

A Site to Resist and Persist: Diversity, Social Justice, and the Unique Nature of Sport

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Abstract

Scholarly debate on the unique characteristics of sport management continue, with much of the dialogue focusing on the sport product, the relationship between sport and external stakeholders (e.g., fans, government, leagues), as well as the unique role that fans and winning play in the delivery of sport. In offering a new lens from which to approach the academic argument, the authors suggest that sport is unique because it serves as a site for coaches and athletes to resist and persist through their activist efforts. To support our position, they (a) articulate the significance of sport in society for fans and non-fans, alike; (b) demonstrate how, because of the relevance of sport in society, coaches and athletes have taken on celebrity status, and as a result, are likely to engage in activism and resistance; and (c) propose these activities then result in societal change. Noting the importance of moderators, the authors also suggest that coach and athlete demographics, their social justice orientation, and the context in which they operate are all likely to influence the relationship between celebrity status and activism and resistance. The effectiveness of their message is likely to vary based on their credibility and the involvement and demographics of the message receiver. The authors offer theoretical and practical implications.

Introduction

For decades, scholars have debated the unique features of sport management. Slack (1998) noted that, although the growth of the field had been impressive, “there is really nothing unique about the body of knowledge within the field of sport management” (p. 21; see also Slack, 1996, for similar criticisms). Other scholars have offered a different perspective, identifying various characteristics that differentiate sport from other industries. Chadwick (2011), for example, pointed to a number of distinguishing characteristics, including the uncertainty of the outcomes, the desire for competitive balance, the product (instead of market) led focus, cooperation across teams and organizations, a lack of control over the product, a focus on performance over other outcomes (e.g., return on investment), the fans as both producers and consumers, and the interdependent relationship with the media. Though the specific categories vary slightly, other authors have advanced similar arguments (Hoye, Smith, Nicholson, & Stewart, 2015; Smith & Stewart, 2010). Finally, recognizing that theory and scholarship are key indicators of the distinctiveness of a field (Chalip, 2006; Slack, 2003), Cunningham, Fink, and Doherty’s (2016) edited volume of theory in sport management demonstrates how the discipline has grown and differs from others.

Much of the foregoing discussion focuses on the sport product, the relationship between sport and external stakeholders (e.g., fans, government, leagues), as well as the unique role that fans and winning play in the delivery of sport. Largely missing from this dialogue is the recognition that sport and athletes can play in shaping cultural discourse and promoting social justice. Athletes and coaches, both of whom have taken on status as celebrity (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Nalapat & Parker, 2005), have famously spoken out on topics of oppression and injustice. Examples include Muhammad Ali’s protest of the Vietnam War; Tommie Smith’s and

John Carlos's protest of human rights abuses in the US at the 1968 Olympics; the Minnesota Lynx of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) protesting racial inequality; the National Hockey League's You Can Play campaign designed to combat prejudice against lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals; and Colin Kaepernick's kneeling during the National Anthem as a form of protest against racial inequality and police brutality, among many others (Cullen, 2017; Davidson, 2017; Garber, 2017; Powell, 2008). To be sure, politicians and some in the entertainment business, including actors and musicians, have used their status to address similar topics. We argue, however, that because of sport's unique space in society, affecting all people irrespective of their fandom (Dunning, 1999; Jackson, 2017), it is different from other industries and serves as a unique site in which key individuals can resist cultural arrangements that serve to subjugate people from under-represented groups.

In this paper, we argue that sport is distinctive from other industries because it is a site for key actors to both resist and persist. Specifically, we suggest that sport has a special place of relevance and affection for many throughout the world, and as a result, coaches and athletes have celebrity status that affords them the opportunity to engage in activism and resistance. We also suggest that the sport context, the social justice orientation and credibility of the coach or athlete, and the sport involvement of the message receiver all likely influence this process. In the following sections, we offer an overview of sport as a site for protest and resistance, and then offer a theoretical model to help understand the underlying dynamics.

