"We are the minority": Latinx student-athletes experiences within their Predominantly White Institutions

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Despite the burgeoning Latinx student population in the United States, a conspicuous gap exists in the academic literature, particularly within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) context. Consequently, the central objective of this study was to redress this void by analyzing the racial experiences encountered by NCAA Division I Latinx student-athletes enrolled in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). To fulfill this objective, the researchers applied a qualitative phenomenological approach, seeking an in-depth comprehension of the significance of diversity practices within the distinct educational milieus inhabited by the study's participants. Employing Latin Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) as the theoretical framework, the authors gathered data through six semi-structured interviews and supplemented this information with pertinent diversity and inclusion-related information derived from each participating university and the respective athletic programs. The study's findings underscored the persistent issue of racial discrimination confronted by NCAA Division I Latinx student-athletes within the university setting. Remarkably, despite the extensive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) trainings and councils within these institutions, Latinx student-athletes continued to grapple with racial disparities. Indeed, recurring themes from the data highlighted their significant reliance on familial support and campus resources as strategies for navigating and mitigating these challenges. In light of a substantial body of scholarly work that recognizes the critical importance of DEI in sport, this study serves as a poignant reminder of the pressing need for further academic and practical endeavors aimed at effectively addressing racial disparities.

Key words: Latinx, student-athletes, PWIs, inclusion, diversity

Introduction

In an era where diversity and inclusion are prominent in the United States sport sector (Cunningham, 2023; McDowell, 2022), the literature on the Latinx population (a non-binary alternative term for Latino or Latina) remains limited (Ortega & Grafnetterova, 2021). Notwithstanding the contributions of some prominent scholars, such as Darvin et al. (2017), McGovern (2020), and Ortega (2021), who have noted common experiences amongst Latinx student-athletes, more research is needed to understand this growing population. The imperative for further research becomes evident when considering the underrepresentation of Latinos within the sport sector, a concern underscored by Cameron (2012). McGovern (2020) echoed this sentiment and suggested a closer examination of the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and generational status is essential to understanding the outcomes of Latinas' participation in U.S. sports. This consternation is further accentuated by Alanis et al. (2022), who call attention to the scarcity of research on Latinas, with a mere 14 studies distinctly focused on this demographic group from 1980 to 2020.

Although Latinx individuals comprise 18% of the total United States population, nearly 60 million people (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020), this percentage does not commensurate with their representation in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) setting, as Latinx individuals constitute only 6% of the student-athletes (McGuire, 2021). Moreover, research focusing on Latinx student-athletes at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) is uncharted territory, as most studies have examined the experiences of Latinx student-athletes at Hispanic serving institutions (HISs; Grafnetterova et al., 2020) and Latinx students within the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) setting (Allen & Stone, 2016). This notable disparity, coupled with Grafnetterova and Banda's (2021) call for enhanced support to empower Latinx student-athletes in achieving higher education, forms a guiding premise for this research study.

Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to conduct a critical analysis of the racial experiences of Latinx student-athletes within the context of PWIs. Specifically, we examine the encounters of these student-athletes with instances of racial discrimination within the PWI environment (RQ1) and elucidate the strategies they employ to navigate the multifaceted challenges they face within this setting (RQ2). To accomplish this objective, we employ a phenomenological qualitative research design that is grounded in the Latin Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) framework. Within the LatCrit framework, there exists a focus on understanding the daily micro and macro-affirmations and challenges encountered by the Latinx population within the dominant culture of the United States (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). As such, this theoretical framework aligns coherently with the analytical scope of the study. In summary, the research seeks to illuminate the intricate tapestry of racial experiences encountered by Latinx student-athletes. In doing so, we provide valuable insights that can inform strategies for addressing these challenges and offer practical solutions.

Latin Critical Race Theory

Espinoza and Harris (1997) underscore that due to the pervasive racism experienced by the Latinx population in the United States, particularly within the educational and legal systems, more affirmations are needed. As such, to investigate the experiences of Latinx NCAA Division I student-athletes at PWIs, this study employs LatCrit as a theoretical framework. LatCrit is an extension of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that focuses specifically on the Latinx population and their intersectional social identities forming discriminations present in the United States (Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2016).

The four key elements that constitute CRT are mirrored in LatCrit. That is, CRT accentuates that (a) racism is ingrained in the educational and legal systems (Birk, 2022; Crenshaw, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001); (b) the United States legal mandates that promote neutrality are color-blind, as they are perpetuated by the interests of dominant White individuals (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1998); (c) eradicating racism requires extensive analysis, as the laws intended to alleviate this problem are embedded with racism (Crenshaw, 1988; Singer, 2005); and lastly, (d) CRT maintains that we must give emphasis to the unique experiences of the individuals who have suffered racial discrimination. According to Delgado (1995), "we must employ storytelling" not only to illuminate their experiences but also to change the dominant White narrative (p. 14). Although LatCrit shares these principles, the fifth element that distinguishes it from CRT is that it comprehends the Latinx population and their intersectional identities (Bernal, 2013).

According to Villalpando (2004), LatCrit provides a critical examination of the interplay between various social identities, including "language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality," within the Latinx population (p. 43). This makes LatCrit an important theoretical framework for scholars to analyze the intersecting identities of Latinx individuals, which give rise to various forms of oppression, including racism and sexism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Stefancic, 1998). Therefore, LatCrit is highly appropriate for this study, as it enables the researchers to draw attention to the experiences of Latinx student-athletes and address the challenges they face within PWI by incorporating their "sociocultural and cultural knowledge" (Villalpando, 2004, p. 48). Although CRT and LatCrit have been present for several decades, they remain highly relevant today. As Yosso et al. (2009) note, this is evident by the continued prevalence of "White communities… universities" (p. 664).

Literature Review

This section serves to elucidate the acronym PWI, delineating its significance in shaping student experiences. Furthermore, we affirm the perspectives of NCAA athletes, prioritizing the paramount importance of cultivating a diverse campus environment, particularly concerning Latinx student-athletes.

PWI Impact: Unpacking the Term and Student Experiences

The preceding section underlined that PWI[1] refer to higher education institutions where 50% or more of the student population is comprised of White-American individuals (Gaston & Ojewuyi, 2022). However, the implications of PWIs on student experiences extend beyond just the high enrollment rates of White students (Bourke, 2016). Drawing upon CRT, Bourke (2016) illuminates the structural power dynamic that exists within the label "Predominantly White Institutions," which reinforces "Whiteness as a norm" and shapes student interactions accordingly (p. 16). This results in persistent underrepresentation, alienation, and self-segregation among people of color in these institutional settings (Elam & Brown, 2004; Santos et al., 2007).

Given the significant Latinx population in the United States, understanding their experiences at PWIs has become a prevalent phenomenon in the American higher education system (Ponjuán & Hernández, 2020; Rankin & Reason, 2005). For instance, Anthony and Eliott (2019) found states with significant Latinx populations and educational institutions, such as California, Texas, Florida, and New York, do not provide Latinx students with equal access to public four-year higher education institutions compared to their White counterparts. This disparity is surprising, given that Latinx people constitute the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States (Funk & Lopez, 2022; Mora, 2022). Therefore, more research is needed to comprehensively understand the experiences of Latinx individuals in the United States educational setting.

The NCAA Student-Athlete Experience

Over the years, a plethora of research has drawn attention to the challenges encountered by student-athletes, particularly within the NCAA, as they navigate the complex terrain of managing their academic pursuits (Gayles, 2015; Rubin & Moses, 2017), athletic engagements (Gould & Whitley, 2009), and social commitments (Marx et al., 2008). The multifaceted nature of this challenge is illuminated in the study conducted by Hardin and Pate (2013), wherein the authors exposed the difficulties encountered by student-athletes. Within their research, NCAA Division 1 football student-athletes struggled to effectively manage their time, a consequence of the persistent academic pressures they faced to maintain eligibility, coupled with the demanding on-field performance expectations set by their coaches (Hardin & Pate, 2013).

Further contributing to this discourse, Huml et al. (2019) explains a range of complex factors that significantly impede the academic advancement of NCAA student-athletes. These encompass a diverse array of challenges, including but not limited to, the shaping influence of "athletic identity," the dynamics of "student-athlete interactions within the athletic department," prevailing "stereotypes" associated with

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1. It is also important to note that PWI is not a federal designation, unlike Hispanic serving institution (HSI), which is defined by federal law (Malcom-Piqueux & Lee, 2011). PWI is a commonly used term in higher education research and is typically defined by the demographics of the student population.

student-athletes, and the specter of "student-athlete burnout" (Huml et al. 2019, p. 98). Therefore, the extant literature underlines the various ways in which NCAA student-athletes' academic pursuits, athletic identity, and student role collectively shape their experiences within their university setting (Gayles, 2015; Marx et al., 2008).

The Importance of a Diverse Campus for Latinx Student-Athletes

The significance of campus culture in shaping a college student's educational experience has been thoroughly explored by scholars (Howard, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Research indicates a campus environment characterized by diverse, equitable, and inclusive (DEI) practices holds the potential to significantly enhance student engagement (Cunningham, 2023; Laird et al., 2007; Pascarella, 2001). This implies students from underrepresented populations (e.g., Latinx, African Americans) who have access to more culturally diverse opportunities and events (e.g., athletic activities, mentoring programs) can indirectly develop stronger cognitive and personal skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For instance, Ortega and Grafnetterova (2022) affirmed how a supportive athletic department contributed to Latinx student-athletes' decision to enroll in graduate programs. Moreover, Martinez (2018) noted how Latinx student-athletes receiving support from their campus advisors, staff, and faculty played an important role in their success at their community college.

Despite the various elements that constitute the campus ecology, including daily routines, specific organizational meetings, and work appointments (Díaz III, 2020; Kuh, 2001), students, faculty, and staff of color (e.g., Hispanics, African Americans, Native-Americans) attending and working at PWIs still continue to grapple with an unwelcoming campus climate and insufficient assistance that appreciates their cultural backgrounds (Turner, 1994). Consequently, Laird et al., (2007) found students of color attending PWIs encounter greater hurdles in terms of classroom engagement and demonstrate reduced levels of overall college satisfaction. In essence, the absence of DEI institutional practices may discourage underrepresented students from fully engaging in a university's extracurricular activities (e.g., athletic events), which can potentially affect their academic success (Cunningham, 2023).

Therefore, in this study, we explore the racial experiences of Latinx student-athletes within their PWIs context. In parallel, we endeavor to provide practical guidance for practitioners to effectively address these multifaceted adversities. Two research questions guided this study forward:

> **RQ1:** What are the racial experiences encountered by NCAA Division I Latinx student-athletes during their enrollment at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)?
>
> **RQ2:** In what ways do NCAA Division I Latinx student-athletes respond to and address the multitude of challenges arising from these experiences?

Method

Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design method, our study delved into the lived experiences of six NCAA Division I Latinx student-athletes within their PWIs. A particular focus was placed on the racial dynamics and encoun-

ters that transpired within the academic milieu of their respective universities. Given the inherent objective of a phenomenological research design, which is to uncover and articulate a phenomenon as experienced by participants (Patton, 2002), our study also aimed to gain insights into how Latinx student-athletes navigate the diverse challenges encountered in their university settings. Thus, aligned with the fundamental principles of phenomenological research design, we engaged in active listening to participants' experiences, incorporating extensive quotes from the interviews to offer comprehensive clarity and depth to our findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Research Design

Patton (2002) contends that a qualitative phenomenological research design is characterized by the researcher's ability to elucidate and comprehend a phenomenon through the lived experiences of those who have encountered it. The primary goal of this research design is to accurately uncover, describe, and present the phenomenon as perceived by the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A phenomenological research study is commonly employed and well utilized to investigate "affective, emotional and intense human experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p.26). Therefore, in this study, the racial experiences of Latinx student-athletes within their respective PWIs educational and athletic settings were assessed.

Participants

This study consisted of six participants, comprising of one Latino man and five Latina women NCAA Division I student-athletes (*see* to Table 1). The participants were engaged in a variety of sports, including Track, Soccer, Long-Distance Track, High Jump Track, and Cross-Country (*see* Table 1). Moreover, participants rated their time management. The concept of time management is highly relevant to the focus of this study, as we are examining the experiences of Latinx student-athletes. Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012) stresses effective time management skills are crucial for balancing academic and athletic commitments, which are both demanding in nature. Therefore, understanding the time management habits and strategies of Latinx student-athletes can provide valuable insights into their experiences and the challenges they face.

In the context of time management, the study's findings revealed that participants consistently opted for options categorized as "above average" or "average" (*see Table 1*). The evaluation of "above average" time management was based on factors such as low stress levels, higher levels of physical activity, good academic performance (e.g., achieving high exam scores), and a healthy balance of leisure activities (Misra & Mckean, 2000). Conversely, "average" time management was characterized by high stress levels, low levels of physical activity, poor academic performance, and a lack of personal downtime (Misra & Mckean, 2000; Wintre et al., 2011).

Participant ages ranged from 21 to 23, with a mean of 22 ($SD = 0.63$). Additionally, participants attended five different PWIs in the United States. The university enrollment ranged from 11,938 to 72,982, and the percent of Latinx students enrolled at the university ranged from 8.4% to 25.6%, with a mean of 17.96%.

Table 1. *Participants' Gender, Sport, NCAA Division, and Time Management Results.*

Name	Gender	Sport	NCAA Division	Time Management Results
Mia	Woman	Track- Long Distance	I	Average
Agustin	Man	Track	I	Above Average
Julieta	Woman	Soccer	I	Average
Michelle	Woman	Cross-Country	I	Above average
Lucia	Woman	Cross-Country	I	Above average
Daniella	Woman	Track- High Jump	I	Above average

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited via snowball sampling. This method involved each participant assisting in identifying subsequent participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2017). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and lasted a maximum of 30 minutes (*see Appendix A*). This format provided the interviewer with the flexibility to explore participants' responses and ask follow-up questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Moreover, to enhance comfort and trustworthiness in the interview process, the first author inquired about participants' preferred language for the interview (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Being proficient in both languages (Spanish and English), she was easily accessible to interview in either language. Nonetheless, all participants opted to conduct the interviews in English.

Furthermore, to accommodate for the geographic dispersion of the study participants, all interviews were conducted through Zoom and were recorded for later transcription and analysis. Participants were offered the option to select a comfortable location, such as their homes or universities, in an effort to reduce potential apprehension or pressure during the interview process (Farhadi, 2017). In addition to the interviews, the primary author collected secondary data from the universities attended by participants, with a focus on resources available to support diversity and inclusion. Diversity policies amongst the universities and athletic departments were noted, along with any other support (e.g., specific training for diversity practices, advisory councils, or organizations that discuss the support of diversity and inclusion; *see Table 2*).

Table 2. Diversity Policies and Support Amongst the PWI and Athletic Settings. Y=Yes, N= No

Name	Faculty and Staff training on DEI (Y or N)	Easy access to reporting racial harassment (Y or N)	Councils, organizations, and groups that specifically focus on DEI (Y or N)	Anti-Discriminatory Policy (Y or N)	Athletic Diversity Policy (Y or N)	Definition of racism and guidance of pronouns and diverse practices (Y or N)
Mia & Agustin	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Julieta	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Michelle	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lucia	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Daniella	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the first interview, the lead author transcribed the session, analyzed the findings, and recorded her interpretations of the discussion in a reflexive journal. As noted by Vadeboncoeur et al. (2021), a reflexive journal enables authors to note the interview's implications from an investigator's perspective and, importantly, to delve deeper into the participant's responses. Therefore, using a reflexive journal throughout the study enhanced its credibility (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

After the second interview finished, the primary author quickly noticed common themes emerging. These themes were not surprising given the literature on the educational (Ponjuán & Hernández, 2020), social (Holguín Mendoza et al., 2021), and physical (Von Robertson et al., 2014) challenges student from marginalized populations experience at PWIs (Grafnetterova & Banda, 2021). Moreover, the LatCrit theory highlights the systemic oppression towards individuals of Latin descent that is seen embedded in legal doctrines that govern society, specifically the educational domain (Valdes, 2005). Consequently, drawing on the PWI culture literature and the LatCrit theory, the primary author began to code similar themes that emerged after the second interview.

To further enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of our study, we conducted member checking by presenting the emergent themes and conclusions to the participants for validation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe this method (member checking) as being one of the most "critical techniques [in] establishing credibility" within a qualitative research study (p. 314). In addition, as noted by Creswell and Poth (2016), member checking allows the authors to ensure that their interpretations and conclusions are firmly rooted in the data obtained from the participants.

Therefore, once all the interviews were concluded, and themes were created, the primary author shared these themes with the participants for their feedback. The participants provided positive feedback that was consistent with the existing literature, which describes the PWI culture as being characterized by strong micro aggressions against non-White individuals (Comeaux, 2011; Turner, 1994). Therefore, member checking adds to the rigor and validity of our study and strengthens the overall conclusions drawn from our findings.

Positionality Statements

The primary investigator of this study is a Latina from Texas. Although she is a U.S. citizen, she identifies personally as Mexican. Moreover, her ethnic, educational, and linguistic background situates her within the participant's "in-group" (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Specifically, her parents are of Mexican origin, she is a native Spanish speaker, and she attended a PWI for six years. Additionally, all of her participants knew she was a Latina woman whose first language was Spanish and who attended a PWI. Her initial recruitment emails mentioned this, along with the start of all the interviews. Furthermore, the researcher's epistemological and paradigm orientation played a crucial role in shaping the study's trajectory. That is, she is bound by a constructivism paradigm, as her aim is to investigate and explain how people relate to

the reality that society has constructed (Nørreklit et al., 2016).

The second author is a White, cisgender man who is an English speaker. He has conducted diversity and inclusion research for two decades, employing varied methodologies and theoretical lenses. Many of these investigations have focused on the nexus of gender, race, and sport, including examinations of the opportunities for and experiences of Latinas in sport and physical activity.

The third author is a Black woman who attended PWIs for her undergraduate and graduate studies. She is an English speaker but also has an intermediate proficiency in Spanish, after living in Spain for two years during her secondary education. Her research is in sport marketing and personal branding. However, a segment of this research encompasses gender-based marketing. She approaches her research from a pragmatic paradigm, where her research methods are determined based on the research questions.

Limitations

While our study has several strengths, we must also acknowledge some limitations. First, our sample size was relatively small, consisting of only six participants. However, it is important to note that research on marginalized communities (e.g., African Americans, LGBTQ individuals, Latinx) can be challenging due to their societal positions in the United States, as captioned by Moore (2018). Moreover, our study focuses on a specific group of college students during their formative years, adding to the complexity of participant recruitment.

Secondly, our sample exclusively comprised participants enrolled in NCAA Division I institutions. While this selection enables us to illuminate their experiences, further research is warranted to comprehensively understand the encounters of Latinx student-athletes across the various other NCAA divisions. Third, the majority of our participants were involved in Track and Field sport settings. Lastly, while all of our participants attended a PWI, one participant (Daniella) also attended a Hispanic serving institution (HSI)[2]. We acknowledge that the intersection of PWI and HSI status can be nuanced and may impact the findings. Nonetheless, the experiences of Latinx student-athletes are an essential issue to comprehend. Additionally, while our findings are robust and consistent with existing literature, caution should be exercised when generalizing these results to all Latinx student-athletes in PWIs. Rather, the experiences of these six participants provide valuable insights for improving the educational and athletic sectors within PWIs.

Findings

The aim of this study was to explore the racial experiences of Latinx student-athletes within their PWIs. Our specific research objectives focused on gaining insights

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2. An HSI is an institution where at least 25% of the student population is Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). It is possible for an institution to be both a PWI and an HSI if the institution has a predominantly White student body but also has a significant Hispanic student population.

into their encounters with racial discrimination within the PWI environment (RQ1) and investigating the strategies they employ to navigate these experiences (RQ2). Results show that Latinx student-athletes at PWIs face racial discrimination from multiple sources, including their environment, coaches, and university staff. Nevertheless, the encouragement they receive from their families and the educational support extended by their athletic departments empower them to persevere even in the face of daily biases. The thematic landscape that emerged from our discussions comprises "Outsider," "Campus Resources," and "Family Matters." A more comprehensive exploration of these themes follows in the subsequent sections.

