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Title

Self-Identity and Role Conflict in Student Athletes : a literature review

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Abstract

【Introduction 】Student-athletes in higher education simultaneously assume academic and athletic roles, making issues of self-identity development and role conflict a long-standing focus in sport psychology and educational research. This dual-role experience not only influences academic and athletic performance but is also closely associated with psychological well-being, gender and ethnic differences, career development, and the availability of institutional support systems. Despite a growing body of research, there remains a need for a systematic synthesis clarifying how student-athletes negotiate and integrate multiple identities within higher education contexts.【Purpose】This literature review aimed to synthesize recent empirical research on self-identity and role conflict among student-athletes in higher education, with particular attention to identity salience, processes of role integration, and the role of institutional environments in psychological adaptation.【Methods 】A literature review was conducted using the Google Scholar database, identifying international empirical studies published after 2018. Representative studies were selected and analyzed to capture key thematic domains, including changes in identity salience, strategies of identity differentiation and integration, diverse identity profiles, and the influence of institutional support systems on student-athletes' psychological adjustment. A thematic synthesis approach was employed to integrate findings across studies.【Results】 The findings indicate that: (1) identity salience among student-athletes is dynamic and shaped by academic performance, athletic achievement, and institutional contexts; (2) a strong athletic identity enhances competitive motivation, yet insufficient identity integration is associated with psychological adjustment challenges; (3) student-athletes characterized by a dual-investment identity profile consistently demonstrate superior academic and athletic outcomes, higher motivation, and better psychological well-being compared to single-role–oriented peers; and (4) gender and ethnic differences play a critical role in identity negotiation processes, with female student-athletes generally exhibiting stronger academic identification.【Conclusion】Overall, role conflict among student-athletes should not be viewed solely as an individual-level challenge but rather as a phenomenon embedded within institutional structures and cultural expectations. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of identity development on psychological health and career trajectories. Thereby informing more effective support policies for student-athletes in higher education.

Keywords: Student-athletes, Self-identity, Role conflict, Psychological adjustment, Identity salience