Sport, Resistance, and Persistence

For decades, athletes and some coaches from around the world and at various levels of competition have protested social injustices and voiced their discontent with social injustices. They engaged in activism, which refers to activities that disrupt hegemonic structures and

systems by challenging the status quo and giving voice to members of disadvantaged groups (Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, in press). As the following review illustrates, they resisted social arrangements that served to subjugate and oppress, and the struggle persisted over time, through different waves of activity.

Edwards (2016) outlined a typology of athlete activism, suggesting that resistance has taken place in waves. In the first wave, which occurred between 1900 and 1945, athletes (e.g., Paul Robeson, Fritz Pollard) sought legitimacy through their athletic participation and excellence in the pursuits. Edwards suggested the second wave started in 1946 and continued into the early 1960s. Here, athletes such as Jackie Robinson and Althea Gibson focused on gaining political access and positional diversity. Athletes in this continued to break down barriers and operated within a context where national shifts toward desegregation (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision) were taking place. In the third wave, (mid 1960s through 1970s), athletes demand dignity and respect. Notable examples from this wave of activism include Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and Jim Brown. In one of the most iconic Olympic images, Tommie Smith and John Carlos stood on the podium with their black gloved fists raised and heads bowed in protest against human rights abuses in the US (Edwards, 1969). Smith later recalled that “it was done in the name of pride, freedom, and equality” (as quoted in Smith, 2008, p. 26).

Despite the noteworthy first three waves resistance, the level of activism and resistance seemingly diminished in subsequent decades (Agyemang, Singer, & DeLorme, 2010; Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Powell, 2008). To be sure, National Basketball Association stars Adonal Foyle, Craig Hodges, and Etan Thomas did persist in their efforts, addressing issues of war, racism, and poverty (Jackson, 2006; Powell, 2008). Their efforts, though, represented the

exception, not the norm. Instead, many athletes remained silent on hot-button topics, ostensibly because of their desire to focus solely on athletic excellence (Crossett, 1995; Kauffman & Wolff, 2010) or because of the potential financial repercussions of discussing controversial social issues (Henderson, 2009; Rhoden, 2006). The latter argument resonates, considering that Hodges never played in the NBA again following his protests during a White House visit (Moore, 2017).

Edwards notes that the forth wave of athlete activism started in 2005. Here, athletes sought to gain power through economic and technological capital. Examples include LeBron James and Colin Kaepernick protesting racism and police brutality in the US, and Venus Williams and Billie Jean King lobbying for gender equality among tennis players and the prize money they receive. Other examples include the University of Missouri football players refusing to play or practice in response to racialized practices on their campus; Aly Raisman seeking structural change in the US Olympic Committee and US Gymnastics following rampant sexual abuse cases; NBA player Jason Collins announcing he was gay and since advocating for LGBT inclusion in sport; and Northwestern University football players seeking to unionize as a form of protest against what they deemed unfair labor practices in college sports; among many others (Cooper et al., 2014; Leichenger, 2014; Yan, Pegoraro, & Watanabe, 2018; Taylor, 2015).

Importantly, the activism has resulted in change. At the University of Missouri, the chancellor and president of the university both stepped down, and the university began to undergo large scale changes designed to address the racialized practices (Yan et al., 2018). The case of the Northwestern football team and related activism from Ed O'Bannon has renewed dialogue about amateurism, athletes rights, and gender equity in college sports (Buzuvis, 2015). Finally, the protests from Colin Kaepernick, LeBron James, the Minnesota Lynx, and scores of other players—in the US and abroad, professional and amateur—and coaches (e.g., Greg

Popovich and Steve Kerr; Schoenfeld, 2017) has generated dialogue around the world. US President Donald Trump even weighed in on the protests, suggesting that NFL owners should respond to athlete protest by saying, “Get that son of a bitch off the field right now, out. He’s fired! He’s fired!” (as quoted in Serwer, 2017). His comments did not have the intended effect but only served to galvanize the resistance.