Campus Experiences

Building upon the LatCrit framework and to address RQ1, our findings enunciate the need for enhanced support for Latinx student-athletes within the educational landscape of the United States (Villalpando, 2004). Notably, a prevalent theme that emerged from our data centered on the experience of "*Outsider*" status encountered by these athletes within the broader campus community.

Outsider

Michelle, one of our participants in our study, noted that due to her Latina background, "it was hard to relate to [other] students in class." Agustin mirrored the same response and simply specified that his campus did not feel like home since it was "mostly White."

It is evident that Latinx student-athletes at PWIs do not feel embraced by their campus environment. This sentiment extends beyond the classroom, permeating into various campus organizations and programs. For example, Lucia explained how she wishes there were "more culturally diverse programs offered that I can be involved in…I do not feel at home here." Furthermore, Agustin shared that, "at the beginning, it was hard to adjust…there are so many White people and not enough Latin organizations for us."

Triana et al. (2020) accentuate the academic success of Latinx students necessitates a pervasive "sense of belonging" that transcends the classroom and permeates the entire university space (p. 8). Furthermore, LatCrit explicitly highlights the need to recognize Latinx "cultures, languages and experiences" within a formal educational setting, as they historically have been "omitted" (Bernal, 2013, p. 390). Our participant, Michelle, echoes these concerns, stating, "it is hard to talk [to faculty or staff] about our issues, especially since no one relates to you." Mia also mirrored the discussion by emphasizing "that due to my skin color...I feel uncomfortable and unsupported." Thus, our findings suggest universities, particularly PWIs, lack an inclusive environment, which ultimately can have a damaging decline in Latinx students' success attainments (Ortega et al., 2022).

We also questioned whether our participants experienced any adverse racial experiences on campus; "have you seen others experience bias based on their race or ethnicity, or have you experienced it yourself?" Themes we identified shed light on how our Latinx student-athletes had either faced racial oppression themselves or had

observed others enduring discrimination based on their skin color. Mia, a participant in our study, stated, "it is hard to relate to people due to my Latin background." Along the same lines, Lucia expressed that "there is not a lot of representation of us; [the staff and faculty] make it really hard to feel welcomed." Michelle further described the implicit racial incidents she had observed "on the university bus and on campus…you could tell that [White] individuals at my university do not like use [outsiders]."

Michelle, Alejandra, and Lucia's experiences give prominence to the pervasive impact of underrepresentation and the absence of diversity practices within a university setting. Their narratives resonate with a study conducted by Loveland (2018), wherein the authors stress the vital role of cultivating a strong sense of "cultural and communal identity" within colleges to better enhance Latinx students' personal development (p. 46). These experiences align seamlessly with the existing body of literature, which illuminates the academic and personal challenges faced by students of color due to the prevalence of underrepresentation and the lack of comprehensive DEI practices within academic institutions (Mendoza et al., 2021; Singer, 2005; Ortega et al., 2022).

Interestingly, participants expressed witnessing a disproportionate burden of outward oppression targeting African American students within their PWIs. While this observation may not be directly correlated to our research questions, it tangentially stresses the broader context of racial oppressions that extend to other student-athletes of color. Mia articulated her observation, noting that "during the Black Lives Matter movement, I saw many negative social posts going around at our university about African Americans, particularly this one post about a student stating that [he or she] will hang a Black person." While this racial hostility was directed at another underrepresented group (i.e., African Americans), the Latinx student-athletes were also impacted. As Mia points out, "the university called a whole meeting on this situation during regular class hours to discuss this…but we [student-athletes] were mad, they didn't do anything to suspend the [person who posted this post]."

Emerging scholarship has pointed to the negative campus culture PWIs have against underrepresented communities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Laird et al., 2007). This was also the case for some of the participants in our current study. Agustin remarked, "I see [and experience] a language barrier in my classes… most of my teammates are international Muslim and African Americans and need help but do not receive it…so we really struggle." Elements such as building relationships with faculty and engaging in extracurricular activities are crucial in providing "counter-spaces" for Latinx and other marginalized populations to succeed academically (Von Robertson et al., 2014). Despite their importance, such spaces were lacking in our participants' experiences.

Countering the Challenges

In addressing our research question (RQ2), we sought to understand the strategies employed by participants to navigate potential racial challenges within their

PWIs. The insights shared by most participants converged around two central themes: *Campus Resources* and *Family Support.*

Campus Resources

Within our study, numerous athletic departments and universities extended valuable resources to bolster students' engagement with matters of race and ethnicity while navigating the intricacies of campus life (*see Table 2*). A significant facet of this support was the establishment of dedicated programs aimed at amplifying DEI within the broader campus community. Our participants were keen to emphasize the pivotal role played by these campus resources in nurturing their academic advancement and social integration. Julieta, for instance, articulated the essence of these resources, affirming, "my university makes it a point to have a diverse curriculum and programs...which makes me feel very inclusive." Likewise, Daniella voiced how "because my university and athletic department provides cultural groups that help me find my voice on campus...I feel that every year I am personally improving." Although these programs varied in availability across campuses, they encompassed a wide range of offerings. For example, DEI training for faculty and staff, mechanisms for reporting incidents of racial harassment, councils, organizations, and groups focused on DEI, anti-discrimination policies, DEI policies specific to athletic departments, and guidance on pronouns and diverse practices (*see Table 2*).

Notably, the participants in this study personally experienced the benefits of these programs. For instance, Julieta affirmed, "every semester is different, but because of the resources and athletic staff present, I am able to learn how to interact [socially] and manage my time within my PWI." Research conducted by Casad et al. (2013) underscores the critical importance of providing students and faculty with the necessary tools to comprehend and confront social justice inequities. That is, when both faculty and students are educated about the mechanics and manifestations of biases, they become more adept at recognizing and addressing these issues openly (Monteith, et al., 2019). This heightened awareness can lead to a more inclusive and equitable academic environment (Adams, et al., 2014; Morris & Ashburn-Nardo, 2009).

Family Support

In various ways, all participants personally encountered instances of racial oppression or observed such occurrences within their PWI university setting. Many of them stressed their family's motivation played a pivotal role in propelling them forward to overcome these challenges. Michelle shared, "My dad was a first-generation college student…and he and my grandparents always make a huge deal to complete [my] university degree." Agustin echoed this sentiment, stating, "we [his family] come from the lower class…education, family, and a job is really important to us." Extensive research has underlined how family members can significantly mold the academic and athletic aspirations of Latinx college students (Osanloo et al., 2018). Moreover, studies have emphasized the crucial role of strong family support in positively influencing the college adjustments and academic achievements of Latinx

students (Núñez, 2013; Ortega et al., 2022; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Our study further corroborates this, affirming that family serves as a significant motivator for Latinx student-athletes, propelling them to pursue their educational and athletic endeavors within their PWIs.

Furthermore, our findings also unveiled that there were instances of persistence stemming from family expectations. For example, Daniella articulated this persistence, explaining, "I worked very hard and was lucky enough to receive a full ride…I have to do well for my culture." Michelle succinctly put it, "I have my family's success on my shoulders…I can't give up." This familial persistence to not squander educational and athletic opportunities acted as a driving force, compelling them to persevere adverse experiences. Grafnetterova and Banda (2021) stress similar dynamics in their study, noting that first-generation Latinx student-athletes heavily rely on family support for their educational and athletic accomplishments. The perception of this support being "unconditional" provides encouragement, persistence and empowers them to pursue their educational goals (Grafnetterova & Banda, 2021, p. 18). Consequently, our study contributes to the LatCrit theory by elucidating that while racism is indeed experienced, Latinx student-athletes driven by strong motives will persistently strive toward their ultimate objectives.

Discussion

While previous research has shed light on the racial experiences of Black student-athletes within a PWI setting (Singer, 2005, 2008), there remains a dearth of comprehensive exploration into the experiences of Latinx student-athletes within this setting. Therefore, this study makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge by closely examining the racial encounters of NCAA Division 1 Latinx student-athletes across PWIs in the United States. Furthermore, the insights gleaned from this study hold potential to offer beneficial guidance to both athletic and academic stakeholders seeking to enhance a sense of belonging within their PWI campus culture.

Building upon Espinoza and Harris' (1997) Latin Critical Race theory, our investigation has brought to light how the racial identity of Latinx participants significantly contributes to the distressing discrimination prevalent in their PWI campus and athletic contexts. These unsettling experiences have caused immense distress, leading them to feel like "outsiders" within their own athletic department and university. In this context, our study outcomes resoundingly echo a fundamental tenet of the LatCrit theory – the deep-seated roots of racism within the United States educational framework necessitate a comprehensive analysis for meaningful transformation (Bernal, 2013; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Grafnetterova & Banda, 2021; Villalpando, 2004).

Moreover, while our participants recounted instances of racial aggression, they firmly refrained from adopting a stance of passive victimhood. Quite the opposite, motivated by familial support and campus resources, they exhibited tenacious determination to pursue and achieve their athletic and academic ambitions. This resilience

resonates harmoniously with the LatCrit framework, which challenges us to recognize and unmask the origins of racism (Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Yosso et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the findings accentuate an intriguing paradox. Despite most of the universities where our participants attended, many of which boasted multiple DEI initiatives within both their academic and athletic domains (*see Table 2*), instances of racial disparity and discrimination persisted among Latinx student-athletes. This observation finds resonance within the extensive LatCrit literature, maintaining the amplification of Latinx voices are needed in order for their experiences to be understood, and for the transformations within educational settings to be achieved (Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

In summary, our research underscores the profound impact of racial identity on the experiences of Latinx student-athletes within PWIs, aligning our findings with the principles of LatCrit theory. It draws attention to the urgency of recognizing and dismantling the roots of racism within the educational system to pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future (Espinoza & Harris, 1997).

Implications

Our findings carry substantial implications. Primarily, they illuminate the presence of racial biases affecting Latinx athletes and other underrepresented student groups, such as African Americans and Muslims, within the confines of their campus environments. This underscores the pressing imperative for universities and athletic departments to adopt more comprehensive and diverse approaches. For instance, academic institutions can proactively organize an array of events, seminars, and programs designed to celebrate and advocate for diversity and inclusion. These initiatives may encompass cultural festivals, unity walks, food tastings, and art exhibitions, among others. The objective for universities should extend beyond mere cultural awareness education; it should encompass the creation of an inclusive and accepting environment where everyone is welcomed. As posited by Wells et al. (2016), diverse learning environments serve to better equip students for a globalized society, ultimately diminishing stereotypes and nurturing "cross-racial understanding" (p.21). Furthermore, Cunningham (2023) underscores the multifaceted benefits that diversity and inclusion practices can confer upon both the campus and the surrounding community. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination persist, particularly within social contexts where individuals perceive distinctions among themselves.

Lastly, we strongly recommend the implementation of robust mentoring programs within universities and athletic departments. These programs would enable athletes to connect with individuals from diverse racial backgrounds, including faculty members. Ortega et al. (2022) have demonstrated how increased faculty representation is positively correlated with the graduation rates of Latinx students. Furthermore, the research by Ortega and Grafnetterova (2022) spotlights the critical role of faculty representation and mentoring programs in enhancing the academic success of Latinx student-athletes. Phommasa et al. (2022) punctuate the potential long-term benefits of practices like "faculty dinners" and "table talks" for marginalized college

students (p. 113). Therefore, we advocate for the widespread adoption of mentoring initiatives that facilitate interactions between athletes and individuals from diverse racial backgrounds, including faculty members.

Future Directions

There are several compelling avenues for future research that warrant exploration. First, it would be valuable for forthcoming studies to delve into the experiences of Latinx student-athletes within other NCAA Divisions. Given that the NCAA Division I typically garners more resources and support for their athletic programs compared to NCAA Divisions II and III (Sweitzer, 2009), examining how these differences influence the racial experiences of Latinx student-athletes could provide insightful perspectives.

Secondly, there is a compelling need for future research to investigate whether additional social identities, such as citizenship, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class, can contribute to the racial discriminatory encounters faced by Latinx student-athletes at PWIs. Existing literature extensively chronicles the heightened discriminatory experiences that result from the intersection of social identities (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; 2022). However, much of this research primarily focuses on the Black population (Ireland et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2017), leaving a gap in understanding the intersectionality of Latinx individuals. Moreover, a recent study by Huber (2023) reiterates the necessity for researchers to undertake a comprehensive examination of the impacts these intersecting identities have within the Latinx population.

Lastly, further research is warranted to assess the potential effectiveness of DEI interventions and training programs aimed at mitigating racial biases on campus. This is particularly significant given that all the universities examined in our study had incorporated faculty and staff training as part of their DEI initiatives, provided easy avenues for reporting racial harassment, and established clear definitions of racism (*see Table 2*). Yet, despite these efforts, it was notable that the majority of the Latinx student-athletes continued to encounter instances of racial aggression.

Conclusion

Amidst the growing presence of Latinx individuals within the education and athletic settings in the United States (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020), it is noteworthy that research on the experiences of Latinx student-athletes, particularly within their university settings, remains relatively sparse (Grafnetterova & Banda, 2021; Ortega & Grafnetterova, 2022). As such, the purpose of this study was to address this gap by critically analyzing the racial experiences of NCAA Latinx student-athletes who attend PWIs. Our findings illustrate the challenges these student-athletes encounter and spotlights their determination, often drawing on both familial and campus-based resources for sustenance. Consequently, this study accentuates the significance of universities and athletic settings to proactively address issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusivity in order to promote a more inclusive environment for Latinx students.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your family's social class?
2. How would you describe race and race relations at your university?
3. How would you describe your experiences as a Latinx student-athlete?
4. Have you seen others experience bias based on their race and ethnicity? Have you experienced bias yourself? If so, what was the nature of the bias?
5. Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsupported by your peers, teachers, or your team?
6. Between these three choices; above average, average, and below-average: how do you feel you manage your sport and schoolwork? What are reasons you answered as you did?
7. Does your social class affect any social, academic, or sport-related settings?
8. Would you like to add any final remarks on your college experiences?

Examining the framing of mental health in Division I college athlete handbooks

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This study examined college athlete handbooks at 50 Division I institutions to understand how language focused on mental health was framed. Mental health is an important area of focus on college campuses, particularly for athletes due to increased demands as well as stigmas related to reporting. The researchers performed a framing analysis of college athlete handbooks during the 2020-21 academic year, focusing on all references to mental health, while also examining in detail specific sections devoted to mental health resources. The findings indicated that those specific sections provided supportive resources for college athletes, potentially eroding stigma surrounding the issue. However, some policies did connect support to athletic performance, thus diminishing the individual in the process. Additionally, a lack of reference to diversity and inclusivity may create barriers to mental health support. This research can provide a great resource for athletic departments focused on developing communication strategies to support athlete mental health.

Key words: mental health, collegiate athletics, NCAA, framing

Mental health has become an increasingly important topic in society (Makita et al., 2021). Awareness around mental health and factors that may increase mental health risks have captured the attention of researchers, organizations, school districts, and government agencies among others. According to the World Health Organization (2014), mental health refers to, "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his own community" (para. 1). Sport represents an important contextual area for mental health as athletes experience mental health symptoms and disorders at a disproportionate rate to the general population (Reardon, et al., 2021). Mental health awareness in sport and supports for athletes' mental health have improved, although challenges still exist. For example, media stereotypes about individuals with mental health concerns may contribute to societal stigmas (Parrott et al. 2021). Sport and cultural values, such as athletes being conditioned to play through pain, pressure to not report injuries, and to constantly project strength, also can contribute to athletes experiencing mental health issues (Poucher et al., 2021).

Additional stressors include overtraining, pressure to perform, and poor relationships with teammates and coaches (Poucher et al., 2021). Research also has discovered that individual factors such as age and gender can influence how athletes experience mental health concerns. For example, elite female athletes are more likely than male athletes to report symptoms of depression (Junge & Fedderman-Dermont, 2016; Wolanin et al., 2016). Whereas mental health is a salient topic in all sport levels, athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics in the United States (e.g., college athletes) are prone to mental health risks. Indeed, college athletes possess very demanding and rigid schedules as they balance athletic obligations with academic responsibilities (Stowkowski et al., 2020a). College athletes often have very rigid schedules, leaving little opportunity for down-time or personal needs, which consequently can aggravate mental health issues (Bird et al., 2020). College athletes also tend to experience disproportionate abuse on social and digital media platforms (Sanderson, 2018).

Consequently, mental health programming and supports have increased in intercollegiate athletic departments. For example, in March 2022, the University of Illinois launched the "I Matter" campaign to address college athletes who experience mental health issues arising from bullying and trolling they experience on social media. One area where intercollegiate athletic departments can address mental health is policy. Prior research has addressed how many universities offer mental health resources (Seidel et al., 2020). Additional research has used qualitative interviews with college athletes about mental health support resources, finding that while these athletes view those resources as helpful, they can also include barriers to support, such as the limited range of those services and the institution's conflicting interests as stakeholders and employees (Hatteberg, 2020). Examining athletic department policies pertaining to mental health is important as these policies can frame how the athletic department values mental health, which may influence college athletes' perceptions of the supports and resources available for mental health. Additionally, previous research has identified that policies may contain mixed messages for college athletes (Sanderson, 2011; Sanderson et al., 2015), and policy analysis may help shed light on how athletic departments programming aligns with, or departs from, stated policies. Accordingly, this research examines intercollegiate athletic policies pertaining to mental health through an examination of college athlete handbooks for schools participating in Division I athletics. Through analysis, this research seeks to uncover how intercollegiate athletic departments are framing mental health policies, and how those framings may influence the use of mental health services.

Literature Review

Framing

The concept of framing was articulated through the sociological work of Goffman (1974), who suggested framing occurs when an individual chooses certain aspects of a situation to define it. Goffman's work built on that of Sherif (1967), who suggested that the way people interpret and experience situations are grounded in the

interpretive schema created through prior experiences. Since these sociological beginnings, framing has found utility in the media and communication domain. In this area, framing occurs when media organizations emphasize aspects of a news story to promote certain understandings and interpretations within the audience (Entman, 1993). This process is often unintentional (Tuchman, 1978) and can be guided by the value system of the journalist or society (Boykoff, 2006). Framing effects on the audience can still take place weeks after exposure (Tewksbury et al., 2000). Media framing research has occurred in many areas related to sport, including how disabled athletes (Buysse & Borcherding, 2010), gender and race (Billings & Eastman, 2003), and mental health (Cassilo, 2020) are portrayed in the media.

However, media members are not the only ones in the communication process, and thus, others with a platform and a voice can frame issues and ideas. This includes an organization's communication department. Sanderson (2011) examined how collegiate athletics departments at Division I institutions framed social media use, recognizing the way athletic departments can produce materials that influence a college athlete's understanding of certain issues. His research found that nearly all those policies were framed in a way that highlighted the risks of social media use rather than promoting the positive ways athletes can use social media. In a later study, Sanderson et al. (2015) examined 244 social media policies from Division I, Division II, and Division III schools, finding the policies were restrictive and contained conflicting messages about ownership of social media content. As such, college athletes did not learn from policy about using these technologies in a positive way. Just as athletic departments have been the focus of framing research, so too have health policies. Such inquiries have included evaluating frames created through policies related to gay men's health issues (Adams et al., 2010), national health policy documents in Canada (Iannantuono & Eyles, 1997), and how national authorities framed SARS in Singapore (Ibrahim, 2007). Despite the importance of mental health, research examining mental health policy framing is scarce. In one such study, Sturdy et al. (2012) examined the role consultation played in forming Scottish mental health policies and the creation of a collective action frame. More recently, Zhang et al. (2021) studied how mental health institutions and media organizations in China frame depression, finding that depression responsibilities were primarily assigned to the individual.

