of-work. The non-athletes mean score ($M=89.2$) was higher than athletes ($M=77.4$). This difference may indicate that non-athletes are better prepared to apply career development principles to decision-making scenarios as well as demonstrate more knowledge of skills in what it takes to get a job and succeed.

The last area where the difference approached but was not statistically significant was on the CDI, Career Orientation Total, between athletes and non-athletes. This scale combines the results of Career Planning, Career Exploration, Career Decision-Making, and World-of-Work Information. It approaches a measure of career maturity, but only uses four of the five measures of adolescent vocational maturity. The difference between the athletes score ($M=90.1$) and the non-athletes score ($M=103.1$) might indicate that non-athletes are more vocationally mature and aware than athletes.

CONCLUSION

This study was concerned with potential developmental deficiencies of Division II college-level student-athletes in the areas of career decision-making, role salience, and values.

The data indicate that athletes and non-athletes at a Division II university tend to be similar in the areas of career decision-making, planning, and role salience. Athletes did project higher life style and prestige scores. Higher life style scores indicate that athletes tended to value the opportunity to plan one's own activities and to live the way one wants to. Many athletes feel most of their time is controlled by others (c.g., coaches, practice, classes), as a result, time for leisure is a premium. Elevated prestige scores indicate that athletes value being acknowledged for their skills more than non-athletes. The prestige score may highlight a desire by athletes to not only be acknowledged for their athletic ability but appreciated for their contribution, role, and sacrifice to the team.

Collegiate athletes must investigate their current career/life expectations and their level of understanding and preparedness in career planning and decision-making. The student-athletes' mean scores for all the CDI scales in this study were below the mean scores for the freshmen in the undergraduate sample upon which the instrument was normed. This indicates that student-athletes may have a variety of unmet needs regarding career development. Student-athletes need career expansion that facilitates their interests (i.e., known or currently unknown) and choices, and aids in dealing with barriers that deter decision-making. Student-athletes also need to find career alternatives that maintain their feelings of self-worth and personal identity. Finally, student-athletes need development of career self-efficacy when participating in life-career planning. Continued career self-efficacy relies on experiences that are reinforced with solid career models and individuals advocating career exploration in a positive manner.

Many career and transitional programs have been designed that address the career and life problems of the student-athlete. However, many of these approaches are "one shot" or semester long career planning programs. While an occupationally focused course is a good introduction, they fall short when student-athletes' problems are more developmental. Programs should be longitudinal over the course of the athletes' participation and facilitate self-reflection and critical analysis by way of assignments sequencing journal writing, group work, and self-assessments. By

constructing a portfolio of work done over each semester and by meeting periodically with a academic athletic advisor, the athlete can investigate the parts (assessments, field of study, and decision-making) to understand (1) what meaning these components have, (2) how they work in everyday life and the future, and (3) why they are important.

A portfolio approach addresses the aforementioned developmental issues (identity, competencies, and career planning) that are often deemed deficient in student-athletes. The portfolio process can assist in reversing learned helplessness by providing an opportunity for students to showcase work representing their accomplishments, thus focusing on strengths rather than deficits. Likewise, reflections on the successful and unsuccessful outcomes by athletes can help identify faulty attributions. Many athletes label themselves poor performers in the classroom. The portfolio process can help advisors encourage a new self-reflection and help transfer competitive strategies and goals to the classroom. Because the portfolio process is longitudinal, student-athletes can begin to change their limited attitudes about themselves and develop more accurate self-perceptions.

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