The review also highlights how activism has persisted over time. As change frequently means a shifting of political, economic, and social power, those who benefit from social arrangements are frequently unwilling to part with their privilege and status (Hartmann, 1996). In other cases, the pursuit of excellence meant turning a blind eye to abuse (Schad, 2018). Nevertheless, athlete activism persisted. Athletes persisted in seeking change through legitimacy, breaking down barriers, gaining access to playing positions and resources, fighting against abuses and neglect, and acquiring power. Collectively, our review shows that athletes have historically engaged in activism and protest. Though the pervasiveness of these activities has ebbed and flowed over time, a number of high profile athletes, coaches, and administrators engage in activism and protest today. Their efforts have created change, opened lines of communication, and sparked national dialogue about social justice issues in sport and in society. As such, unlike other business sectors, sport represents a site to resist unjust social arrangements and to persist in the face of criticism and opposition.

Largely missing from the academic analysis of athlete protest and activism, however, is a discussion of how, why, and under what conditions these activities take place. In the following section, we draw from disparate theories and literature to suggest that athletes and coaches have taken on celebrity status, and it is this standing that allows them to engage in activism and

protest. We further articulate moderators that are likely to influence the nature of these relationships. We offer an illustrative summary in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about Here

Sport as a Site for Activism and Resistance

Celebrity

A number of authors have commented on the significance of sport in society (Coakley, 2015; Sage & Eitzen, 2016). Dunning (1999) suggested that sport has the potential to influence the lives of people who do not even consider themselves fans. To illustrate, consider the size of the sport industry, which Plunkett research estimates at \$1.5 trillion worldwide. Milano and Chelladurai (2011) show that sport is broad, including sport consumption, goods and services, advertising, investments, government expenditures, and imports and exports. Most Americans (80%) are involved in some sort of sport activity, broadly defined, with sizeable portions engaged in activities on a regular basis (Eitzen & Sage, 2016).

Beyond participation and consumerism, sport has a place in other aspects of the cultural milieu. Entire magazines, websites, and television stations are devoted to sport, and daily newspapers regularly devote a quarter of their print space to sport. Millions regularly attend social events around major sport competitions, such as the Super Bowl, and others spend time talking with friends and family about sport on a regular basis (Cunningham & Welty Peachey, 2012). Finally, in some respects, sport reflects society's commitments, priorities, and values (Fahey, 2008).

We argue that sport's relevance in society has resulted in athletes and coaches taking on celebrity status, a transformation that has occurred at the amateur and professional ranks. As Jones and Schumann (2000) explain, people frequently seek role models they deem to be virtuous and honorable, and athletes, because of their exceptional skills, frequently fill this void. As a result, fans expect them to play various roles, from sports entertainer to role model (even if athletes and coaches do not want that role), among others. In addition, though many think of professionals when considering athlete celebrity, the influence of coaches and athletes is seen at lower levels, too. Bissinger's (1990) book, *Friday Night Lights*, offers an apt illustration, as community members lauded and even idolized coaches and players of an interscholastic football team in Texas (US). Weber (2011) observed as much two decades later in his analysis of interscholastic football in Iowa (US), where talented athletes became heroes in their communities.

To be sure, the view of athletes as celebrities is not a new occurrence, as Veri (2016) has shown that companies used athlete celebrity endorsers as early as the 1920s. Nevertheless, because of the various forms of and access to new media, we suggest that athletes' and coaches' celebrity is perhaps magnified like no other time. To illustrate, in 2016, the *Business Insider* compiled a list of the most popular athletes in the world, using salary, endorsement earnings, Facebook likes, and Twitter followers to support their rankings (Gaines, 2016). The top five ranked athletes—Cristiano Ronaldo, LeBron James, Lionel Messi, Neymar Jr., and Roger Federer—averaged \$33.6 million in endorsements, 52 million Facebook likes, and 25 million Twitter followers (note: at the time, Messi did not have a Facebook or Twitter account).