Mental Health and Mental Illness

While "mental health" and "mental illness" are commonly discussed by expert organizations in the same space (e.g., NAMI, n.d.; About mental health, 2021), the two terms are not interchangeable. MentalHealth.gov defines mental health as "emotional, psychological, and social well-being" (What is mental health?, 2020, para. 1), whereas the American Psychiatric Association defines mental illness as "health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior" (What is mental illness?, 2018, para. 1). With the ability to see the differences between the two terms, their prevalence and impact can be understood. The Center for Disease and Control (CDC) published on its website that 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year, and 1 in 25 Americans lives with a serious mental illness (About mental

health, 2021). Despite the commonality established by these statistics, mental health and mental illness have been historically stigmatized in American society. Mass media is the most common source for information on mental health and mental illness (Myrick et al., 2014), and thus, plays a prominent role in this area. For instance, coverage often linked mental illness and violence (McGinty et al., 2016), despite that being an inaccurate representation of their relationship (Friedman, 2006). Coverage rarely involved accounts from mental health professionals (Salter & Byrne, 2000). Thus, these stigmas formed as the media reinforced myths and stereotypes about mental health and mental illness that caused feelings of shame, self-blame and secrecy (Benbow, 2007). Additionally, mental health policy can be impacted by inaccurate portrayals. Wahl (2003) provides an example, saying:

> Again, these patterns of coverage have the potential to influence public attitudes and policy. A focus on dysfunction and absence of stories of recovery likely contribute to public pessimism about the potential for recovery. Many people, including legislators and other policymakers, continue to believe that those with severe mental disorders are unlikely to recover (p. 1598).

In recent years, mediated attitudes about mental health and mental illness and the stigmas associated with them are shifting. Rhydderch et al. (2016) analyzed mental health coverage in English newspapers and found that from 2008-2014, there was a significant decrease in the number of articles with stigmatizing elements of mental health. Elsewhere, Gwarjanski and Parrott (2018) examined media coverage of schizophrenia in the United States, finding that such stories were met with increased positive reader feedback. On social media, users expressed positive support and an atmosphere of acceptance to public figures who made public mental health disclosures (Parrott et al., 2020). Despite these shifts, communication of mental health policy and resources is still lagging. Seidel et al. (2021) examined New York City metropolitan area college and university websites for their mental health offerings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research found that in the 138 websites examined, only half contained information about remote counseling, and 57.97% of the sample had directions for students who were experiencing a mental health emergency. Thus, while mental health and mental illness are being taken more seriously, there remains a lack of resources in some areas of society, one of which is sport.

College Athletes and Mental Health

Mental health has become an increasingly important topic for college athletics and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has become concerned about college athletes underutilizing mental health services (Brown et al., 2020). On the NCAA's website, it lists a "Mental Health Best Practices" section that includes four practices: clinical licensure of practitioners providing mental health care, procedures for identification and referral of college athletes to qualified practitioners, pre-participation mental health screening, and health-promoting environments that support mental well-being (Mental health best practices, n.d.). A scoping review found that most variables associated with college athlete mental health are related to generic or sport-specific factors (Kegelaers et al., 2022). One of the challenges with college athletes not seeking more mental health support is the existence of barriers that may preclude them from asking for help (Gross et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2018). These barriers include lack of time (e.g., Lopez & Levy, 2013; Beauchemin, 2014), fear of reprisal from coaches or administrators (e.g., Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010; Sudano et al., 2017), fear of experiencing personal discomfort (e.g., Watson, 2005; Sasso et al., 2022), and perceptions that they will be perceived as weak for seeking help (e.g., Moore, 2017; Bird et al., 2020). Research has also indicated athletes may not understand the services available to them (Ryan et al., 2022). These roadblocks not only prevent college athletes from seeking support, but also to experience elevated mental health symptoms (Drew & Matthews, 2019). Division I college athletes can experience a wide variety of mental health stressors related to managing both athletic and academic responsibilities, transitioning away from home to college, being bullied on social media (Sanderson, 2018), and adverse childhood experiences (Brown et al., 2020). College athletes also have experienced mental health issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as some athletes lost the ability to participate in sport and were limited for a time in how they could communicate with teammates and coaches (e.g., Graupensperger et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2023). College athletes also tend to display more negative attitudes towards seeking help than students who are not athletes (Beauchemin, 2014). Although college athletes can experience a diverse range of mental health issues, common manifestations include depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, and loss of athletic identity that can occur when an athlete is injured and loses the ability to compete (Ryan et al., 2018).

Moreover, college athletes from under-represented and minority groups are at additional risk with mental health as they feel isolated and unsupported by school administrators, which may preclude them from seeking mental health supports (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020). Black collegiate athletes have noted the stigmas and culture of silence surrounding mental health (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Stigma can play an impactful role on college athletes seeking mental health services. Hilliard et al. (2023) surveyed 328 Division II and III college athletes and found that public stigma related to mental health was significantly related to self-stigma, which was also related to attitudes about mental health, in either a positive or negative direction. The authors then used a logistic regression analysis, finding those who sought mental health services in the past had an increased likelihood of positive stigma and attitudes toward mental health. Furthermore, prior research has established that while college coaches have awareness of the stigma associated with seeking mental health support, they have a lack of knowledge about the role a sports psychologist consultant could play (Halterman et al., 2020). Research has also indicated that Black college athletes are at an elevated risk of mental health struggles and interview data suggests that athletic departments need to offer stress management programs for this college athlete population (Wilkerson et al., 2022). Examinations into recent media coverage about college athletes disclosing their mental health concerns shows these athletes receive support from coaches, teammates, and the media, which can help shed stigmas about reporting and diminish barriers (Cassilo & Kluch, 2021). However, such media cov-

erage also commodifies these athletes, placing importance on the athletic value their teams lose when these athletes step away to focus on mental health, and that dehumanization may negatively affect mental health disclosures.

Hatteberg (2020) used qualitative interviews with student athletes to understand uses and perceptions of support resources. The research found the majority of the athletes interviewed used those resources but also believed there to be barriers to support, such as not having the athletes' best interests in mind, the confidentiality of those sessions, and the inability of those resources to provide the support the athletes actually need. Furthermore, a cross-sectional study found that college athletes indicated reliance on themselves to seek mental health services, a lack of time, and negative attitudes from head coaches about mental health could all serve as barriers (Yoon, 2023). Researchers have also identified several ways that athletic departments can enhance their mental health offerings including programming and working with coaches to promote positive organizational change towards mental health (Ryan et al., 2018). A 2022 interview study also indicated that athletic trainers seek more training to recognize mental health concerns (Beasley et al., 2022). College athletes who receive more social support and feel more connected with their team also tend to report stronger mental health (Graupensperger et al., 2020). Elsewhere, research from semi-structured interviews with college athletes indicated not having sport-specific mental health resources can be a barrier to support and that institutions need to create athlete-centered resources with annual advertisements to increase college athlete consumption of these services (Young et al., 2022). Given that these recommendations are suggested to occur at the organizational level, it seems plausible that organizational policy is one domain where current organizational culture and perspectives about mental health can be assessed. Previous research has identified how organizational policy can influence how college athletes perceive organizational perspectives on social media (Sanderson, 2011; Sanderson et al., 2015), and this research seeks to understand what organizational policy about mental health communicates to college athletes, including how policy may shape perceptions and understandings about organizational culture and supports related to mental health. To aid this understanding, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

RQ1: How did sections devoted to mental health within college athlete handbooks frame mental health resources?

RQ2: How did the rest of the college athlete handbooks frame mental health?

Method

Data Collection

To compile collegiate athletic department communication related to mental health, researchers sought college athlete handbooks at Division I schools in the "Power Five" conferences (Atlantic Coast, Big 10, Big 12, Pac-12, and Southeastern). College athletes annually receive a college athlete handbook from their respective athletic departments, which includes university and athletic department policies and procedures (Huml et al., 2014), and thus, these handbooks have been a point of data collection in relation to college athlete policies and procedures in several prior studies (e.g., Sanderson, 2011; Southall & Nagel, 2003). These handbooks are "an authorized source of information, and a communication medium for the entire athletic community" and are "readily available for athletic administrators, coaches, athletes, and other athletic department personnel to access" (Paule-Koba & Rohrs-Cordes, 2019, p. 4). Power Five conference schools have been documented to have greater autonomy than other NCAA member institutions (Brutlag Hosick, 2014). Prior research has examined social media policies within college athlete handbooks at the Division I level and used similar purposive sampling (Sanderson, 2011). To grow the sample size for this project, researchers included data from the Big East conference, which is considered a high-major league for college basketball, producing multiple national champions. This led to an initial sample of 76 schools to seek this information from. Researchers then visited the athletic department websites for these schools to obtain digital versions of these handbooks, mirroring the process used by Sanderson (2011). This data collection occurred in May 2021, thus the researchers sought the 2020-21 version of the handbook or the latest publicly available version. If a handbook was not publicly available (which was the case for 29 of the schools), the researchers emailed the university's athletic department communication team requesting a copy. This resulted in a final sample of college athlete handbooks from 50 different universities. Of those 50 handbooks, 20 universities (40% of the sample) had no specific section devoted to mental health resources. There were 44 handbooks (88% of the sample) that included references to mental health appearing outside of a specific section[1].

Data Analysis

The college athlete handbooks ranged in size from 27 to 81 pages. In addition to mental health, the contents of these handbooks covered topics including academic eligibility, gambling, hazing, drug testing, and graduation. To begin the data analysis process, the researchers reviewed all the college athlete handbooks to see if there was a specific section devoted to mental health, as an initial review of the data indicated that detailed information about mental health services was found in these types of sections as opposed to overall health sections. This led to two separate data sets: (1) mental health references throughout the handbook; and (2) specific sections within the handbooks focused on mental health. Handbooks were not limited to one set or the other if there were examples of both within its contents. Those sections specifically focused on mental health ranged from 1 to 9 pages. The researchers then took a data-driven approach to both data sets separately, allowing for the frames to emerge for themselves. Within each data set, the researchers noted any themes or patterns at the sentence level, which could be used to create initial frames, or frames

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[1] As has been done in similar prior research (e.g., Sanderson et al., 2014), we chose to not identity the schools whose examples were used in this research. This decision was made so that it was clear that the authors were not criticizing certain school in the data set but instead, providing a holistic view of the data. For a list of schools, please contact the corresponding author.

from the first reading. The researchers then organized theses frames into framing categories, finding eight categories for each data set. There was no baseline numeric threshold for a frame to be constructed (e.g., appearing in 'x' number of handbooks) but after completing the analysis portion, the researchers tallied that all 15 categories appeared in at least 18% of the data. The researchers electronically confirmed these findings in the data through an email exchange. For each handbook, there was no limit to the number of frames that could be included, an approach that has been used in prior framing studies (e.g. Cassilo & Sanderson, 2018). Within each handbook the authors found frames that supported each other but also others that were contradictory in nature. For instance, there were handbooks that had supportive mental health specific sections but in other sections of that same handbook, there was language introducing barriers to support. This being a qualitative study, the researchers did not examine the statistical relationships between co-occurrence of frames.

Results

Mental Health Specific Sections

RQ1 asked, how did sections devoted to mental health within college athlete handbooks frame mental health resources? Through the data analysis process, seven themes were identified by the researchers in the data that addressed RQ1. Those frames (see Table 1) were: (a) explanation of support; (b) versatile support; (c) focus on athletic performance; (d) confidential space; (e) access to resources; (f) committed to helping; and (g) encouraging athletes to seek help. Below, each of those frames will be presented in more detail in order of frequency.

Explanation of Support, (n=24; 80% of sample)

Parts of these sections were devoted to explaining what appointments of these services would entail. In some cases, this explanation included a basic overview of a first session, such as, "This session will last approximately 45-50 minutes, and it is your chance to share some background information and get to know our providers." Part of the mental health support included expert staff. Thus, included in this frame were any references to the expertise of the staff, including, "Mental health services are provided by licensed mental health professionals." Additionally, some policies included clear rules and regulations for these appointments, including, "Please note if you miss more than 1 appointment, the college athlete is responsible for all appointment fees for the missed appointments."

Versatile Support, (n=22; 73.3% of sample)

Some specific sections devoted to mental health resources made clear that the athletic department was available to help in any way the athlete needed. To show their versatility, some departments listed off issues they could help with, such as, "Topics can include anxiety and depression, relationship issues, dealing with injury, time management, dealing with stress, homesickness, substance use, disordered eating/eating disorders, financial issues, family matters, etc." Versatility also included

Table 1

Coding Themes and Examples from Mental Health Specific Sections

Name of theme	Description	Example
Explanation of support	Explanation of what mental health appointments would entail.	"This session will last approximately 45-50 minutes, and it is your chance to share some background information and get to know our providers."
Versatile support	Examples indicating that the athletic department was available to help the student-athlete in any way.	"Topics can include anxiety and depression, relationship issues, dealing with injury, time management, dealing with stress, homesickness, substance use, disordered eating/eating disorders, financial issues, family matters, etc."
Focus on athletic performance	Data included instances in which mental health was discussed in the context of how it could help the student-athlete's performance.	"It is our philosophy that the healthier you are as a whole person the better you will perform."
Confidential space	References to mental health stressed the confidentiality of resources.	"All aspects of individual counseling sessions are confidential and protected by state law."
Access to resources	Data included references to how simple it was for student-athletes to use mental health resources.	"Appointment times and length are flexible."
Committed to helping	Examples discussed that improving student-athlete mental health was a goal of the athletic department.	"[School] is a committed to providing student-athletes overall support for their wellbeing."
Encouraging athletes to seek help	Data included language that implored student to use the available mental health services.	"If you have questions or concerns about yourself or someone you know, or to get your free [school] stress-ball, please contact…"

types of support. For example, one school listed services such as personal counseling, group counseling, crisis intervention, and team building. Sections also made clear they could adjust their services to offer anything that makes the college athletes feel comfortable, including this example, "Counselors of both genders are available."

Focus on Athletic Performance, (n=19; 63.3% of sample)

Other aspects of these sections often connected mental health support to how it could help an athlete's performance. In one example, this focus on athletic performance was articulated by saying, "These services are aimed at helping college athletes learn more about the psychological/mental aspect of sport with the purposes of enhancing performance." Another example expressed commitment to helping achieve better mental health only in connection to athletic performance by saying, "It is our philosophy that the healthier you are as a whole person the better you will perform." Elsewhere, these sections also connected poor athletic performance to mental health concerns, saying,

> Any of the following concerns can impact college athletes' preparation and execution in their sport: difficulty adjusting to college, dealing with stress associated with being a student-athlete, relationship concerns, ADHD, and other mental health conditions such as: depression, anxiety, eating disorders, & substance misuse.

Other handbooks addressed common mental health concerns but only in the context of sport, such as, "Some of the most common reasons athletes use the sports psychology services are performing well in practice but not in competition, anxiety and nervousness before games, low self-confidence, poor concentration or focus, low motivation, and making technical corrections." In other handbooks, athletic and personal mental health were tied together, including, "[School] demonstrates its mission to prepare student-athletes to perform at their highest level academically, athletically, and personally by providing services to support optimal mental health and sport performance."

Confidential Space, (n=16; 53.3% of sample)

To promote mental health disclosures, mental health sections in college athlete handbooks stressed the confidentiality of these resources. There are several examples of this, including highlighting how confidentiality can be created because of legal concerns, such as, "All aspects of individual counseling sessions are confidential and protected by state law," and listing who cannot be contacted, including, "Consistent with state law, counselors *will not speak with anyone*, including your coach or parents (if you are 18 & older), for any reason without your written consent."

Access to Resources, (n=15; 50% of sample)

These sections within college athlete handbooks often focused on how simple it is for athletes to receive the help they are looking for. Examples included showing easier access by fitting into an athlete's schedule, saying, "Appointment times and length are flexible." Many included that counseling sessions were no cost and could

be as frequent as needed, such as, "All aforementioned services are confidential, free, unlimited, and available for any student-athlete at [school]." Easier access to athletes also meant clearly communicating the availability of resources, including, "Appointments are primarily held Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. However, other times can be made available as necessary."

Committed to Helping, (n=11, 36.7% of sample)

The next frame for these sections established that athletic departments have goals to improve athlete mental health. Some indicated the value their athletic department placed on mental health and communicated that this will be an area of focus moving forward, including, "[School] is a committed to providing student-athletes overall support for their wellbeing." By singling out mental health in their medical services, others made clear that it was a priority for them, "The athletics department is committed to providing student athletes with comprehensive medical care, to include mental health services." Other areas indicated that individual wellbeing was a priority for the department, such as, "The philosophy of the unit is embodied in the statement 'helping students help themselves.'" In some cases, athletic departments made clear that by valuing the individual, they were committing to helping address mental health concerns, such as, "The mission of counseling and sport psychology services is to provide short-term psychological services to [school] student-athletes to facilitate the development of the whole person."

Encouraging Athletes to Seek Help, (n=8, 26.6% of sample)

These sections also made attempts to implore college athletes to use these services. In one specific instance, this occurred by showing the commonality of the many reasons why athletes seek help, including, "Student-athletes often meet with counselors to discuss a variety of issues, including but not limited to: the transition to college, coping with injuries, relationship difficulties (family, teammates, friends, romantic partner), stress, eating concerns, substance use, anxiety and depression". Other ways to show the commonality of mental health included referencing the "stresses of daily life" and listing examples of mental health concerns that the athletes could identify with, such as "academic stress, family issues, down mood, relationship challenges." Others encouraged athletes to seek treatment by offering free stuff for those who came, such as, "If you have questions or concerns about yourself or someone you know, or to get your free [school] stress-ball, please contact…" Evidence of this theme also included putting athletes in the driver's seat of the process. For example, "All students are urged to seek help proactively in order to resolve personal, interpersonal, family, and academic problems that may hinder their quality of life and ability to function well during college years."

Entirety of Handbook

RQ2 asked, how did the rest of the college athlete handbooks frame mental health? Through the data analysis process, eight themes were identified by the researchers in the data that addressed RQ1. Those frames (see Table 2) were: (a) avail-

Table 2
Coding Themes and Examples from Entire of Handbook

Name of theme	Description	Example
Available resources	The athletic department described the ways student-athletes could receive help.	"All [school] students, including student-athletes, have access to a range of on-campus mental health care services at University Counseling Services ("UCS")."
Reducing barriers	Data included language that attempt to eliminate obstacles to seeking mental health support.	"Head Coaches and support staff are notified of at-risk student-athletes, but specific information related to mental health status will not be communicated."
Barriers to seeking help	Data included any language in the handbook that could negatively impact a student-athlete's ability to receive mental health support.	"It is the responsibility of the student-athlete to report all physical injuries, illnesses, & mental health concerns (anxiety, depression, etc.) to an Athletic Trainer as soon as possible."
Connection to punitive action	References to mental health that included a punishment for the student-athlete.	"If a breathalyzer is issued by [school] and yields a positive result that meets the legal definition of intoxication under [state] law***, the student will be deemed to have a Probationary violation of the Substance Abuse Policy and required to meet with mental health professional for evaluation/treatment."
Collaborative effort	Data included references to how mental health was connected to holistic athlete health efforts.	"The dietitians collaborate with the Sports Medicine, Sports Performance, Mental Performance and other members of the Health & Performance team to assist student-athletes in achieving optimal performance and provide unified care."
Importance of mental health	Examples discussed the value to the individual of addressing one's mental health concerns.	"Ordinary pressures of daily collegiate life, involving academic and athletic expectations, have been found to lead to various student-athlete health concerns, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, sleep and eating disorders, athletic performance issues, and relationship difficulties."
Connection to other health concerns	Data included references to mental health in the context of other health concerns.	"Disordered eating patterns can negatively impact student-athletes' mental and physical well-being, and eventually, their performance."
Connection to academic success	Examples referenced how mental health could impact a student-athlete's performance in the classroom.	"The SCS exists to advance student development and academic success by providing personalized and evidenced-based mental health care to [school]."

able resources; (b) reducing barriers; (c) barriers to seeking help; (d) connection to punitive action; (e) collaborative effort; (f) importance of mental health; (g) connection to other health concerns; and (h) connection to academic success. Below, each of those frames will be presented in more detail in order of frequency.

