2026 13th International Seminar on Sport and Exercise Psychology

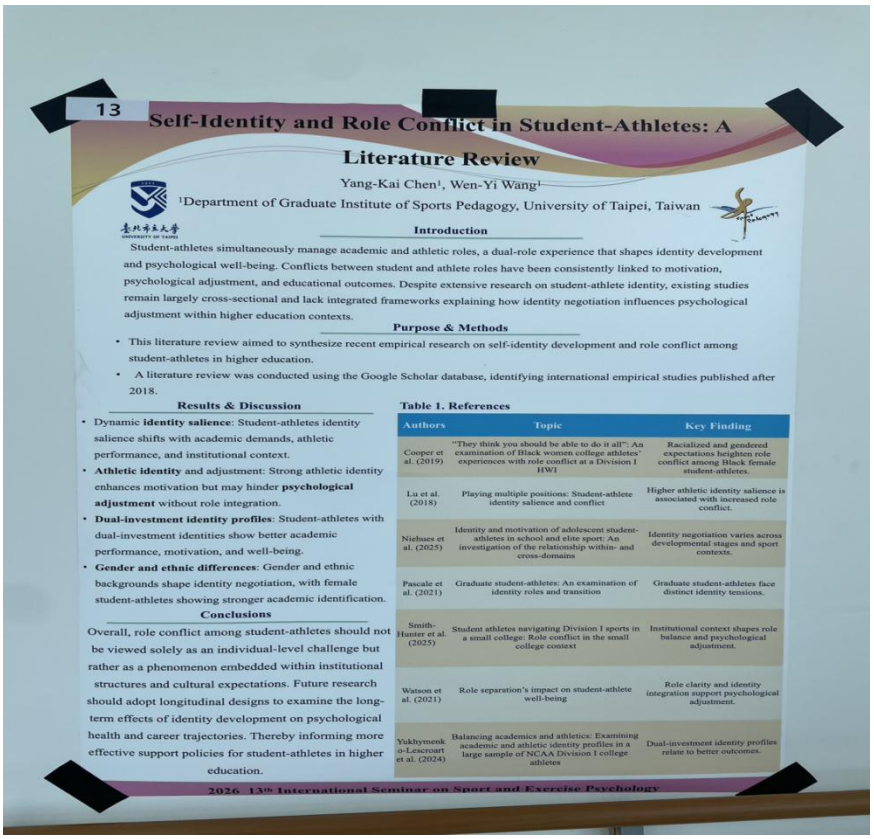
第十三屆國際競技與運動心理學研討會

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Self-Identity and Role Conflict in Student-Athletes: A Literature Review

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Introduction

Student-athletes simultaneously manage academic and athletic roles, a dual-role experience that shapes identity development and psychological well-being. Conflicts between student and athlete roles have been consistently linked to motivation, psychological adjustment, and educational outcomes. Despite extensive research on student-athlete identity, existing studies remain largely cross-sectional and lack integrated frameworks explaining how identity negotiation influences psychological adjustment within higher education contexts.

Purpose & Methods

- This literature review aimed to synthesize recent empirical research on self-identity development and role conflict among student-athletes in higher education.
- A literature review was conducted using the Google Scholar database, identifying international empirical studies published after 2018.

Results & Discussion

- Dynamic **identity salience**: Student-athletes identity salience shifts with academic demands, athletic performance, and institutional context.
- **Athletic identity** and adjustment: Strong athletic identity enhances motivation but may hinder **psychological adjustment** without role integration.
- **Dual-investment identity profiles**: Student-athletes with dual-investment identities show better academic performance, motivation, and well-being.
- **Gender and ethnic differences**: Gender and ethnic backgrounds shape identity negotiation, with female student-athletes showing stronger academic identification.

Conclusions

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.

Table 1. References

Authors	Topic	Key Finding
Cooper et al. (2019)	"They think you should be able to do it all": An examination of Black women college athletes' experiences with role conflict at a Division I HWI	Racialized and gendered expectations heighten role conflict among Black female student-athletes.
Lu et al. (2018)	Playing multiple positions: Student-athlete identity salience and conflict	Higher athletic identity salience is associated with increased role conflict.
Niehues et al. (2025)	Identity and motivation of adolescent student-athletes in school and elite sport: An investigation of the relationship within- and cross-domains	Identity negotiation varies across developmental stages and sport contexts.
Pascale et al. (2021)	Graduate student-athletes: An examination of identity roles and transition	Graduate student-athletes face distinct identity tensions.
Smith-Hunter et al. (2025)	Student athletes navigating Division I sports in a small college: Role conflict in the small college context	Institutional context shapes role balance and psychological adjustment.
Watson et al. (2021)	Role separation's impact on student-athlete well-being	Role clarity and identity integration support psychological adjustment.
Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al. (2024)	Balancing academics and athletics: Examining academic and athletic identity profiles in a large sample of NCAA Division I college athletes	Dual-investment identity profiles relate to better outcomes.

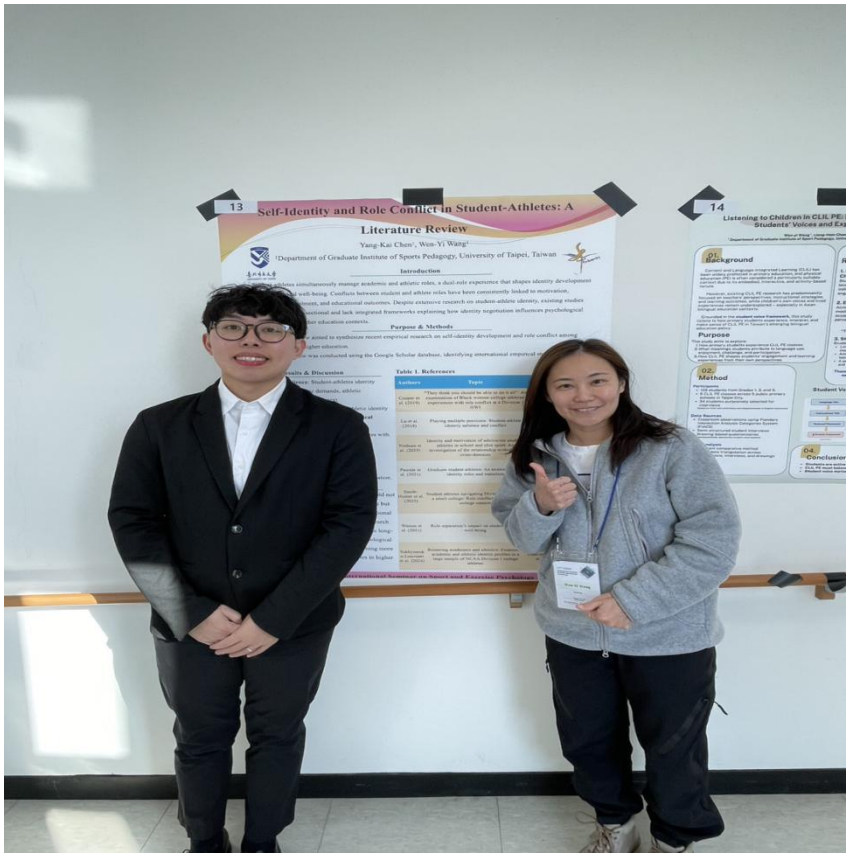
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