Collectively, the evidence suggests that athletes and some coaches have celebrity status. The esteem with which they are held means that athletes and coaches have a unique platform to

voice their perspectives about a variety of topics, including social injustice. Indeed, researchers have found that people with power, status, and privilege in a given social context are more likely to advocate for justice and fairness (Melton & Cunningham, 2014; Sartore & Cunningham, 2010). Thus, even though many athletes and coaches have what would otherwise be marginalized identities in Western society (e.g., racial minority, women, sexual minority), their status as celebrity affords them with the latitude and ability to engage in activism and resistance.

Importantly, these perspectives frequently shape fans' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Indeed, Melnick and Jackson (2002), in a study of New Zealand youth, found that celebrity athletes have a meaningful impact on youths' personal beliefs, value systems, appraisals of the self, and behaviors. In a similar way, Stevens, Lathrop, and Bradish (2003) showed that Canadian youth frequently considered athletes as heroes, believing the athletes had exceptional athletic skills but also valued personal traits and pro-social behaviors. Not surprisingly, marketing researchers have shown that celebrity sports figures can have a substantial influence on consumers' attitudes toward products and their purchasing behaviors (Dix, Phau, & Pougnet, 2010). Behavioral outcomes are not limited to consumerism, though, as Yan et al. (2018) showed that athletes protesting racial injustices at their university helped spur social media activity and attention to the topic. Based on this evidence, we propose:

Proposition 1: Based on their celebrity status, athletes and coaches are likely to engage in activism and resistance.

Proposition 2: Activism and resistance from celebrity athletes and coaches is positively associated with societal change concerning social injustices.

Moderators

In addition to considering the direct effects we suggest in propositions 1 and 2, we also identify a number of moderators, or variables that influence the relationship between two other variables. That is, the effect of a predictor and outcome variable is dependent upon the level of a third variable—the moderator (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Moderators specify when, how, and under what conditions various phenomena might occur (Bacharach, 1989; Cunningham et al., 2016), and they represent important elements of theory building (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007; Cunningham & Ahn, in press). We first specify three moderators that influence the relationship between celebrity status and activism: demographics, contextual factors and social justice orientation.

Coach and Athlete Demographics. A number of demographic characteristics are likely to influence the extent to which athletes and coaches engage in activism and resistance. In North America, for example, White, able-bodied, heterosexual, Protestant men have traditionally held power, and the same is true in sport (Cunningham, 2015). As such, people who do not hold these identities have likely face barriers, biases, or discrimination, in society, at work, and on the field (Colella, Hebl, & King, 2017; Cunningham, 2015). Even if they have not personally experience mistreatment, people from under-represented groups likely personally know someone who has. We suggest that, because of these direct and indirect experiences with bias, people from under-represented groups are more likely than their peers to engage in activism and resistance.

Previous researchers have offered some support for our position. For example, in the organizational setting, researchers have shown that women and racial minorities are more likely than their male and White counterparts, respectively, to favor policies and procedures geared toward addressing previous injustices (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006). Pickett and Cunningham (2017), in a study set in the exercise context, found that instructors who

were overweight or obese—characteristics that placed them in the social minority within the fitness industry—were strong champions of body inclusiveness. These patterns are consistent with the prominent athletes and coaches who have engaged in activism and resistance (see also Edwards, 2016). Thus, though we recognize that people from majority groups can and do advocate for others (see Steve Kerr and Greg Popovitch of the NBA), these individuals are exceptions, not the rule. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 3: Demographics will moderate the relationship between celebrity status and engagement in activism and resistance, such that coaches and players from under-represented groups will be more likely to take part in the activities than their peers from majority groups.