Available Resources, (n=36, 72% of sample)

While there may not have been specific sections of the handbook devoted to mental health resources, many handbooks did include available resources in other sections. For some, indicating there were resources available meant naming specific people who athletes could turn to, such as, "[Name] is a good resource, particularly in the areas of welfare, wellness, mental health, conduct and behavior." Others referenced university-wide services, including, "All [school] students, including student-athletes, have access to a range of on-campus mental health care services at University Counseling Services ("UCS")."

Reducing Barriers, (n=32, 64% of sample)

Within these handbooks, athletic departments tried to entice athletes to use their mental health resources. This included eliminating the cost barrier by making clear that students would not be penalized financially, such as,

> Effective with the 2015-16 academic year, students that enter the [school name removed] and receive athletically related financial aid upon enrollment cannot have their initial award non-renewed or reduced for athletic reasons or due to injury, illness and/or a physical or mental medical condition.

Others stressed that the appointments were a safe space, saying, "Head Coaches and support staff are notified of at-risk student-athletes, but specific information related to mental health status will not be communicated."

Barriers to Seek Help, (n=27, 54% of sample)

Some language in the handbook created barriers, thus creating a deterrent for college athletes to seek support. In some cases, this included mentioning there were mental health resources but giving no information on how to access them. Prior research has established lack of information as a barrier to seeking mental health support (Sadavoy et al., 2004). Other language indicated potential fees for students (e.g., students needing to pay for their own therapy appointments) or requirements to disclose the individual's mental health history prior to coming to the university. Prior research has examined cost (Moroz et al., 2020) and privacy (Melcher et al., 2022) as barriers to seeking mental health support. A required disclosure of prior mental health concerns would be considered a privacy breach for some. Some universities put the responsibility solely on the student to seek help, including, "It is the responsibility of the student-athlete to report all physical injuries, illnesses, & mental health concerns (anxiety, depression, etc.) to an Athletic Trainer as soon as possible." Research has shown that putting the responsibility on college students to seek their own mental health support can be a barrier (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2007). In one case,

a coach potentially had access to mental health status, by saying, "Coaching staff and administrators will be apprised of information on the student-athlete's wellbeing and status per the confidentiality parameters." While the language here is unclear how much the coach would have access to, that ambiguity does create an additional privacy concern, which as referenced earlier in this section, is an established barrier to seeking mental health support.

Connection to Punitive Action, (n=22, 44% of sample)

In some instances, mental health was included in references to other behavior that may lead to punitive action. Drug and alcohol abuse was one area this was particularly evident. Some handbooks referenced a mental health evaluation as part of the return to play after a drug or alcohol violation. Yet this reference was often vague to the extent that it was unclear whether mental health concerns were viewed as the cause of substance abuse problems or a consequence. For instance, "The Director of Athletics may suspend the student-athlete from conditioning, practice, and/or competition until the Director of Athletics is satisfied after consultation with the team physician that the student-athlete is physically and mentally fit to resume such activities." Another instance included, "If a breathalyzer is issued by [school] and yields a positive result that meets the legal definition of intoxication under [state] law***, the student will be deemed to have a Probationary violation of the Substance Abuse Policy and required to meet with mental health professional for evaluation/treatment."

Collaborative Effort, (n=21, 42% of sample)

In some college athlete handbooks, the athletic department outlined how mental health fit into the other efforts to attend to athlete health. This included detailing how different services work together in a holistic effort that included mental health, such as, "The dietitians collaborate with the Sports Medicine, Sports Performance, Mental Performance and other members of the Health & Performance team to assist student-athletes in achieving optimal performance and provide unified care." Others discussed how mental health services guide other areas of support, such as, "Athletic trainers will abide by any standing order of the Team Physician, Team Orthopedic Surgeon, Mental Health/Mental Game Professional and/or dentist."

Importance of Mental Health, (n=20, 40% of sample)

As part of the dialogue in the handbooks, the athletics departments communicated the significance of mental health. This included discussing why athletes may struggle with mental health concerns, including, "Ordinary pressures of daily collegiate life, involving academic and athletic expectations, have been found to lead to various student-athlete health concerns, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, sleep and eating disorders, athletic performance issues, and relationship difficulties." Including such language establishes to the college athlete the effects that mental health can have, thus highlighting its importance. Others showed how they valued mental health by making some resources mandatory, such as, "This 10-week program covers a wide variety of topics that include: values and identity exploration,

mental health support and resource education, social media training, introduction to career readiness programming and more." Such a mandatory program shows the priority and importance the university puts on mental health.

Connection to Other Health Concerns, (n=14, 28% of sample)

In some cases, mental health was discussed in the context of other health concerns, creating a holistic view of health that includes both mental and physical health that included some crossover with the "collaborative effort" frame. For instance, mental health care was often discussed in relation to pregnancy, such as, "It could include you, your obstetrician or other maternal health care provider, your coach, athletic trainer, team physician, academic counselor, a mental health counselor, or others as needed," as well as eating disorders, including, "Disordered eating patterns can negatively impact student-athletes' mental and physical well-being, and eventually, their performance." In some cases, it was communicated that being healthy included mental health, such as, "Being a healthy and academically successful college student means having the physical, mental, and social well-being to live each day to its fullest."

Connection to Academic Success, (n=9, 18% of sample).

One final frame within the data focused on mental health in connection to an athlete's performance in the classroom. This was included by referencing academics in the goals of some support services, such as, "The SCS exists to advance student development and academic success by providing personalized and evidenced-based mental health care to [school]." Other universities included information on how academic support works with mental health support, including, "SASP counselors also assist our students with various personal and academic challenges. We work in conjunction with Center of Mental Health Services…"

Discussion

While mental health is a concern for all college students, Division I collegiate athletes face additional stressors that can impact their mental health. Their rigid schedules and lack of time for personal care can worsen mental health concerns (Bird et al., 2020). This was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many collegiate athletes were isolated from other students on campus and limited in their communication with their own team and coaches (Graupensperger et al., 2020). Thus, it is very important to have mental health support available to collegiate athletes. However, availability of resources is just one step toward making sure athletes receive support. Proper communication of those resources is essential to ensuring that athletes know how to access such resources and receive the support they need. The college athlete handbook is a critical tool in supplying those messages.

For the specific sections dealing with mental health resources, the information provided is largely supportive in nature, so much so that it includes several examples of athletes being encouraged to seek mental health support. By incentivizing athletes

to seek treatment or focusing on commonality of the experience, it is normalizing mental health concerns and indicating a cultural focus on mental health. This type of language within these handbooks is perhaps even more noteworthy than frames falling within the "importance of mental health" categories, as it is not only indicating that mental health is important but furthermore imploring athletes to address their own concerns. Additionally in the sample, the messaging creates at least the perception of a safe space where information is confidential and the athletic department staff wants to help the athletes get better any way that they can. Confidentiality was a concern in prior research (Hatteberg, 2020), and this suggests that institutions may be addressing that concern. The messages are generally encouraging to athletes and show evidence that the support staff and athletics department care about the athlete's mental well-being. This type of supportive environment is essential to shedding the stigmas related to mental health and athletics. Barriers to college athletes seeking help for mental health have been well documented and include lack of time (e.g., Beauchemin, 2014; Lopez & Levy, 2013), fear of reprisal from coaches or administrators (e.g., Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010; Sudano et al., 2017), fear of experiencing personal discomfort (e.g., Sasso et al., 2022; Watson, 2005), and fear of reprisal from coaches or administrators (e.g., Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010; Sudano et al., 2017). These barriers are all addressed within the data. The messages often include flexibility (addressing lack of time), confidentiality (addressing fear of reprisal from coaches or administrators), and supportive messaging aimed at shedding the weakness stigma. Within the data, there seems to be a rebuttal for every reason why an athlete would choose not to seek help. Roadblocks to mental health support cause elevated mental health symptoms (Drew & Matthews, 2019). Thus, by attempting to diminish these roadblocks, athletic departments are attempting to improve athlete mental health. As previously mentioned, research examining mental health policy framing is scarce, particularly in an athletic context. Therefore, it is encouraging to uncover findings in this research similar to media framing studies focused on mental health in digital media coverage (e.g. Parrott et al. 2021). This research suggests that supportive messaging framing for mental health is consistent across communication professions.

Despite overall supportive messaging, there are concerns with the framing of these mental health resources outlined in the handbooks. One such concern is the focus on athletic performance within this messaging. In some cases, athletic departments tied improved mental health to improved athletic performance. Given that prior research has established a connection between employing a sports psychologist and winning (Stowkowski et al., 2020b) this is not too surprising, however, this messaging existed in cases even when a non-sports psychologist was mentioned as a member of the support staff. While some may view winning as the ultimate goal in all collegiate athletics, this focus on athletic performance still dehumanizes the athlete and their concerns in the process. Improved mental health becomes not about the individual but instead about the team or university. Similar findings have existed in prior research. In an examination of media framing of a collegiate athlete's mental health disclosure, Cassilo and Kluch (2021) found that one of the frames in the data

was the commodification of that athlete by focusing on what his athletic value was rather than his personal struggles with mental health. While mental health and athletic performance are no doubt linked, emphasizing their connection to the collegiate athlete can potentially reinforce barriers to disclosure because that individual sees their mental health concerns viewed by the athletic department only in the context of its impact on team performance. This also suggests that while the Cassilo and Kluch (2021) study noted that journalists introduced this frame, it is not solely a journalist issue. Mental health is framed in the context of athletic performance in multiple forms of content.

Additionally, while most universities with mental health sections in their college athlete handbooks do a fine job in communicating their mental health resources, the language within the text typically puts the responsibility on the athlete to seek help and use these resources. Among the eight themes found in these sections, the overall attitude appears to be that in this process, the athletic department takes a passive approach, assigning obligation to the athlete to make the first step to use these resources. There are exceptions, as some sections discussed how other athletes could report mental health concerns they see in their peers, but that just makes other athletes accountable for starting the support process rather than the athletic department itself. This approach toward mental health resources is not unique to athletic departments. Zhang et al. (2021) examined how mental health institutions and media organizations in China frame depression, and similarly found that depression responsibilities were primarily assigned to the individual. The researchers suggested that individualizing mental health responsibility has a direct effect on stigma formation. It would not be fair or accurate to say that these athletic departments have fully individualized the mental health process. By communicating their resources, their desire to help and the commonality of mental health concerns, these departments are emphasizing the collective nature of the process. Still, in most cases, excluding instances such as mental health in relation substance abuse or pregnancy, these resources are described in a manner where the athlete must take the first step to receiving help and support, and whether that approach creates barriers or reinforces stigmas is an area worthy of further examination.

Overall, though, these specific sections devoted to mental health resources in college athlete handbooks are a positive contribution in supporting athletes. The larger issue is that there are not enough of these sections. For many of the universities within the sample, references to mental health are instead sprinkled throughout the college athlete handbooks in undefined sections. Prior research has found that simply not knowing where to seek help can be a barrier to accessing support (e.g., Iversen et al., 2011; Moroz et al., 2020). The tone of the messaging regarding mental health also changes in instances where there is no specific section. From the data, frames talked more generally about mental health and its connection to other areas of the campus experience, rather than going into as much detail on the support services offered. In the process, additional barriers to support arose, such as privacy concerns. Mental health was discussed in the context of drug and alcohol use. Mass media has a well-documented history of inaccurately overstating the connection between

mental health and socially unacceptable behaviors like violence (Freidman, 2006; McGinty et al., 2016).

In some of the handbooks, mental health is only referenced in sections related to substance abuse. While it's possible the universities are showing concern for mental health following an athlete's substance abuse, the language is not clear enough to be concrete. Athletes could interpret the handbooks as blaming an athlete's mental health for substance abuse. Additionally, the handbooks included language that mandated a mental health evaluation as part of the substance abuse recovery process. Again, this could be to show concern but could also be viewed as a punishment, thus making mental health evaluation seem like a punishment. Additionally, by emphasizing the connection between mental health and drugs and alcohol use, these handbooks are similarly exaggerating a direct connection, especially as for some of these handbooks such a connection is one of very few references to mental health in the entire document. The National Institute of Drug Abuse states that "prevalence of comorbidity between substance use disorders and other mental illnesses does not necessarily mean that one caused the other, even if one appeared first," and adds on their connection that "establishing causality or directionality is difficult" (NIDA, 2021). These connections can form stigmas around mental health, as they can reinforce myths and stereotypes about mental health and mental illness that cause feelings of shame, self-blame, and secrecy (Benbow, 2007). Additionally, this finding has implications for framing theory in relation to mental health. Much like media coverage can often frame mental health in connection to undesirable behavior, so too can policy-focused content created by administrators. Thus, the medium or profession are not responsible for this connection. This framing of mental health likely lies deeper in some societal or value-driven bias.

While the frames that emerged in these handbooks are important to discuss, it is perhaps equally as important to examine what is lacking from this messaging. Overall, the messaging does portray a safe, confidential and supportive space for the athletes who need to seek mental health services. However, references to a diverse or inclusive environment are lacking, which can create barriers and stigmas for athletes seeking services, as evidenced by prior research (Wilkerson et al., 2020). For instance, Gopalkrishnan (2018) documented the implications that cultural diversity has on practice and policy related to mental health. In some cases, stigmas surrounding depression can be much higher in some cultural groups than others (Biswas et al., 2016). Elsewhere, there are clear gender differences in mental health seeking behaviors as well as mental health afflictions (Afifi, 2007). Thus, any statement related to mental health services that lacks reference to the diverse and inclusive nature of the services might be creating barriers and reinforcing stigmas.

This is especially important because athletic departments are typically led by White men, as The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) detailed that 72.3 percent of Division I athletic directors were White men; 86.7% of Division I conference commissioners were White; and 76.3 percent of administrators at the NCAA's headquarters were also White (Hruby, 2021). Thus, whether the athletic director is directly involved in the creation of the college athlete handbook or not, the messaging in these handbooks is often coming from an athletic department that is led by a White male's perspective and values. This becomes especially important when considering the tenets of framing theory. Framing is an unintentional process (Tuchman, 1978) often guided by the value system of the individual creating the content (Boykoff, 2006). While that is mainly examined in the context of media coverage, it also applies to policy formation. If mental health support language is being constructed mainly in athletic departments headed by White males, then such language will include the value system of a White male. As such, language that is supposed to break down barriers related to mental health, stigmas, and reporting, may instead reinforce them due to a lack of diverse and inclusive values.

The coach and the role that individual plays in the mental health support process is also worthy of further examination. Prior research has indicated that college football coaches have awareness of mental health stigma but a lack of understanding of confidentiality in relation to mental health disclosures (Halterman et al., 2020). For the most part in this research, the coach was framed as excluded from the process, which in some ways is a positive. Fear of reprisal from coaches or administrators has been documented as a barrier to seeking mental health support (Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010), so in that respect, framing the process as a confidential space that excludes the coach would encourage athletes to seek support they need because they will not be worried about how it affects playing time or their scholarship. However, the head coach plays an important role for college athletes. Often, they recruited players and are viewed as father figures (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005) who can be extremely influential on the physical and psychological development of athletes (Marback et al., 2005). This has been documented in health settings, as well. At the collegiate level, support from coaches can play a critical role in concussion reporting (Baugh et al. 2014). Prior research like this therefore raises the question as to whether it is good to exclude college coaches from the mental health support process. At some colleges and universities, coaches have access to and have completed mental health first-aid training (e.g., Oddo, 2022). The role of the coach remains a complex issue in whether they serve as barriers or supporters to receiving mental health support, and understanding their role continues to be a worthy area of inquiry.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study can be used by athletic departments to enhance their mental health messaging, and thus, support college athletes. Specifically focused on college athlete handbooks, departments should have sections devoted to mental health resources, as their inclusion would make it easier for college athletes to find information on the services. Within this data set, only 40% of universities had such a section. Additionally, universities should attempt to avoid messaging that ties mental health concerns to athletic performance. While winning is a chief priority of collegiate athletics, college athletes concerned for their own mental health may not share that priority. Their focus is likely on getting better for their own personal reasons. Messaging should reflect that and show that the department cares about the college athlete as a person, not just an athlete. Additionally, barriers to support such

as fear of reprisal from coaches or administrators (e.g., Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010; Sudano et al., 2017) and perceptions that they will be perceived as weak for seeking help (e.g., Bird et al., 2020; Moore, 2017) are athletically focused. Taking mental health outside of the athletics context can perhaps reduce these barriers. Furthermore, messaging in the handbooks suggested a reactive approach for athletic departments, in which they respond to mental health concerns rather than more proactive efforts. If this messaging is indictive of overall department attitudes, it can create barriers and mental health stigma (Zhang et al., 2021). Thus, more college athlete mental health concerns could be addressed if departments were proactive in helping athlete mental health before the college athlete feels it necessary to seek their own support. Finally, the findings lacked messaging that suggested a diverse or inclusive environment. Mental health support is not a one size fits all approach, and messaging that is sensitive to individual differences could be impactful in prompting students to seek support.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research chose to examine just athletic programs within six conferences in Division I athletics. While the reasons for their inclusion are justified and have been previously addressed, it is possible that other universities not included within the data set would discuss mental health differently. It would be a worthy investigation to examine how universities that did not place so much emphasis on athletics framed their mental health support for athletes, especially to compare against the data in this study. Another limitation of this research is that it focused solely on college athlete handbooks for its examination of mental health communication. Athletic departments likely also engage in oral communication of these resources. Additionally, universities or athletic departments may also engage in social or digital media campaigns emphasizing mental health resources. The messaging in these other forms of communication would also be worth examination. Future research should also examine not just the content of these communication channels but also the effectiveness. It is unclear how effective a college athlete handbook can be in communicating mental health resources or anything related to the college athlete experience. To better support athletes with their mental health concerns, there needs to be a better understanding of how to communicate with these athletes. An interview-based study may provide the data needed to reveal these conclusions.

Conclusion

Mental health has never been a greater focus in sport. Up until recently, the primary discussion regarding athlete mental health was tied to mental toughness. Now that dialogue is changing, which is particularly important at the collegiate level, where athletes are prone to the same mental health struggles as any students but are also at elevated risk due to factors such as time demands, pressure, travel, and social isolation. With that discourse changing in many places, it is essential that athletic departments evolve and adapt as well. Mental health support services are becoming

a priority for athletes and proper communication of those resources is essential to ensure that treatment is accessible to anyone who needs it. While athletic departments are communicating such resources in their college athlete handbooks, these remain a work in progress. While many of these sections include supportive messaging, some lack depth and guidance, while others may create barriers through a lack of inclusivity or a focus on athletic performance. Communication of resources can be the first step toward receiving support, which makes examinations of mental health policy and communication strategies a vital area of study.

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Examining NCAA Division I Faculty Perspectives on the Role and Value of Intercollegiate Athletics

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The uneasy marriage of higher education and athletics can be seen through the conceptual lenses of former institution and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) President Myles Brand's Standard or Integrated View. The Standard View maintains that athletics serves as a business while the Integrated View argues that athletics should be appreciated as a form of education and art. Through these perspectives of athletics as a business, education, and art, this study surveyed faculty at one football bowl subdivision institution ($n = 216$) on their perceptions of athletics. Analyses demonstrated faculty perceptions were varied and contradictory as they noted athletics was simultaneously a business important for their institution, but also a detractor for higher education at large. Additionally, they perceived some developmental benefits of participation in athletics but still did not believe sports to be educational in nature. Implications for better understanding faculty perceptions of athletics while improving the education-sport marriage are discussed.

Key words: intercollegiate athletics, faculty perceptions, academic-athletic integration

> Many Big-time U officials, knowing that their schools cannot provide the vast majority of undergraduates with meaningful educations, try to distract and please these consumers with ongoing entertainment in the form of big-time college sports.
>
> *– Murray Sperber, Beer and Circus*

As we grapple with the sobering realities that have undermined institutions as a result of athletics scandals, it is an appropriate time for us all to take a moment to examine our own perceptions. Rather than throwing stones at the convenient target as another athletics scandal is uncovered, let's first take a look at ourselves and our biases about what fields are worthy of aca-

demic study. How different might many of our previous athletics-academic scandals have been had we valued athletics like we do the arts?
– Erianne Weight, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

These quotes reflect two contrasting examples of faculty views concerning intercollegiate athletics in higher education. While Sperber framed the business of athletics as a distraction for university stakeholders, Weight alluded to faculty—Sperber included—biases concerning under-appreciating the inherent artistic and educational qualities in intercollegiate athletic participation. These divergent perspectives of intercollegiate athletics are nothing new, as sport and education scholars have engaged in similar discussions about the unique, uneasy marriage between sport and American colleges and universities (Clotfelter, 2019; Harry & Weight, 2019; Smith, 2021; Sperber, 2000; Thelin, 1996, 2011).

It is possible to categorize these distinct perspectives using Brand's (2006) Integrated and Standard Views of intercollegiate athletics. Those with an Integrated View (IV) often appreciate how athletics can serve and be incorporated into the greater institutional missions (Brand, 2006; Clotfelter, 2019; Harry, 2023; Weight & Huml, 2016). Conversely, those with a Standard View (SV) maintain that athletics is merely entertainment or an extracurricular activity, offering "more educational value than fraternity parties but less than chess club" (Brand, 2006, p. 10). This lens is particularly common across Power Five institutions or commercialized schools with abundant financial resources and high-profile sports programs (Hirko & Sweitzer, 2015). Brand (2006) argued that individuals with the SV undervalue and misperceive athletics participation's inherent educational forces, while their IV counterparts possess a more balanced perspective on sport (Brand, 2006).

Stakeholders with an IV tend to couple the importance of mind-body development, similar to in the performing arts (Foster et al., 2022; Matz 2020; Weight et al., 2020), espousing the values athletes cultivate, such as perseverance, teamwork, ethics, and the ability to cope with adversity (Brand, 2006; Harry, 2023; Harry & Weight, 2019). Furthermore, faculty with an IV may find similar value in athletes' abilities to read X's and O's and artists' abilities to decipher sheet music. For example, Matz (2020) noted athletes and artists engage in practice, public performance, and have professional ambitions, with both groups blending theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Accordingly, athletics, like fine arts majors, has pedagogical potential for integration into a holistic liberal arts education. However, Matz (2020) observed that while music performance and theater have evolved from extracurricular activities to "legitimate academic majors" (p. 284), higher education's double standards, which undervalue physical skills compared to intellectual skills, have prevented a similar shift for intercollegiate athletics.

On a larger level, individuals with an IV tend to center intercollegiate athletics benefits to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions. Clotfelter (2019) outlined four ways college sports enhanced university communities, such as improving participants' educational opportunities and experiences, molding campus cultures and traditions, increasing visibility and status, and generat-

ing financial benefits for institutions with high-profile athletic programs (Bass et al., 2015; Clotfelter, 2019; Lifschitz et al., 2014). Moreover, Foster et al. (2022) noted the potential for a "synergistic effect" (p. 176) on learning to occur when sport and education are appropriately coupled. Further, Anderson (2017) linked a successful March Madness basketball tournament run or success in other high-profile postseason competitions with a subsequent increase in the number of applications a school receives. This afforded schools greater selectiveness in their admissions process, decreasing their acceptance rate and elevating their status (Anderson, 2017; Clotfelter, 2019). Finally, Koo and Dittmore (2014) and Walker (2015) demonstrated that athletic success increases sport and education donations. Despite the validity of these arguments, they tend to be overshadowed by the negative aspects intercollegiate sport can bring to campuses and communities (Clotfelter, 2019; Sperber, 2000).

Those with an SV believe athletics serves as an entertainment business operating—inappropriately—under the higher education umbrella (Sperber, 2000). Indeed, Sperber (2000) coined the term "College Sports MegaInc" (p. 216) to describe how big-time athletics, driven by business interests, have transformed university operations, leading presidents to cancel classes for games, debauchery from tailgating culture, and negative impacts on student behaviors. With this business focus, faculty and others with an SV lens see limited educational qualities associated with intercollegiate athletics, meaning the activity is not tantamount to an educational experience. Indeed, scholars argue that athletics culture can lead college athletes to devote more time to sport than education (Ayers et al., 2012; Rubin & Moses, 2017), resulting in lower academic performance, lower graduation rates compared to non-athlete peers, poorer career preparation, and struggles with retirement from sport (Gurney et al., 2017; Harper, 2018). Others note that funding that could—or should—support institutions' academic mission is funneled to athletics programs rarely operating in the black (KCIA, 2010; Sperber, 2000).

Accordingly, many academic stakeholders see athletics as a detractor to higher education's overall purpose (Brand, 2006; Sperber, 2000). The stakeholder group with perhaps the most contentious view of intercollegiate athletics is faculty (Clotfelter, 2019; Comeaux, 2011; Kramer, 2016; Kretchmar, 2023; Lawrence, 2009; Weight & Huml, 2016). It has traditionally been assumed that faculty hold an SV, with previous research noting faculty's generally negative attitudes toward college athletes and intercollegiate sport (Brand, 2006; Comeaux, 2011; Harry & Weight, 2019). However, scant research has directly examined faculty's perspectives within Brand's (2006) Integrated and Standard framework.

The current study addresses this gap by expanding the research in higher education and intercollegiate sport regarding faculty perspectives on athletics. This is important for a multitude of reasons. First, faculty voices are rarely heard in athletics contexts (Ott & Bates, 2015). For example, while faculty leaders can voice support or opposition to athletics-related issues (e.g., stadium renovations or Title IX concerns), their vote is typically symbolic or performative, holding little weight in the final "business" decisions (Clotfelter, 2019; Thelin, 2011). Indeed, even Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) who act as liaisons between academics and athletics

departments hold little sway in athletics departments' policies and practices (Leary, 2014). Thus, our study offers an outlet for faculty voices and perceptions.

Second, understanding faculty attitudes toward athletics and athletes is critical, as extant literature shows the importance of faculty-student and faculty-athlete relationships for providing a holistic and beneficial college experience (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Harry, 2021, 2023). Faculty's perspectives on athletics likely influence their relationships and interactions with athletes, such as their desires to mentor or avoid athletes altogether (Weight et al., 2020). Faculty also contribute to their campuses and students' development, so understanding their perspective is crucial to fully grasp campus culture. Campus culture influences athletics culture, and thus, relates to faculty's Standard or Integrated Views of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006; Ott, 2011; Weight et al., 2020).

Finally, this research expands upon Brand's (2006) Integrated and Standard Views while furthering the literature on the relationship between faculty and athletics. Brand (2006) proposed these perspectives nearly two decades ago, but whether faculty hold Integrated or Standard Views toward college sport remains under-examined in the higher education literature. Exploring faculty's views can identify tensions, equip higher education administrators to address those tensions, inform policy and decision-making, bolster athletes' success, and potentially mend relationships. With this in mind, we examined whether faculty at one public Power Five institution exhibited a Standard or Integrated View of intercollegiate athletics through the following research questions:

> RQ1: How do faculty perceive the role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education?
> RQ2: How do faculty perceive the role of intercollegiate athletics as
>   a. a form of education?
>   b. a business?
>   c. a performance art?

Conceptual Framework

Myles Brand's legacy as a former academician, university president, and NCAA president lends credibility to his Integrated and Standard Views on intercollegiate athletics (Foster et al., 2022; Renfro, 2009). Brand experienced the division between education and athletics firsthand as an academic and university president (Kretchmar, 2023). Accordingly, he made strides as NCAA president to improve academic administrators' and faculty's engagement in athletics governance while increasing academic standards for athletes (Renfro, 2009; Kretchmar, 2023; Suggs & Hoffman, 2021). In addition, he saw his work promoting an IV and challenging traditional, historic SVs on intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006).

Some perceive Brand's (2006) IV as a more holistic, balanced lens of sport—and its academic significance (Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020)—suggesting that institutions should incorporate athletics into higher education's mission and structures.

Examples include institutions further integrating athletics into service activities on campus and in the local community or athletics' budgets flowing through the standard financial processes of the broader university (Brand, 2006). Another component of the IV is that outcomes associated with athletics participation complement athletes' and students' classroom outcomes and experiences (Brand, 2006; Coffey & Davis, 2019; Katz et al., 2021; Weight & Huml, 2016). Participating in athletics has long been advocated to build teamwork, compassion, resiliency, hard work, leadership, and other qualities (Chalfin et al., 2015; Coakley, 2021; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Weight et al., 2020). Thus, the IV aims to heighten appreciation for athletics' educational opportunities and benefits while challenging the separation of sports and education.

Brand's (2006) IV also challenged audiences to consider parallels between athletes and students in other units on college campuses, such as art or music departments. For example, musicians and athletes often achieve significant accomplishments before enrolling at their institutions, and both groups frequently receive recruitment offers or earn scholarships for their programs. Similarly, musicians and athletes experience intense time demands, practice for countless hours, perform in front of crowds, and seek to pursue careers in their respective crafts (Miksza & Hime, 2015; Weight et al., 2020). Despite these similarities, musicians and other art students can receive academic credit for learning and developing their craft, while athletes often cannot (Weight & Huml, 2016; Weight et al., 2020). So, Brand (2006) called for an athletic major or curriculum, prompting contentious arguments from critics (e.g., Feezell, 2015). It is worth noting, however, that Brand was by no means the first issue such a call, and this practice existed previously across the intercollegiate landscape (e.g., University of Washington; Renick, 1974).

Alternatively, Brand's (2006) SV maintains that faculty and other academics in American higher education are biased against athletics and athletes, seeing the "enterprise" as a distraction to institutions' teaching, research, and service missions (Clotfelter, 2019). Indeed, scholars have argued that such perspectives further divide academics and athletics, causing opposition and tension between the two sides of campus (Foster et al., 2022; Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020). The SV also contends that athletics is extracurricular, auxiliary, and offers limited educational value (Brand, 2006). At the heart of this view is an under-appreciation for bodily and physical skill development (Foster et al., 2022; Hyland, 2008). This bias means that athletics will continue to be ostracized from educational missions and structures and, therefore, unable to fully integrate into the academy. Still, many faculty and critics favor academic-athletic separation and may hold the SV despite likely not reflecting on such a perspective (Corlett, 2013; Feezell, 2015; Harry & Weight, 2019). Thus, we now focus on an overview of faculty's athletic perceptions.

Faculty and Intercollegiate Athletics

In the early and mid-1800s, the values of the European Enlightenment made their way into American higher education (Thelin, 2011). As students adopted ideals

such as freedom, happiness, and fraternity, they started exercising more control on campuses, organizing various extracurricular groups like athletic teams (Flowers, 2009; Smith, 2011). Faculty and academic administrators—from a host of disciplines—were heavily involved in the initial development and implementation of athletics programs. Before students took on coaching roles, faculty lent their time and energy to intracollegiate competitions, coaching various teams (e.g., rowing, track and field, baseball; Duderstadt, 2009; Flowers, 2009; Smith, 1990). Administrators also contributed their time and resources to assist students in fundraising for athletic facilities, equipment, and eventually travel (Clotfelter, 2019; Flowers, 2009).

At this time, athletics largely comprised interclass competitions (e.g., first-year students versus sophomores). Partaking in or watching athletics offered students a sense of community and identity, as it was something the entire student body could enjoy (Smith, 2011). Similarly, faculty and administrators from various disciplines (e.g., literature and art, education, chemistry) took an interest in these competitions (Smith, 1990). With this, sport emerged as a significant co-curricular component of the college experience. As the railroad system grew across the country, intracollegiate athletic competitions transformed into intercollegiate athletic competitions between peer institutions (Flowers, 2009).

As intercollegiate sports rose to prominence, faculty found students' increased attention and time given to athletics troubling (Flowers, 2009). Accordingly, faculty at many institutions established faculty athletics committees to confront issues with growing sport enterprises, such as athletes missing class time, using professional athletes to compete, and gambling (Barr, 1999; Savage et al., 1929; Smith, 2011). To many in the academy, intercollegiate athletics was "of control" and needed to be reined in by campus leaders (Barr, 1999, p. 42). One of the ways in which sports was "out of control" was through the increased violence in athletics, especially in football. This violence was of particular concern for institution leaders, who, at the request of then President Theodore Roosevelt, met to discuss ways to make football safer for the participants (Smith, 2011). This was the beginning of the institutionalization of athletics. Ultimately, these meetings of institution leaders to discuss safety led to the creation of the NCAA (Smith, 2011; Thelin, 2011).

With greater faculty control over athletics, the NCAA and conference offices had strong academic representation. Barr (1999) noted that faculty established and led many athletics conferences in college sports' early years. However, in the mid-1900s, faculty realized that oversight over athletics took up more time than they originally intended and distracted from their teaching and research goals (Barr, 1999). Thus, faculty relinquished some control to athletics-specific administrators, who eventually became athletic directors (ADs). While presidents maintained ultimate control in the NCAA, most took a laissez-faire approach to sports on their campuses (Duderstadt, 2009; Smith, 2011), allowing ADs to extend their power and begin building a commercial and professional sport enterprise (Clotfelter, 2019).

The mid-1900s saw a host of commercial and professional changes spearheaded by athletics leaders including increased stadium sizes and strategic initiatives to build alumni financial support for academics and athletics (Clotfelter, 2019; Smith,

2011). Similarly, the 1950s saw the emergence of athletics-based scholarships for athletes, which irked some faculty and academic administrators who already saw the demise of the student component of the "student-athlete" (Smith, 2021).

This progression toward commercialism and professionalization was accelerated in 1984 when the University of Oklahoma and the University of Georgia successfully annexed television rights from the NCAA (*NCAA v. Oklahoma Board of Regents*, 1984). This seismic shift created what Hirko and Sweitzer (2015) referred to as the *haves* and the *have-nots*. This dichotomy can be considered in two ways. First is the distinction between revenue (i.e., *haves*) and non-revenue sports (i.e., *have-nots*). The second way to consider this dichotomy is athletic programs operating under a commercial model (i.e., *haves*) and those operating under a subsidized model (i.e., *have-nots*). This can better be understood as the majority of Power Five schools and everybody else (Hirko & Sweitzer, 2015). Indeed, Power Five programs receive roughly 5% of their budgets from subsidies, whereas Group of Five institutions—their closest NCAA competitors—relied on subsidies for 50% of their budgets (Springer et al., 2023). Others highlight how rapidly increasing coaches' compensation and questionable commercial practices under the guise of tax exemption further indicate college athletics' business-like operations (Sperber & Minjares, 2015; Zimbalist, 2015).

To cultivate stronger links between education and sport, in 1989 the NCAA mandated that institutions designate a FAR to serve as a liaison between academic and athletic departments (NCAA Division I Manual, 2020). FAR duties include (1) maintaining an institutional relationship with the school's conference and NCAA, (2) cultivating athletics' relationship with administrators and faculty, and (3) ensuring athlete health and well-being (Leary, 2014). Despite FAR's unique and significant role on campuses and in the NCAA governance structure, their involvement on campus and in NCAA decision-making is usually limited (Lawrence et al., 2007; Leary, 2014). These limitations could result from their concerns about athletics' culture and finances or expressions of ambivalence about sport (Lawrence et al., 2007).

The last few decades have also seen a rise in faculty-led organizations looking to reform college athletics. Groups like the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (KCIA), the Coalition of Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), and the Drake Group have challenged faculty ambivalence, highlighting sport's significance within post-secondary education. Faculty in these groups strive to enhance academic integrity in sport, center athletes' academic and athletic well-being, and likely promote a more Integrated View of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006; Kretchmar, 2023). The Drake Group most recently called for faculty to improve college athletes' educational support, discussed football and men's basketball athletes' racial exploitation, advocated for athletes' increased economic rights, and expressed the need for more presidential management of sport. Still, few faculty and academic administrators have employed these suggestions, demonstrating, once again, strong levels of ambivalence toward sport-education integration (Clotfelter, 2019).

Outside of FARs and those most passionately involved in reform groups, research shows that many faculty do not fully understand college athletics governance,

organization, and role (Fine & Cooper, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2007). Finances may be the faculty's least understood and contentious athletics area (Lawrence et al., 2007). While faculty generally express strong negative feelings regarding athletic department budgets, spending, and coach salaries, research also demonstrates faculty's ambivalence toward understanding college athletics on a deeper level (Clotfelter, 2019; Lawrence, 2009; Lawrence et al., 2007).

For example, in a faculty survey at institutions with high-profile sport teams, Lawrence et al. (2007) found that 40% of participants felt faculty roles and athletics oversight needed to be better defined and understood. Similarly, Ott (2011) surveyed faculty who expressed they were fairly satisfied with intercollegiate athletics at their institutions but were still dissatisfied with their role in athletics governance and finance. Indeed, over 43% of faculty surveyed voiced concerns about the lack of diverse perspectives when making sport decisions. Faculty in this study were also discontented with using institutional subsidies to support athletics and expressed skepticism regarding their school's balance of education and commercialization (Ott, 2011). Importantly, findings from Lawrence et al. (2007) and Ott (2011) also highlight the ambivalence of faculty toward athletics, contributing to what Barr (1999) called a "tradition of inaction" (p. 43). Such decisions to remain inactive in athletic oversight have likely contributed to faculty holding a Standard, rather than Integrated, View of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006).

Methods

Site and Participants

We used survey method to explore whether faculty at one institution held an Integrated or Standard View of intercollegiate athletics (Groves et al., 2011). To protect the anonymity of the institution's and the participants' privacy, we will refer to the institution using the pseudonym Middle America University (MAU). This public Midwest institution is a Division I Power Five institution providing athletes opportunities in over 15 sports. MAU consistently finishes in the top 20 of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Learfield Directors' Cup, a primary ranking system for college athletics success (NACDA, n.d.). Further, the MAU athletics department's revenue regularly exceeds its expenses (Knight Commission, n.d.).

Additionally, MAU is classified as a Research 1 (R1) institution offering doctoral degrees and producing and disseminating high levels of research, suggesting a strong faculty presence. U.S. News and World Report ranked the institution in America's top 200 national universities (US News and World Report, n.d.). We collected faculty email addresses from academic department websites. We used systematic random sampling to select faculty from MAU. Of the roughly 1,600 faculty at MAU, we selected every 2nd faculty member and sent an email to participate in the study (Riddick & Russell, 2015). Two hundred and sixteen (26%) completed the survey. Participants largely identified as white Assistant or Associate Professors with 12+ years at MAU. More demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Characteristics	*n*	%
Academic Rank		
Administrator	12	6.2%
Assistant Professor	48	24.7%
Associate Professor	54	27.8%
Full Professor or higher	49	25.3%
Instructor/Lecturer/Adjunct	31	16.0%
College		
Education	46	23.7%
Engineering	19	9.8%
Agricultural	33	17.0%
Architecture	3	1.5%
Arts and Sciences	64	33.0%
Business	29	14.9%
Years of Experience		
0-3 years	17	8.8%
3-6 years	26	13.4%
6-9	27	13.9%
9-12	33	17.0%
12 or more	91	46.9%
Gender		
Female	84	43.3%
Male	110	56.7%
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian	9	4.6%
Black or African American	4	2.1%
Hispanic or Latinx	7	3.6%
Mixed	7	3.6%
White	167	86.1%

Instrument and Data Collection

Using statements from Brand's (2006) seminal article on the Standard and Integrated Views, we created a survey instrument to determine the most prevalent perspective among MAU faculty. Example questions about the Standard View included: "intercollegiate athletics is a detractor from the mission of higher education" and "intercollegiate athletics is an extracurricular activity." Example questions centering the Integrated View of athletics included: "intercollegiate athletics is central to the mission of my institution" and "athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics are participating in an educational endeavor." Brand (2006) made these or similar statements, which served as the baseline for questions in the survey.