Contextual Factors. The context in which one engages in sport is likely to influence whether the individual uses celebrity status to engage in activism. We argue that people surrounded by colleagues and supervisors who support social justice and activism are likely to engage in activism and protest. Equally importantly, when influential others object to such actions, coaches and athletes are unlikely to be socially engaged. Our rationale stems from social information processing theory, where Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) argued that “the social context, through informational social influence processes, can affect beliefs about the nature of jobs and work, about what attitudes are appropriate and, indeed, about what needs people ought to possess” (p. 233).

A number of diversity scholars have theorized about the importance of context, particularly in relation to diversity and social justice issues (Avery, 2011; Huffman, Watrous, & King, 2008). Avery, for instance, suggested that “an avid supporter of diversity might turn a blind eye to discrimination in the presence of a notoriously biased supervisor” (p. 247).

Cunningham and Sartore (2010), in a study of university employees, demonstrated the importance of diversity-friendly coworkers and supervisors. They found that coworker and (to a lesser degree) supervisor support for diversity were positively associated with employees championing diversity and negatively related with opposition to diversity initiatives.

Finally, we point to anecdotal evidence in US professional leagues to further support our position. Colin Kaepernick, who played for the NFL's San Francisco 49ers, knelt during the national anthem in protest against racial injustice and police brutality. The following season, no team signed him to a contract, and several owners have spoken out against such forms of protest (Reid, 2017). Several NFL players continue to kneel or protest in other ways, but the proportion pales in comparison to two professional basketball leagues: WNBA and NBA. In the WNBA, the Minnesota Lynx began protests, holding a press conference to address their concerns and wearing "Change Starts with US" t-shirts. Several teams and players followed suit (Ziller & Prada, 2017). Similarly, in the NBA, coaches and players have been some of the most vocal critics of racial injustice, police brutality, and what they deem as unjust policies from the Trump administration. Though the NBA has a league policy requiring players to stand during the national anthem, the league encourages players and coaches to connect with their communities on topics important to them. The dialogue can take the form of speeches, messages on t-shirts worn during warm-ups, participation in community events, and videos shown during the game (NBA Players, 2018).

Given the collective theory, research, and anecdotal evidence, we propose:

Proposition 4: Context will moderate the relationship between celebrity status and engagement in activism and resistance, such that coaches and players will be more likely

to take part in the activities when in an environment supportive of diversity and social justice.

Social Justice Orientation. Beyond context, personal characteristics can influence whether celebrity athletes and coaches engage in activism and resistance. Other scholars have also noted the influence of individual level factors, such as the level of consciousness (Cooper et al., in press), extroversion (Cunningham & Sartore, 2010), and openness to experience (Melton & Cunningham, 2014). In the current paper, we focus on a personality characteristic directly related to activism and resistance: social justice orientation. People who have a strong social justice orientation are concerned with the distribution of resources and opportunities in society, and they believe that when one group is advantaged over others, people should seek to rectify that situation (Miller, 1999).

Mahony, Hums, Andrew, and Dittmore's (2010) review of the literature illustrates the importance sport management scholars have placed on issues related to justice. Similarly, a number of researchers have shown that social justice orientation is associated with support and advocacy for diversity-related topics. For example, employees' concern for social justice is linked with their support of affirmative action in the workplace (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006). Hans, Kersey and Kimberly (2012) found that undergraduate students' attitudes toward LGB individuals was a function of their social justice beliefs. Participants in the study also spoke about the ills of discrimination and the belief "in equal treatment for all humans" (p. 8). Finally, in articulating their theoretical framework, Ginwright and James (2002) noted that people who work to promote systemic change frequently do so because of empathy expressed toward others and the desire to end social oppression—elements of a social justice orientation.

Collectively, this research suggests that people who hold a strong social justice orientation are more likely than are their counterparts to express concern about diversity and social justice issues. Thus, among celebrity coaches and athletes, activism and resistance is more likely to take place among those who have a concern for social justice. Based on this reasoning, we propose:

Proposition 5: Social justice orientation will moderate the relationship between celebrity status and engagement in activism and resistance, such that coaches and players will be more likely to take part in the activities when they have a strong social justice orientation.