This and the review of relevant literature on the Brand's (2006) two views provided greater content validity (Groves et al., 2011). However, some topics were more represented based on Brand's (2006) emphasis and emphases from previous studies. For example, the survey included a few more questions about athletics as education than athletics as a business because Brand addressed the former more than the latter. Additionally, there is a slight emphasis on athletics as art given Brand's (2006) contentious comparison between sport and performance art. Such emphasis is likely due to his own biases as the NCAA president at the time (Kretchmar, 2023) and presents a limitation of the survey. The notion of athletics as education and art through an Integrated View is also further supported by the literature (Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020). However, in building out this study, we honed in on Brand's (2006) unique perspective, which leaned more toward an Integrated View. Regarding reliability, this study was piloted with faculty from MAU who were not in the final sample and no faculty in the pilot expressed concerns with the questions (Groves et al., 2011).

Faculty were provided a seven-point Likert scale to select whether they (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) slightly disagree, (4) neutral, (5) slightly agree, (6) agree, or (7) strongly agree with the statements. We used Qualtrics to make the survey and emailed it to the faculty in the Fall 2022 semester. After two weeks, we provided a follow-up email reminding faculty about the survey. We then closed the survey two weeks after the reminder email for a total window of four weeks (Groves et al., 2011).

Data Analysis

We began by establishing the normality of our data distribution. The Shapiro-Wilk score for each item was significant ($p < .001$), indicating that our data were non-normally distributed. We checked the survey's reliability using Cronbach's alpha, which makes no assumptions of normality. The Cronbach's alpha for the survey was .776, indicating that the survey items were internally reliable (Pallant, 2016). We originally sought to determine whether differences existed between demographic groups. However, our data were non-normally distributed. Thus, we tried to transform the data using various methods (Pallant, 2016), but none were successful. Accordingly, we used nonparametric alternatives to analysis of variance (ANOVA; i.e., Kruskal-Wallis & Mann-Whitney U). However, there were relatively few significant findings and those findings lacked the power to explain the variation we observed between faculty responses. This suggests that other demographic variables may account for the variation we observed.

Findings

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that faculty at MAU recognize the role of intercollegiate athletics as a source of entertainment and a potential opportunity for athletes to develop critical thinking skills and a value system but do not view it as central to the institution's mission or as equivalent to other educational

areas involving physical skill development. The following sections provide insight into this study's specific research questions. It is worth noting that the standard deviation for our survey questions ranged from 1.082 to 1.894 (on a scale from one to seven), indicating moderate variation within participants' perceptions of the value of intercollegiate athletics to MAU. We have organized the questions into four primary categories (e.g., *Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics, Athletics as Education, Athletics as Business, and Athletics as Performance Art*) to better organize the data. However, this is not to suggest that the survey consisted of multiple subscales.

Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics

Faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics were varied. Respondents believed that their institution was more well-known for its intercollegiate athletics program ($M = 5.753$, $SD = 1.377$) than its academic programs and perceived intercollegiate athletics as entertainment ($M = 5.711$, $SD = 1.358$). There was slight agreement that intercollegiate athletics was central to the institution's mission ($M = 4.119$, $SD = 1.894$), that mental development is more important than physical development ($M = 4.258$, $SD = 1.542$), that athletics detracts from higher education's mission ($M = 4.325$, $SD = 1.807$), and that athletics is an extracurricular activity ($M = 4.655$, $SD = 1.888$). Finally, faculty strongly disagreed that intercollegiate athletics' role is undervalued by their institution ($M = 1.794$, $SD = 1.082$) and slightly disagreed that most faculty members are anti-intercollegiate athletics ($M = 2.840$, $SD = 1.304$).

Table 2

Faculty Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics

	Mean	SD
My institution is more well-known by the general public (in the state/outside of the state) for its intercollegiate athletics programs rather than its academics programs.	5.753	1.377
Intercollegiate athletics is a detractor from the mission of higher education.	4.325	1.807
Intercollegiate athletics is just an extracurricular activity.	4.655	1.888
Mental development is more important than physical development.	4.258	1.542
Most faculty at my institution are anti-intercollegiate athletics.	2.840	1.304
Intercollegiate athletics is entertainment.	5.711	1.358
Intercollegiate athletics is central to the mission of my institution.	4.119	1.894
The role of intercollegiate athletics is undervalued by my institution.	1.794	1.082

Athletics as Education

Faculty agreed that intercollegiate athletics offers opportunities for athletes to develop critical thinking skills ($M = 4.943$, $SD = 1.648$) and offers individuals an opportunity to develop a value system ($M = 5.139$, $SD = 1.470$). There was less agreement that athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics are participating in an educational endeavor ($M = 4.036$, $SD = 1.831$). Finally, faculty showed moderate to strong disagreement that the role of intercollegiate athletics should be further integrated into the mission of MAU ($M = 3.309$, $SD = 1.637$), that college athletes should major in athletics with faculty oversight ($M = 3.124$, $SD = 1.889$), that intercollegiate athletics coaches roles share similarities with their own, and that college athletes should receive academic credit for their participation ($M = 2.747$, $SD = 1.713$).

Table 3

Faculty Perceptions of Athletics as Education

	Mean	SD
Participation in intercollegiate athletics offers individuals an opportunity to develop a values system.	5.139	1.470
Intercollegiate athletics offers opportunities for athletes to learn developmental and critical thinking skills.	4.943	1.648
Athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics are participating in an educational endeavor.	4.036	1.831
Intercollegiate athletics should be further integrated into the mission of my institution.	3.309	1.637
With faculty oversight, college athletes should be able to major in athletics.	3.124	1.889
Intercollegiate athletics coaches are educators with similarities to professors.	2.866	1.799
College athletes should receive academic credit for their athletics participation.	2.747	1.713

Athletics as Business

Faculty reported relatively strong agreement that intercollegiate athletics should be financially self-supporting (M = 5.387, SD = 1.574) and that athletic budgetary decisions should flow through the normal university budget process (M = 4.691, SD = 1.794).

Table 4

Faculty Perceptions of Athletics as Business

	Mean	SD
Athletics at my institution should be financially self-supporting.	5.387	1.574
Athletics department budgetary decisions should flow through the normal university budget process.	4.691	1.794

Athletics as Performance Art

Faculty at MAU reported a moderate agreement that athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics have similarities with students in the performing arts (M = 4.232, SD = 1.698) and that there were inherent similarities in the performance aspects (M = 4.232, SD = 1.765). Despite this agreement, there was a low level of agreement that intercollegiate athletics should be treated similarly to education in other areas involving physical skill development (M = 3.747, SD = 1.639).

Table 5

Faculty Perceptions of Athletics as Performance Art

	Mean	SD
Athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics have similarities with students who participate in the performing arts.	4.232	1.698
There are inherent similarities in the performance aspects of students enrolled in performing arts majors (i.e., music, theater, and dance) and students competing in intercollegiate athletics.	4.062	1.765
Intercollegiate athletics at my institution should be treated similarly to education in other areas that involve physical skill development.	3.747	1.639

Discussion

This discussion offers potential explanations about MAU faculty's complicated attitudes toward intercollegiate athletics, paying particular attention to their general perceptions of MAU sports, how athletics is/is not a form of education, and the business of athletics. Implications of these explanations and ways to improve the education-sport nexus at MAU are provided after the discussion.

Faculty's Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics

MAU faculty's varied and often contradictory responses indicate their perceptions about intercollegiate athletics' role at their institution are complex. Given this study's descriptive nature, it would be difficult to definitively claim whether MAU faculty held a Standard or Integrated View of intercollegiate athletics. However, faculty's perceptions generally appear to align more with a Standard View. For example, faculty perceived MAU as more well-known for its athletic accomplishments than academic success. This perception reflects the reality that the school consistently ranks highly athletically but has shown only slight improvement over the years in the USNWR academic rankings. This idea may also be linked to the faculty's moderate agreement that athletics is central to MAU's overall institutional mission (i.e., since MAU is more well-known for athletics, it *must* be important to MAU's mission).

Indeed, previous research has noted that athletic success can increase notoriety for less academically prestigious institutions (Clotfelter, 2019; Lifschitz et al., 2014). This is particularly true with high-profile sports like football and men's and women's basketball, in which MAU has excelled. In line with this research, MAU's most recent incoming freshman class was the largest in school history and possessed the best academic credentials of any previous class. While this correlation certainly does not imply causation, such increases around times of athletic success are referred to as the Flutie Effect (Clotfelter, 2019) and may reflect a synergistic relationship between athletics and MAU when it comes to improving the school's academic profile and attracting higher caliber students. This offers a counter perspective to MAU faculty's view that athletics detracts from higher education's overall mission, given that improving students' academic capabilities may enhance MAU's standing in the USNWR rankings. Thus, leveraging these athletically related benefits challenge the faculty's slant toward a Standard View.

Further, it is interesting to note the contradiction in faculty's perceptions that athletics was simultaneously central to MAU's overall institutional mission but a detractor from higher education's overall mission. This contradiction could indicate that faculty's expectations are higher concerning the academic rigor across higher education more broadly than MAU's, potentially stemming from its lower USNWR rankings. Moreover, faculty perceived that intercollegiate athletics was not undervalued by their institution and that faculty across campus generally supported athletics (Brand, 2006). This demonstrates alignment with an Integrated View and their notion that athletics is central to MAU's institutional mission while contradicting the finding that athletics is not central to higher education as a whole.

This cognitive dissonance further highlights the notion that MAU faculty are conflicted when it comes to situating big-time college athletics in the context of higher education, broadly and at their institution. Conversely, this may indicate that faculty believe a threshold exists regarding integrating athletics into the university's mission that has been met or exceeded by athletics' current status at MAU. This framing may also aid in understanding why faculty believe that athletics should not gain academic standing at MAU (e.g., academic credit, curriculum), as they perceive this to be an expansion of athletics' role in MAU's mission.

Athletics as Education

MAU faculty generally did not view college athletics as a form of education, but such perceptions were also not without inconsistencies. In line with previous scholarship about skills cultivated through athletics (Chalfin et al., 2015; Harry & Weight, 2019; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007), faculty somewhat strongly supported the idea that athletics helps students develop critical thinking skills and values systems, indicating a more Integrated View. However, they also noted that these components, despite being seminal in other educational endeavors, did not elevate athletics to the level of an educational pursuit. Such expressions are key in maintaining a Standard View (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019). These ideas also support the faculty's perception that students' mental development is more significant than their physical development and that athletics is simply an extracurricular physical activity (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019; Hyland, 2008). Extracurricular or auxiliary components in higher education, like student activities, recreation, parking, or food services, are often viewed as peripheral to the educational mission (Brand, 2006; Clotfelter, 2019). Such beliefs are seminal to the Standard View (Brand, 2006).

Likewise, faculty moderately agreed that similarities exist between performance arts and athletics and that there were parallels between athletes and students in the performing arts. This suggests an alignment with an Integrated View (Brand, 2006). However, faculty did not believe athletics should be structured in ways aligned with these educational and performance-based areas. This matches their previous contradictory statements and suggests a more Standard View (Brand, 2006). Still, these expressions are unsurprising given that faculty did not favor awarding academic credit for athletic participation or creating a major or curriculum based in athletics at MAU. Once again, this suggests a degree of cognitive dissonance, given that art students receive academic credit for their performance and have the opportunity to major in their craft (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019).

Finally, the notion that athletics coaches are educators to their athletes the way faculty are educators to their students received the strongest disagreement from faculty. However, this notion is key to the Integrated View (Brand, 2006; Harry, 2023; Harry & Weight, 2019; Weight et al., 2015). This aligns with faculty's perception that MAU should not further integrate athletics into its mission. Likening athletics coaches to educators could further the perception that athletics is more valued at MAU than academics. It may also threaten the collegial governance model often employed within the academic components of colleges and universities (Birnbaum,

1988). Given the perceived power that Division I athletics departments—particularly at the Power Five level—currently exercise (Clotfelter, 2019), faculty may feel that further legitimizing athletics as an educational endeavor and athletics coaches as educators would potentially strengthen that power and provide athletics personnel access to an area currently only governed by faculty.

Another potential reason for these views may be that college coaches often receive significantly higher compensation than faculty, particularly at the Division I Power Five level (Clotfelter, 2019). Indeed, Berkowitz et al. (2019) outlined steep increases across non-revenue sports at the Power Five level. For example, they reported that in 2018, the average salary for wrestling coaches increased to $266,000 (55% increase over five years), baseball coaches increased to $651,445 (51% increase), and gymnastics coaches averaged somewhere between $196,068 and $315,860. By comparison, the average salary for full-time faculty at public, four-year institutions increased roughly 12% from $79,897 to $89,640 in that same span (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). Further, a comparative analysis by Clotfelter (2019) found that head football coaches from 44 Division I programs made almost four times as much as university presidents and roughly 16 times as much as full professors at the institutions. This was likely also the case at MAU, given that their current head football coach was the highest-paid state employee when data collection occurred. Million-dollar buyouts for football coaches released before the fulfillment of their contracts may also taint faculties' perceptions of coaches-as-educators (Clarke, 2022), further prompting their belief that athletics is a business.

Athletics as Business

In contrast to viewing athletics as education, faculty perceptions supported the idea that it is a form of entertainment through their moderate to strong disagreement toward implementing a major or curriculum rooted in intercollegiate sport that would allow athletes to receive academic credit for athletic participation. Geographic location may provide some insight into this perception, given that MAU's athletic program is the state's most high-profile and competitive level of sport. Further, entertainment options are limited for faculty, students, and the greater MAU community outside of sport. Thus, athletics is how faculty and other stakeholders are entertained, potentially preventing them from seeing athletics and college athletes performing as more than a commodity (Coakley, 2021).

Previous scholarship has demonstrated that faculty often view athletics as a business operating within the walls of higher education (Clotfelter, 2019; Gurney et al., 2017; Kretchmar, 2023; Sperber, 2000). Indeed, MAU faculty held relatively strong views that MAU sports were a business, a common perspective for faculty throughout the academy (Clotfelter, 2019; Feezell, 2015; Lawrence et al., 2007). Accordingly, faculty agreed that the athletics budget should flow through the standard university budget process. Ironically, this desire to have athletics' budgetary decisions go through the university-wide process is an example of an Integrated View, as going through such processes treats the athletics department similarly to other academic departments (Brand, 2006).

Alternatively, faculty noted that MAU's athletics department should be financially self-supporting, a perspective in line with the Standard View. Brand (2006) noted that the individuals with the Standard View maintain that "something without academic value," like intercollegiate athletics, "should not be entitled to a university budgetary subsidy if at all possible. Athletics should earn its own way" (p. 15). This lens treats athletics departments differently than academic departments, as most academic departments are not required to be self-supporting revenue centers (Clotfelter, 2019; Lombardi, 2013). Currently, MAU's athletics department is one of the few self-sustaining universities within Division I (KCIA, n.d.). Additionally, their athletics department consistently transfers funds to the university to support academic research, which is uncommon at this level of competition (Clotfelter, 2019). With such conflicting views on the financial side of athletics, it may be helpful for faculty to receive some form of education about the economics behind MAU's athletic department and how it supports academic endeavors on campus (Lawrence et al., 2007).

In summary, it appears that MAU faculty held an Integrated View regarding some components of their athletics department but stopped short when actualizing those beliefs, instead reverting to a Standard View. For instance, the faculty's acknowledgment that athletics help students develop critical thinking and values systems (i.e., Integrated View) but do not consider athletics as an educational pursuit (i.e., Standard View). Another example is the faculty's moderate agreement about the similarities between athletics and the performing arts (i.e., Integrated View) but disagreement that athletics should be structured in ways that align with educational and performance-based areas (i.e., Standard View). Finally, faculty agreed that athletics budgets should flow through standard university budgeting processes (i.e., Integrated View) while believing they should be financially self-supporting (i.e., Standard View). Given the complex and contradictory nature of MAU faculty's perceptions of intercollegiate athletics, it is important to consider the implications of these findings for the institution, particularly those that may be more transferable to the broader higher education landscape.

Implications

Faculty in this sample held varied and contradictory perceptions of intercollegiate athletics. Such perceptions are likely influenced from their prior understanding of and experiences with intercollegiate athletics generally and with MAU sports specifically. To address the varied and contradictory perceptions, we propose two avenues institutions can use to better align faculty's perceptions of intercollegiate athletics. The first is promoting the synergistic relationship between academics and athletics to foster enhanced dialogue, understanding, and collaboration. Second is redefining athletics' role in higher education. While these may be particularly beneficial for MAU, they may also prove helpful for other institutions looking to better understand and improve the relationship between education and sport.

Faculty's inclination toward a Standard View presents a barrier for MAU to fully capitalize on the benefits athletics brings to the university (Brand, 2006; Clotfelter, 2019). Thus, MAU and similar institutions might benefit from intentionally show-

casing synergies across athletic and academic departments to bolster awareness and address faculty's cognitive dissonance toward athletics. This could include accentuating scholarly work done by the institutions' sport management, higher education, or other faculty across academia whose work centers on the academic-athletic nexus (Foster et al., 2022; Harry, 2023; Kretchmar, 2023). Institutions could also develop an incentive structure (e.g., internal grant funding) to encourage faculty and athletic staff collaboration, particularly regarding research and/or educational endeavors that would increase faculty's intercollegiate athletics knowledge and deepen our field's understanding of intercollegiate athletics from multiple disciplinary perspectives (Brand, 2006; Coakley, 2008; Foster et al., 2022).

For example, faculty in kinesiology, physiology, and psychology could conduct studies with athletes that not only benefit the faculty with potential funding, publications, and conference presentations, but also the athletes and the athletics department with enhanced knowledge about athletes' physical and mental performances and areas for improvement. This would of course require athletics departments, who are often seen as lacking transparency (Gurney et al., 2017; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016), to allow or even encourage athlete participation in research. This also promotes sport-education integration if athletes are able to participate in the research and further draw connections between their sport participation and research opportunities and advancement. This could be seen as an avenue for engaging athletes in a HIP, while also showcasing athletics as education (Harry, 2023).

There are also a host of symbiotic opportunities for athletics departments to work academic programs. Some institutions, like the University of Colorado-Boulder, an institution also similar to MAU, offers students in the College of Media, Communication, and Information (CMCI) opportunities to partner with media and communication directors in athletics (Be Involved, n.d.). For example, CMCI faculty have created courses in which students are tasked with developing social media content for the university's athletics teams as part of their course projects. This offers opportunities for faculty to engage with athletics personnel and determine the needs/wants of athletics, while also gaining a unique curricular opportunity for their own classes. Similar integrative opportunities exist across college campuses but are under-explored. Engineering, architecture, and economics faculty could be consulted for renovation projects, while faculty in nutrition could support work with athletics administrators on training tables and meal plans for athletes. Athletics departments have myriad options when it comes to engaging with faculty to promote an Integrated View; however, these options remain largely untapped. Importantly, this involvement or consultation must be more than superficial or symbolic (Lawrence et al., 2007; Leary, 2014).