In addition to examining potential moderators between celebrity status and engagement in activism and resistance, we explore three factors that might influence the relationship between activism and resistance, and the social change that takes place: source credibility, demographics of the message receiver, and sport involvement of the message receiver.

Source Credibility. One factor that could influence the persuasiveness of the activism and resistance is source credibility. Researchers have long shown that the credibility of the source influences communication effectiveness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Ohanian (1990) suggested that a number of factors influence credibility, including attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise on the subject matter. Pornpitakpan's (2006) review of the literature in the area showed that credible sources were persuasive in conveying a message, though other variables, such as receiver characteristics, might influence this relationship. Note: we highlight one receiver characteristic—sport involvement—in the following section.

A number of researchers have demonstrated the importance of source credibility among coaches and athletes. Many researchers have focused on endorsers, drawing from the premise that trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness are linked with endorser effectiveness (Amos,

Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). Examinations of product and event endorsements by collegiate athletes (Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004), professional boxers (Fink, Parker, Cunningham, & Cuneen, 2012), and famous athletes (Koernig & Boyd, 2009), among others, have demonstrated the importance of credibility in driving consumer behavior. Importantly, the credibility of the source is largely dependent upon how well that source matches the product or service (McDaniel, 1999). Outside of the sport and endorser context, Rhee and Fiss (2014) found that source credibility was an important factor influencing stock market reactions to controversial organizational decisions.

In the context of the current analysis, credibility pertaining to activism and resistance may stem from traditional antecedents—attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise—as well as source demographic and personal characteristics. The importance of attractiveness, for example, is likely more salient for women coaches and athletes than it is for men (see Crossett, 1995; Fink, 2016). Similarly, people may interpret messages of social justice differently depending on the race and perceived racial identity of the message sender (Cooper et al., in press; Cunningham & Regan, 2012). Though a complex number of characteristics likely serve as antecedents, estimates of source credibility make the message effective. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 6: Source credibility will moderate the relationship between activism and resistance, and societal influence, such that the message will be more effective when the message receiver considers the coach or athlete to be credible.

Demographics of Message Receiver. For many of the same reasons we previously outlined (see Proposition 3), we suggest the demographics of the person receiving the message will influence its utility. Members of under-represented groups—including women, racial minorities, sexual minorities, persons with disabilities, and religious minorities, among others—

are likely to have faced stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination, or know someone who has (Colella, Hebl, & King, 2017; Cunningham, 2015). As a result, they may be more receptive to messages advocating for social justice and equality. Of course, we recognize that some members of majority groups can and do welcome activism and resistance, as they too might champion social justice causes. That noted, *ceteris paribus*, they are likely to be comparatively less willing to embrace messages related to activism and resistance.

Our theorizing suggests that the demographics of the message receiver are likely to moderate the relationship between activism and resistance, and the subsequent effectiveness of the message. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 7: Demographics of the message receiver will moderate the relationship between activism and resistance, and societal influence, such that the message will be more effective when the message receiver is a member of an under-represented group.

Sport Involvement. From one perspective, sport's relevance in society influences all individuals, irrespective of their connection to sport (Dunning, 1999). After all, one need not be a basketball fan to know who Michael Jordan is. Even casual fans likely know who Colin Kaepernick is and the protests in which he engaged. For more involved fans, however, the athletes' viewpoints might hold more weight. Therein rests the importance of sport involvement, or a "person's perceived relevance to an object based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Koo & Lee, in press; see also Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Sport marketing researchers have shown the importance of sport involvement for consumers and fans (Funk & James, 2001). For example, Parker and Fink (2008) found that sport involvement influenced people's attitudes toward women and their ability in sport. In a study of consumer reactions to advertisements, Fink, Parker, Cunningham, and Cuneen (2012) found that

sport involvement was linked to purchase intentions of a drink an athlete endorsed. Later sponsorship research from Koo and Lee (in press) showed that sponsor-event congruence was associated with sponsor credibility when sport involvement was high. The authors suggested that highly involved fans paid more attention to the messages about the sport, and these messages were then likely to influence the consumers' attitudes and behaviors.