Likewise, university administrators could collaborate with athletics administrators to host semesterly town halls open to other institutional stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, students) to demystify athletics and increase transparency. This could allow athletics leaders to learn more about academic spaces, furthering their understanding of higher education and their position in the broader institutional context (Harry & Weight, 2019). Town halls could also further enhance stakeholders' understanding of

the campuses' academic and athletic arms (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Encouraging dialogue and collaboration and intentionally cultivating space for intergroup contact allows MAU and similar institutions to develop a shared understanding of athletics' role within the institution to prompt a more Integrated View. This could potentially strengthen the academic-athletics nexus while also dispelling faculty's stereotypical perceptions about athletes in their classes (e.g., dumb jocks) that can lead to stereotype threats or other negative impacts on athletes' educational pursuits (Comeaux, 2011; Wininger & White, 2008; 2015).

In promoting the synergies between academics and athletics, the field can further discern components of athletics and continue the work of Brand (2006) and others to redefine athletics' role in the academy (Coffey & Davis, 2019; Harry & Weight, 2019; Kretchmar, 2023; Matz, 2020; Springer & Dixon, 2021; Weight et al., 2020). MAU faculty generally did not perceive athletics as a form of education; however, they still appreciated the physical development and critical thinking skills athletics promoted in its participants. This aligned with much of the previous scholarship on the Integrated and Standard Views (Harry & Weight, 2019; Weight et al., 2020). Thus, redefining athletics' role to include and even emphasize its educational merit may help address Foster and colleagues' (2022) concerns regarding faculty's "narrow understanding of intercollegiate sport environments" and the increasing "separation between athletics and academics" (p. 190).

Redefining college athletics' role and value affects how institutions and athletics departments govern and organize sport (Harry, 2023; Springer & Dixon, 2021). For example, Harry (2023) advocated for the ways in which intercollegiate athletics could be reconsidered and designed as a high impact practice (HIP) to include stronger reflection, intentionality, and interaction opportunities for athletes participating in athletics. Such an idea follows an Integrated View and positions athletics more in line with other academic and HIP experiences like internships, service learning, and diversity/global learning (Harry, 2023). Similarly, other scholars calling for a redefinition of intercollegiate sport have suggested shifting the athletics department to more directly mirror academic departments or even having athletics be enveloped by an academic unit, like colleges of health and human performance or education (Matz, 2020; Springer & Dixon, 2021). Perhaps the most Integrated View perspective on such an idea would be reimagining athletics departments within a college of music, performance, and art (Brand, 2006). These reorganizations allow for more faculty involvement in and oversight of athletics, which various scholars and reform groups have promoted over the years (Clotfelter, 2019; KCIA, 2010). Furthermore, such a design bolsters relationships and understanding across campus, promoting the Integrated View.

Further, reorganizing athletic departments could aid in reconceptualizing faculty's perceptions of coaches as educators, aligning them more closely with the academic mission. This shift would require establishing clear guidelines for coaches as instructors. Further, partnerships between coaches and faculty would help maintain rigor and ethical behavior, result in mutual appreciation for one another's roles, and contribute to an Integrated View of athletics. To achieve this, institutions might con-

sider developing a curriculum in intercollegiate athletics analogous to the performing arts (Brand, 2006; Harry, 2023; Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020). While designing such a curriculum is beyond this paper's scope, it aligns with the faculty's perceptions of similarities between athletics and performing arts. Involving faculty from relevant fields in curriculum design can further ensure rigor and ethics, which may ease concerns about restructuring athletics as a performance art (Harry & Weight, 2019).

Although this proposition is relatively novel, similar structures exist at the NCAA Division II and III levels and are thus worth considering for Division institutions with greater resource availability. Failing to explore this redefinition could result in athletics further diverging from higher education's mission. However, there are several factors that institutions would need to consider when assessing the feasibility of this approach, including institutional priorities, stakeholder resistance, financial considerations, competitive success, or NCAA compliance. A key consideration of such a reorganization would be striking a balance that preserves athletic departments' competitive advantage and strengths while simultaneously addressing their educational shortcomings. Doing so would foster a more integrated approach that emphasizes academic and athletic success, allowing institutions to work toward creating an environment where institutions can excel on the field and in the classroom.

Limitations and Future Research

As noted in the methods, there are a few limitations with our study that future researchers should consider when conducting similar studies on Brand's (2006) Standard and Integrated Views. First, this study relied heavily on Brand's (2006) article to create the survey and understand the views of MAU faculty toward athletics. Thus, some topics pertaining to the Standard and Integrated Views, based on Brand's own potential biases (Kretchmar, 2023), were examined less (i.e., athletics as education versus athletics as business). Future research could address this limitation by examining Brand's (2006) less-discussed topics further to develop a more holistic scale/survey for understanding faculty perceptions.

Second, the data collected about faculty views on athletics were only from one Power Five institution, thus, findings should be generalized with caution. It is likely that faculty from other types of institutions could have different perspectives on the role and value of athletics at their own institutions (Clotfelter, 2019). Finally, our findings are based on a limited sample in terms of racial and institutional heterogeneity. Thus, findings and implications are potentially limited in their generalizability beyond MAU faculty and definitively limited in their generalizability beyond NCAA Division I Power Five institutions. Moreover, the perspectives of MAU faculty may not accurately reflect the views of a racially diverse population.

Future research can address these limitations by collecting data from faculty across various institutional types and comparing the findings to those in this study. This would also allow for a more holistic understanding of faculty perceptions of

athletics across the NCAA. Future researchers should also consider what variables might account for faculty's varied responses. For example, preliminary analysis of accompanying qualitative data indicated that previous sport involvement, fan identification, or experience with athletes might be fruitful areas to interrogate. Finally, this research did not explore causal relationships between faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics and its influence on college athletes. However, previous scholarship has noted faculty's negative perceptions of college athletes, particularly those in revenue-generating sports (i.e., football, men's basketball). It would be intriguing for future researchers to examine if a connection exists between faculty's Standard or Integrated Views of intercollegiate athletics and their attitudes toward athletes.

Conclusion

This research extends the higher education field's understanding of faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics, particularly regarding Brand's (2006) Standard and Integrated Views of intercollegiate athletics. Ultimately, this sample of faculty from one institution demonstrated that this stakeholder group is fairly confused and at odds regarding the appropriate role and place of athletics in higher education and within their institution. However, as faculty in this study generally maintained athletics detracted from the overall mission of higher education, was not educationally valued or worthy of academic credit, and operated as a business, most of their perceptions continue to foster a Standard View of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006). These findings are consistent with much of the previous research in this area, noting that faculty can be biased toward athletics and its participants (Comeaux, 2011; Foster et al., 2022; Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020).

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Identity Dynamics in Collegiate Olympic Athletes Post-Tokyo 2020: A Pre-Post Study

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This study employs a pre-post survey design, engaging a purposive-convenience sample of 94 U.S. college athletes who participated in the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics across eight sports and 22 countries. Utilizing validated scales, participants' group, national, and athletic identities were measured weeks before and after the event. Paired sample t-tests and a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance were utilized to understand the effects of time and demographic variables on these identities. Results revealed that after competing in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, college athletes exhibited a significant decrease in their group identity and a significant increase in their national identity, while their athletic identity remained relatively unchanged. The results were qualified by student status interactions such that international students showed a significant decrease in group identity and a significant increase in national identity after competing in Tokyo 2020, with no significant changes observed in these identities for domestic students. The results illuminate a complex process of identity negotiation experienced by collegiate Olympic athletes that transition between Olympic and college sport environments. This study contributes to sport management literature by offering nuanced insights into the dynamics of role-switching, urging stakeholders to utilize these findings to enhance the experiences of college athletes.

Key words: athlete identity, reintegration, Olympics, collegiate sports

Introduction

In recent years, the Olympic Games have experienced a significant increase in the participation of college athletes, reflecting the growing recognition of their talent and potential within the realm of international sport competition (Martinez, 2016; Settimi, 2016). The recent surge in representation in international competition might be credited to the advanced facilities, rigorous training programs, and specialized coaching provided by higher education institutions, which offer favorable environments for developing world-class athletes (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Moreover, the academic setting offers an opportunity for athletes to develop valuable life skills alongside their athletic pursuits, equipping them with the mental fortitude and discipline required to succeed in high-pressure competitions such as the Olympics (Huml

et al., 2019). As more and more college athletes make their mark on the global stage, the Olympic Games are evolving into a dynamic platform that celebrates and propels the ambitions of these elite athletes.

Although the participation of college athletes in the Olympic Games has been widely celebrated, it has also elevated some concerns regarding the potential challenges associated with role-switching between collegiate and Olympic competition. For example, athletes that transition from the collegiate sports environment to the Olympic stage experience challenges in adapting to new team dynamics and the heightened pressure to perform at elite levels (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). This shift can lead to a sense of dissonance, as athletes grapple with expectations associated with their Olympic identity while preserving ties to their college team (or group) identity (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Similarly, the reintegration of college athletes into their collegiate teams after their experiences at the Olympic Games might also be challenging due to a potential negotiation of identity and their own evolving sense of self, as they navigate the complexities of transitioning between global mega events and college athletics. This delicate balance between these dual roles may result in psychological stress and a sense of divided loyalty, which may ultimately influence athletic performance and overall well-being (van Rens et al., 2018).

Kim and Hums (2010) discuss cross-cultural adjustments required by collegiate athletes post-participation in international sport events. The transition back to collegiate sports following international competition can be seen as a form of cross-cultural adjustment, where athletes need to traverse the cultural gradations of their collegiate sports environment after having experienced a different cultural context in international competitions. During these international competitions, athletes develop and negotiate varied identities, including athletic, national, and group identities, which might be intensified due to the high-stakes environment.

Once back with their college teams, these athletes often find their identities, potentially amplified throughout international competition, struggling to amalgamate into the contemporary college sports environment, which has evolved significantly in recent years, becoming intensely competitive and commercialized. Such dissonance can lead to latent conflicts and dissatisfaction, as the prestige, attention, and respect that accompany being an elite international athlete may not resonate within the intricate dynamics of their college teams, where the emphasis on commercial appeal and intense competition can overshadow individual accomplishments (Macaulay, 2022; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). To this end, Shimizu et al. (2016) investigated changes in the life skills of college athletes over time, and how these changes relate to career outcomes. This study illuminates how the growth and development of an athlete during international competitions can affect their transition back into collegiate sports. They found that the skills developed during the international competition period potentially creates a discrepancy when reintegrating, as these skills may not be as valued or applied in the context of more commercialized collegiate sports.

Despite the growing interest in the experiences of college athletes participating in the Olympic Games, there remain significant gaps in the sport management literature concerning role switching and the reintegration process upon their return to col-

legiate sports. Specifically, limited research has been conducted on the multifaceted aspects of one's identity transformation, such as group identity, athletic identity, and national identity, as athletes transition between elite and collegiate environments. While some studies have explored the challenges of balancing dual roles in sports and academics (e.g., Nichols et al., 2019), the nuance of one's identity negotiation in the context of team dynamics and national representation remain underexplored. To this end, a more complete understanding of how college athletes navigate these identity shifts could provide valuable insights into the development of effective support systems and interventions to facilitate an easier transition and support overall well-being (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2022). This research aims to address these gaps, focusing on interplays between group, athlete, and national identities, and the implications for athletes' experiences, performance, and long-term development in both the Olympic and collegiate domains.

Literature Review

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT), first posited by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, forms a theoretical framework for understanding the interpersonal and intergroup relationships that permeate different fields, including sport management. The central tenet of SIT posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from a perceived membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These groups can be as diverse as family, workplace, national, or sporting affiliations.

The application of SIT in sport management literature has been extensive. Scholars have employed this theory to understand various phenomena ranging from fan behavior (e.g., Wann & Branscombe, 1990), organizational identification (e.g., Heere & James, 2007), to athletes' group dynamics (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014). Several researchers have found that a person's identity as a fan can significantly influence their emotional responses, behavior, and consumption patterns, as individuals seek to maintain a positive self-image through their affiliation with successful teams.

Similarly, the construct of group identity, in the context of SIT, provides a lens through which we can examine how individuals identify with particular groups, in this case, sport teams. This group identity can be so profound that members often conform to group norms, exemplify group behavior, and respond emotionally to group-related events (e.g., Terry et al., 1999). The concept of national identity also stems from SIT, representing the extent to which an individual identifies with their national group, which becomes especially significant in international sports competitions where the patriotic feelings run high (Crisp et al., 2008). The concept of national identity further intensifies group identity, binding together a diverse set of individuals under a common banner, and fuels fervor in fandom. Finally, the application of SIT in understanding of athletic identity is multifaceted. Athletic identity, according to Brewer et al. (1993), is the degree to which a person identifies with their athlete role. This identity can greatly impact the athlete's behavior, motivation, self-presentation, and performance. Recognizing the importance of group affiliation, team

cohesion, and leadership in sport, the application of SIT helps us to know more about the psychological processes and interpersonal dynamics inherent in team sports.

SIT has played a significant role in shaping our understanding of group dynamics in sports. By understanding how group identity, national identity, and athletic identity form and influence behavior, scholars and practitioners in sport management can better understand and cater to the needs of different stakeholders, including college athletes who transition between global mega events and college athletics negotiating these very identities (e.g., Beauchamp & Eys, 2014; Brewer et al., 1993; Crolley & Hand, 2002; Ronkainen et al., 2016; Sparkes, 1998; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Group Identity

Group identity is the psychological connection an individual feels with a group, leading to the internalization of group norms, values, and behaviors (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Van Kippenburg & Van Schie, 2000). In sport management, group identity has been studied to understand how individuals identify with teams and how this influences behaviors and attitudes. This can manifest in ways such as fan loyalty, consumption patterns, and emotional reactions to team performance (e.g., Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Collins et al., 2016; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011). Researchers have also argued that group identity can significantly influence group cohesion, leadership, and team performance among athletes (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014).

Group identity plays a significant role in how athletes identify with their sport teams. As they develop a sense of belonging to the team, their group identity intertwines with their athletic identity. They become more committed to the team, conform to group norms, and work towards the group's goals (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014). This identification can nurture team cohesion and improve performance (Brewer et al., 1993).

However, a unique situation arises when college athletes represent their home countries in international mega events. Upon returning, these athletes may experience identity negotiation as they try to reconcile their group identity with their college team and their amplified national identity following international competition. This negotiation might manifest as a multifaceted psychological process involving cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral adaptations (Sussman, 2001; Ward & Kennedy; 1993; Zhou et al., 2008).

Delving deeper into the realities of representing one's country, it's essential to consider the considerable amount of time that athletes spend in official national team preparation, travel to, and participation in mega events (e.g., Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Orlick, 1989; Torregrosa et al., 2015). The athletes invest substantial time in training camps, tryouts, and team travels, in addition to the elite skill and training required for an individual to make the team. This extensive engagement with international teams can contribute significantly to their identity formation and development, emphasizing the pivotal role of time and experience in shaping one's athletic and national identities. Furthermore, their sense of belonging may be affected, resulting in potential confusion, conflict, or anxiety, commonly referred to as "identity

conflict" (Sparkes, 1998). The realm of identity conflict is vast, implying that one's internal struggle can encompass numerous areas such as role expectations, societal perceptions, and self-concept (Greenwald, 2002). This identity conflict can be especially challenging to manage due to the dichotomy between athletes' roles within their college teams and their national representation. As a result, these athletes may feel divided loyalties, questioning whether their primary identity should align more closely with their college team or their national team. Such can lead to a reevaluation of commitment levels, possibly influencing their interactions with teammates and coaches, and possibly affecting their overall performance (Sparkes, 1998).

Furthermore, role engulfment emerges as a critical dimension in this scenario, whereby athletes are profoundly immersed in their roles, either as a student-athlete or as a representative of their home country. The transitioning process from being role-engulfed as a student-athlete to assuming a similar engulfment as an athlete competing internationally for their country requires nuanced negotiation and adaptive strategies (Aggey-Pinegar, 2010). Assessing this transitioning process can shed light on the multifaceted challenges encountered by athletes, extending current understanding of psychosocial dynamics and offering avenues for improved support (e.g., Kidd et al. 2018; Miller & Kerr, 2003).

Given the significant role of group identity in collegiate athletes and the potential for conflicts and adaptations when they represent their home countries in international mega events, it is crucial to examine how their experiences in such events may impact their sense of belonging and association with their college teams upon return. Thus, the ensuing hypothesis is postulated:

Hypothesis 1: College athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly lesser group identity with their collegiate team following participation in the Games.

National Identity

National identity refers to a collective or group identity that stems from individuals identifying with a nation. It encompasses shared traditions, language, culture, and symbols that represent the distinctiveness of a nation (Smith, 1991). This shared identity offers a framework for social cohesion, collective action, and engenders a sense of belonging among citizens (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). National identity can often be strongly exhibited and reinforced through major societal events, including sports competitions (Crolley & Hand, 2002).

In sport management, the concept of national identity has been explored in terms of how sport shapes and reinforces national identity and how this identity influences the behavior of fans and athletes (Crisp, Stathi, Turner, & Husnu, 2008). At the broadest level, researchers show how sports can serve as a medium for the expression of national identity. These expressions are often most visible in international competitions, where national teams and athletes embody their nation on a global stage (Holt, 1999). Mega sporting events like the Olympics often incite national pride and unity, showcasing the strength of national identity (e.g., Stanton, 2014; Tomlinson & Young, 2006; Xu, 2006). Further, sport has been studied as a medium

through which individuals develop and internalize a sense of national identity, as successful national teams often strengthen national identity among citizens through instilled national pride and unity (Crolley & Hand, 2002).

Participation in international sport competitions significantly affects national identity among these athletes (Hognestad, 2006). Representation of the home country intensifies feelings of national identity, as athletes can become aware that they are not only competing for personal accomplishment, but also symbolizing their nation's strengths and aspirations (Houlihan, 1997). Artifacts such as the nation's anthem, flag, and other national symbols used during these events reinforce this identity. However, this heightened sense of national identity can also increase the pressure and expectations placed on the athletes, both by themselves and compatriots (Morgan, 2006).

However, for college athletes who participate in international sports competition for their home countries, negotiating this amplified national identity upon returning to their college sports team may be challenging. This may be particularly true if the athletes' home country differs from the country of their college. This is often a period of identity negotiation, where athletes struggle to reconcile their enhanced national identity with their identity as a member of their college team (Sparkes, 1998). They might experience conflicting loyalties and expectations, as well as cultural dissonance. In severe cases, it can lead to identity conflict and stress, affecting their performance (Ronkainen et al., 2016).

Given the intricate relationship between national identity and international the Olympics, particularly how representation and participation in such events can amplify feelings of national identity among athletes, it is critical to explore how this dynamic unfolds for college athletes representing their home countries. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 2*: College athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly greater national identity with their home country post-participation in the Olympics.

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity is a self-concept that individuals hold about themselves as being an athlete and the degree to which they identify with the role (see Brewer et al. 1993). This identity is often salient in athletes who invest significant time and energy into their sport and value their role as an athlete highly. Sport management literature has explored athletic identity to understand its effects on behavior, motivation, and athletic performance. For instance, Brewer et al. (1993) suggest that strong athletic identity can enhance commitment and performance but might lead to difficulties in adjusting to career transitions and sport-related injuries. Athletic identity has also been examined in the context of retirement from sport, where transitioning out of an athlete role can create major identity disruption and stress (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Athletic participation in international mega-events, such as the Olympics or World Championships, can influence athletic identity. Given the prestige and global

exposure of these events, they can be perceived as pinnacle experiences in an athlete's career (Schwenkler, 2021). Success on the international level may reinforce and strengthen an athlete's identity, deepening the alignment between their self-concept and role as an elite athlete (Sparkes, 1998). However, for college athletes who compete in international sports competitions for their home countries, this enhanced athletic identity may cause difficulties upon returning to their college teams. The international sport experience, often perceived as a higher level of competition, might lead to a disparity between their self-perception as elite international athletes and their role as collegiate athletes (Ronkainen et al., 2016). This identity dissonance could result in feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction and may influence their interactions and performance within the college team (Sparkes, 1998).