Drawing from this research, we suggest that the influence of activism and resistance is likely to vary based on the level of sport involvement among those who hear the message. Previous researchers have shown that highly involved people are receptive to advertising and endorsement messages from coaches and athletes. *Ceteris paribus*, we suspect the same would be the case for activism and resistance, such that the effectiveness of the message is likely to be enhanced with the message receiver is highly involved with the sport. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 8: Sport involvement will moderate the relationship between activism and resistance, and societal influence, such that the message will be more effective when the recipient is highly involved with the sport.

Discussion

Scholarly debate on the unique characteristics of sport management continue (Chadwick, 2011; Chalip, 2006; Hoye et al., 2015; Slack, 1996, 1998; Smith & Stewart, 2010). In offering a new lens from which to approach the academic argument, we suggest that sport is unique because it serves as a site for coaches and athletes to resist and persist through their activist efforts. To support our position, we articulated the significance of sport in society for fans and non-fans, alike. We then demonstrated how, because of the relevance of sport in society, coaches and athletes have taken on celebrity status, and as a result, are likely to engage in activism and resistance. We propose these activities then result in societal change. Noting the importance of

moderators, we also suggest that coach and athlete demographics, their social justice orientation, and the context in which they operate are all likely to influence the relationship between celebrity status and activism and resistance. The effectiveness of their message is likely to vary based on their credibility and the involvement and demographics of the message receiver.

Our model has theoretical and practical implications. As previously noted, previous scholars commenting on the uniqueness of sport have focused on the sport product, the relationship between sport and external stakeholders (e.g., fans, government, leagues), as well as the unique role that fans and winning play in the delivery of sport. However, as we have illustrated in our paper, there is much more to the story. Unlike other industries, key individuals in sport have a distinctive opportunity to influence societal attitudes toward social justice. In addition, we offer a novel theoretical framework for understanding how, when, and under what conditions activism and resistance is likely to occur. The inclusion of moderators represents a key component of our model and serves to extend the understanding of coach and athlete activism and resistance.

We also identify a number of practical implications. Given that sport is unique in the manner that celebrity coaches and athletes can engage in activism and resistance, questions remain as to how sport leagues can help facilitate these activities, particularly when the league or team does not agree with the stance? In addition, how do leagues effectively leverage celebrity coaches' and athletes' activism and resistance? Can teams and leagues position these behaviors as a way to more effectively connect with fans and promote the sport? The NBA and WNBA have seemingly adopted these approaches (NBA Players, 2018), and given that activism and resistance is unlikely to ebb in the future (Edwards, 2016), other leagues would do well to follow suit. Our model also has implications for coaches and athletes. Though a number of factors are

outside their control, they can influence their credibility. Education and persuasive messaging can help to facilitate perceptions of expertise and trustworthiness—two factors critical to one’s perceived credibility (Ohanian, 1990).

Finally, we see a number of areas for future research. As with any theoretical model, subsequent testing, examination, and revising is warranted. In addition, we have largely drawn from a North American perspective, but resistance, persistence, and activism are global phenomena. Future researchers would do well to examine our model from a global perspective, adapting and refining for the specific context. Finally, although scholars have written on methods of resistance and persistence, often missing from the conversation are the voices and insight from the athlete either (a) engaging in athlete activism (but see Lee, 2015), or (b) the athlete with activist aspirations themselves. As current and former athletes are pursuing additional outlets off the field to speak out and re-claim their narratives (see Bennett, 2018; Thomas, 2018) how might this enhance and/or change discourse on his topic? Given the importance of resistance and persistence in sport, additional scholarship on the topic is needed.

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Figure 1

Activism and Resistance among Celebrity Athletes and Coaches