For example, collegiate sports, while competitive, often do not match the intensity and prestige of international competition like the Olympics. Thus, the athlete might feel a sense of under-stimulation or lack of challenge, leading to a decrease in the salience of athletic identity (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Furthermore, Olympic athletes are widely seen as representatives of their home nations, garnering attention and respect that may not be replicated in the context of college sports (Brewer et al., 1993). As such, these athletes may struggle to readjust to their roles within their college team following the heightened responsibilities and status they experienced at the Olympics. This adjustment process might cause them to question or reassess their identity as an athlete (Sparkes, 1998).

Athletic identity, the degree to which individuals identify with the role of an athlete, can be significantly impacted by participation in international sports competitions like the Olympics. Such events can amplify the athletes' self-concept and alignment with the role of an elite athlete, creating a potential disparity in identity salience upon returning to college sports settings. Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is posited:

> *Hypothesis 3*: College athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly lesser athletic identity upon returning to college post-participation in the Olympics.

International Versus Domestic Student-Athletes

Various cultural, social, and psychological factors may play a pivotal role in shaping identity dynamics, particularly when examining the differences between international and U.S. domestic student-athletes. For example, one might posit that international students experience notable changes in group and national identity post international representation. Such decline in group identity amongst international students post-Olympics may underscore a possible conflict or reevaluation of affiliations and loyalties, illuminating how mega sport events may potentially lead to a reconfiguration of athletes' connection or allegiance to their immediate group or team. Conversely, domestic student-athletes might exhibit stability in their group identity, potentially stemming from a more congruent cultural and national context, which might shield their group affiliations from the influence of international participation (Ronkainen et al., 2016).

In parallel, enhancements in national identity among international students post international competitions may also underscore the potent influence of mega sport events in reinforcing associations and identifications with one's home nation, potentially fueled by the amplified national pride and camaraderie experienced during such competitions (Crolley & Hand, 2002; Houlihan, 1997). Contrastingly, the possible unaltered national identity among domestic student-athletes following a mega sport event would underscore the potentially ingrained and stable sense of national belonging in this demographic, undisturbed by the influences of international competitions (Kim and Hums (2010).

To this end, interaction effects will be examined to determine if the effects of time on group identity, national identity, and athletic identity differs depending on various demographic factors. More specifically, we predict that there will be significant effects of student status (i.e., international student or domestic student) on the dependent variables such that college athletes who are international students will experience greater effects of time than college athletes who are domestic students. As such, the following hypothesis is forwarded:

> *Hypothesis 4:* International college athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly different (a) group identity, (b) national identity, and (c) athletic identity upon returning to their college team post-participation in the Olympics.

Method

Participants

Participants were drawn from a purposive-convenience sample of current U.S. college athletes who qualified for and competed in the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics. A total of 251 U.S. college athletes competing in 12 different sports for 36 different countries comprised the sample (NCAA, 2021). Due to the prepost design of this study, incoming and graduating U.S. college athletes were deemed ineligible because they would not be able to sufficiently answer pretest or posttest questions related to one or more measures (e.g., group identity). Researchers contacted each of the remaining 166 eligible participants via social media to explain the study purpose and request their participation in the study. Ninety-four U.S. college athletes across 8 different sports and 22 different countries agreed to participate, with 156 usable surveys being collected (pretest: $n = 94$; posttest: $n = 68$; 72.3% postsurvey response rate).

Participants were undergraduate students with ages ranging from 18–24 years ($\bar{x} = 21.2$ years). Fifty-two percent of the sample was male, and 48% female. Seventy-nine percent of the sample classified themselves at White, 8.4% Black/African American, 6.6% Hispanic, with the remaining 6% Asian, Pacific Islander, or Multiracial. Though the sample included U.S. college athletes, 58.5% of the participants had citizenship in countries other than the United States and competed at Tokyo 2020 for the following 22 countries: Australia, Bahamas, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Jamaica, Jordan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Ni-

geria, Norway, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Tunisia and Venezuela. Table 1 provides a summary of participants' demographic characteristics, student statuses, and athletic backgrounds.

Table 1. *Paired Sample t-test Results for Group Identity, National Identity, and Athletic Identity*

Identity Type	Time	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value	Significant?
Group	T1	5.23	1.24	-2.17	< .001	Yes
Group	T2	4.72	1.07			
National	T1	4.06	1.01	3.44	< .001	Yes
National	T2	4.94	1.19			
Athletic	T1	4.95	1.42	0.04	.197	No
Athletic	T2	5.11	1.12			

Note: "Time" refers to the measurement points T1 (before) and T2 (after) the Tokyo 2020 competition. "Significant?" refers to whether the results are statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Instrumentation

A prepost design was enlisted to measure participants' group identity, national identity, and athletic identity before and after competing at Tokyo 2020. Atkinson and Nevill (2001, p. 820) suggest "research designs that involve correlated data (e.g., repeated measures) are more powerful than those involving separate unrelated groups." To measure the level of identity the participants had with their college teams, we used the group identity scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992), and later refined by Van Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000). This scale comprised six Likert-type items that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): "When someone criticizes my college team, it feels like a personal insult"; "I'm very interested in what others think about my college team"; "When I talk about my college team, I usually say *we* rather than *they*"; "My college team's successes are my successes"; "When someone praises my college team, it feels like a personal compliment." Reliability of the group identity measure was excellent ($\alpha > .88$). We used Huddy and Khatib's (2007) national identity scale to measure participants' identity with their home nation (i.e., that for which they competed at Tokyo 2020). The scale included four Likert-type items ranging from 1 to 5, such as "How important is being American to you?"; "How well does the term American describe you?"; "To what extent do you identify with your American nationality?"; and "To what extent do you see yourself as a typical American?" Reliability of this measure was very good ($\alpha > .80$). We measured athletic identity using the 10-item Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1993). This scale included Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): "I consider myself an athlete"; "I have many goals related to sport"; "Sport is the most important part of my life"; "Most of my friends are athletes"; "I would feel very depressed if I were injured and

could not compete in sport"; "I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport"; "I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself"; "Other people view me mainly as an athlete"; "I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else"; and "Sport is the only important thing in my life." The reliability of the measure was very good ($\alpha > .83$). In addition to these previously validated scales, we added to the survey a series of demographic questions to see if these variables would moderate the hypothesized relationships. These questions included student status (i.e., domestic or international), age, gender, and ethnicity.

Data Collection

A pretest survey consisting of all measures was administered to participants one month prior to the Opening Ceremony of Tokyo 2020. We selected the pretest timeframe to ensure that all participants could complete the survey at least one week prior to their traveling to Tokyo (the earliest travel schedule for a participant was three weeks prior to the Opening Ceremony) and to avoid all "blackout" periods imposed on the participants by various governing bodies (Geurin & McNary, 2021). The posttest survey consisting of all measures was administered to participants two weeks after the Closing Ceremony of Tokyo 2020. We used a shorter posttest timeframe to limit potentially confounding factors and participant attrition (Price & Murnan, 2004). As such, we can be more confident that any changes observed between pretest and posttest surveys were the result of participants' experiences at Tokyo 2020. The surveys were web-based and created using Qualtrics online software, after which data were exported to and analyzed using SPSS 23.

Data Analysis

We used paired sample t-tests to test for statistical significance between measures in the pretest and posttest surveys, and a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance was used to determine if any of the demographic variables moderated the influence of time (i.e., Olympic experience) on group identity, national identity, and athletic identity. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations were computed to better understand the relationships between all variables.

Results

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare participants' group identity before (T1) and after (T2) they competed at Tokyo 2020. Findings showed a significant difference between T1 ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.24$) and T2 ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.07$); $t(67) = -2.17$, p < .001. These findings revealed support for H1 as levels of group identity decreased among participants following their experience at Tokyo 2020. A second paired sample t-test was used to compare national identity among participants before (T1) and after (T2) they competed at Tokyo 2020. Findings showed a significant difference between scores at T1 ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.01$) and T2 ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.19$); $t(67) = 3.44$, p < .001, providing support for H2 as levels of national identity among participants increased following their experience at Tokyo 2020. A paired sample

t-test was used to compare the participants' athletic identity before (T1) and after (T2) their experience at Tokyo 2020. The findings showed no significant differences between T1 ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.42$) and T2 ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.12$); $t(67) = .04$, p = .197, indicating a lack of support for H3. The results of these paired sample *t*-tests are summarized in Table 1.

A repeated measures analysis of variance was used to explore any interaction effects of demographic characteristics and time on the dependent variables. Findings indicated there were no interaction effects involving age, gender, or ethnicity. A significant main effect for time was observed for group identity and national identity but was qualified by student status interactions (student status × group identity and student status × national identity). As illustrated in Table 2, international students exhibited a significant decrease in group identity following the experience of competing at Tokyo 2020 [$F(1,67) = 19.33$, $p < .01$]. We observed no significant differences of group identity among domestic students before and after Tokyo 2020. Similarly, international students demonstrated a significant increase in national identity after competing at Tokyo 2020 [$F(1,67) = 17.64$, $p < .01$] as illustrated in Table 2. We observed no significant differences for national identity among domestic students before and after Tokyo 2020. Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide illustrative summaries of the results of the repeated measures ANOVA for interaction effects of time and student status on group identity and national identity, respectively.

Table 2. *Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Interaction Effects*

Variable	Interaction	F-value	p-value	Significant?
Group Identity	Student Status	19.33	< .01	Yes
National Identity	Student Status	17.64	< .01	Yes

Note: "Variable" refers to the tested variable. "Interaction" denotes the interaction term in the ANOVA model. "Student Status" refers to International and Domestic groups. "Significant?" refers to whether the results are statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Figure 1. *Repeated measures ANOVA results for interaction effects of time and student status on group identity.*
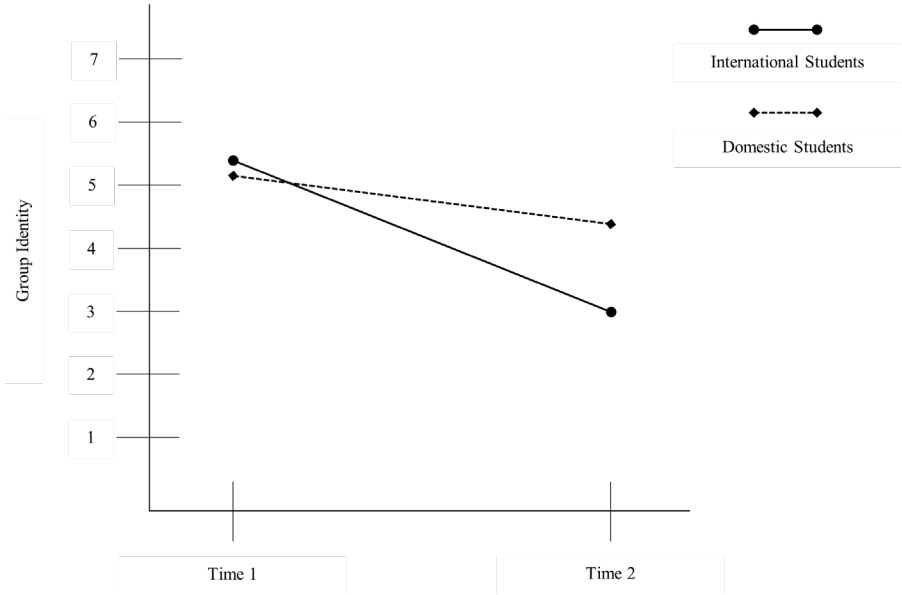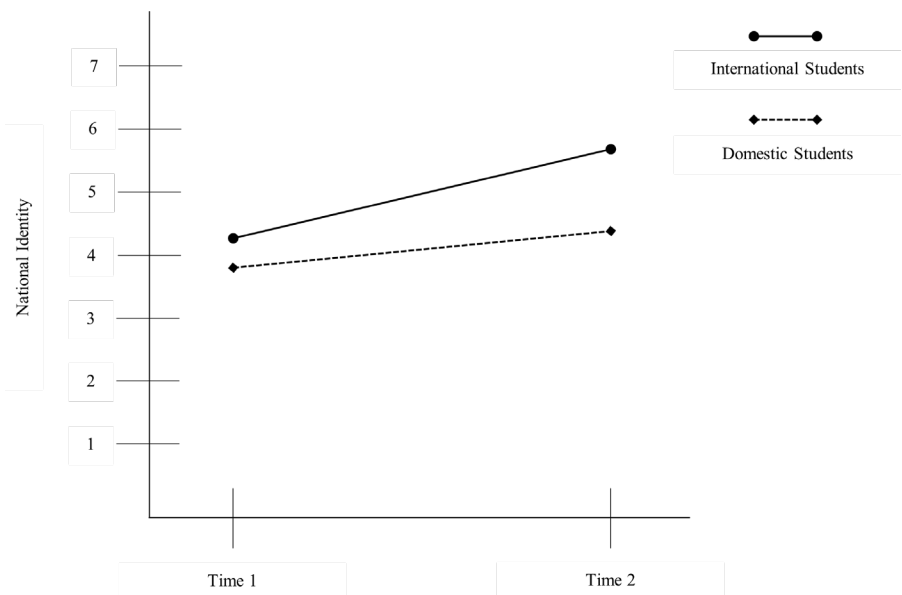

Figure 2. *Repeated measures ANOVA results for interaction effects of time and student status on national identity.*

Discussion

This research aimed to examine the changes in group, national, and athlete identities of participants before and after their engagement in Tokyo 2020. The application of paired sample t-tests served as a robust methodology to provide comparative insights into these changes. The initial analysis examined the shift in the sense of group identity among participants. The results suggested that the experience of the participants at Tokyo 2020 resulted in a significant decline in their group identity with their respective college teams following the Games. This change in participants' perceived identity endorses the concept that college athletes who participate in an international mega event during their time at university may experience a decline in their sense of unity with their college teams following the event.

A subsequent part of the research focused on studying changes in participants' national identity. It was observed that the sense of national identity among the participants underwent an augmentation following their participation in Tokyo 2020. This observable increase in national identity following the Games supports our contention that college athletes who participate in an international mega event will experience an enhanced sense of national pride as a result of their involvement in the event.

Further, the last segment of the study sought to determine alterations in the participants' athletic identity in the wake of Tokyo 2020. Contrary to expectations, the results suggested that the event had little to no significant impact on participants' self-perceived athletic identity. The stability in the sense of athletic identity counters the third hypothesis, which assumed a possible transformation in college athletes' identification with their athletic roles after returning to their college teams following an international mega event.

The study delved into possible interaction effects between demographic characteristics and time on the dependent variables, using a repeated measures analysis of variance. Analyses revealed no detectable interactions involving age, gender, or ethnicity on the studied outcomes. However, a significant main effect for time on group and national identity emerged, which was qualified by notable interactions with the participants' student status. Our results underscored a nuanced interplay between student status and the transformations in group and national identity post participation at Tokyo 2020. Specifically, international students experienced a discernible decline in group identity following their involvement. This delineates that their experiences at Tokyo 2020 affected their sense of unity and belongingness with their respective college teams, possibly pointing towards a conflict or re-evaluation of their affiliations and loyalties. This may be indicative of a wider phenomenon in sport mega events, wherein international representation leads to a reconfiguration of one's connection and allegiance to their immediate group or team, necessitating further investigation into the psychosocial mechanisms underlying such shifts. In contrast, domestic students did not manifest alterations in group identity. The differential effect illustrates how domestic students may retain a more stable or resilient group identity, potentially due to a more congruent cultural and national context, mitigating

the influence of international participation on their group affiliations.

Similarly, with regard to national identity, international students exhibited a significant enhancement post-Tokyo 2020, suggesting that such international exposure and representation amplified their association and identification with their home nations. This enhancement could be attributed to the intensified national pride and camaraderie experienced during international competitions, offering a richer, more diversified platform for expressing and reinforcing one's national identity. In contrast, the domestic students' national identity remained static post event, emphasizing the varying dimensions and stability of national identities among different student categories. An absence of significant change in national identity among domestic students may signal the presence of a more ingrained and established sense of national belonging, potentially undisturbed by the external stimuli provided by international competitions.

The research findings reveal a complex picture of the impact of participation in major international mega events like Tokyo 2020 on the subjective identity of athletes. Specifically, while there are observable changes in team and national identities, the athletes' sense of their athletic identity remains resilient and unaltered. The implications of the results are critical to understanding the role such events play in shaping an athlete's identity perceptions and open pathways for more detailed explorations in the future.

Practical Implications

This research provides important implications for sport management, college athletic administrators, and athlete support services, revealing how participation in international mega-events like Tokyo 2020 might impact college athletes' identities on different levels. Firstly, the significant decrease in group identity among participants post-Tokyo 2020 implies that athletic administrators should be cognizant of the potential changes in athlete' sense of unity with their college teams following such international experiences. It may be beneficial to create strategies aimed at reinforcing and fostering this sense of team unity upon athletes' return. The strategies could include team-building exercises, group debriefings, or team retreats that may function to recalibrate group dynamics and re-establish a collective identity among team members. To this end, Berg and Warner (2019) emphasis the essential role of social support in promoting athlete development, especially during transitions between sporting arenas. These authors highlight the utility of a supportive network (i.e., coaches, peers, and family) in facilitating smooth transitions and fostering a sense of belonging. Dean and Reynolds (2017) expand on this, emphasizing the reintegration of student-athletes using a strengths perspective from social work, thus harnessing athletes' inherent capabilities to effectively manage transitions.

Secondly, the observed increase in national identity following participation in Tokyo 2020 suggests that these events can be a powerful medium for enhancing athletes' pride and connection to their home nations. Athletic administrators should therefore acknowledge and celebrate this strengthened sense of national identity. For example, hosting a welcome-home ceremony or public acknowledgment event could

serve to support this strengthened national pride, simultaneously fostering community support and engagement.

Thirdly, the stability of college athletes' self-perceived athletic identity, despite their participation in a major international event, highlights the resilience of this identity facet. This provides reassurance to sport management and athlete support services that such involvement does not disrupt these athletes' personal identification with their athletic roles. Such a continuity of athletic identity can be considered a positive aspect for athletic administrators, suggesting the athletes maintain their athletic dedication and focus, despite potential changes in their team and national identities.

Lastly, the differential impact of mega sporting events on international and domestic students underscores the necessity for tailored support strategies for different statuses of athletes. For instance, recognizing the potential for a sharper decline in group identity among international students could prompt the provision of additional resources or supportive interventions targeting this group upon their return. Stoa et al. (2020) draw attention to the requisite of effective identity management during such transitions. They show how stress can considerably affect an athlete's intrinsic motivation, which becomes critical in high-pressure competitive environments such as college sports. As such, international student athletes' identity negotiation becomes increasingly important as they are tasked with reconciling their multiple identities derived from diverse sport arenas (Ronkainen et al., 2016; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Therefore, interventions that aid athletes in managing their multiple identities can mitigate potential identity conflicts stemming from the dramatically different cultural arenas of mega sport events and collegiate sports.

Theoretical Implications

Firstly, this research builds on the foundational theories of group identity, offering a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play in athletes' identity perceptions within international sporting events. The observed decline in group identity post-participation in Tokyo 2020 resonates with the theoretical propositions of Tajfel (1981), Tajfel and Turner (1979), and Van Kippenburg and Van Schie (2000), emphasizing the intricate psychological connections individuals forge with groups and the subsequent internalization of group norms, values, and behaviors. This study corroborates earlier research suggesting that group identity significantly influences behaviors and attitudes, including fan loyalty, consumption patterns, and emotional reactions to team performance (Collins et al., 2016; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011), expanding current understanding of how engagement in global contexts may challenge "local" affiliations, specifically college teams. The potential disjuncture between local affiliations and global experiences opens avenues for extensive theoretical examination into the mediating or moderating factors that potentially affect relationships between social identities, context, and experiences, and encourages a reevaluation of existing frameworks on group identity in sport management literature.

Secondly, this research substantiates theories positing the potent influence of international sporting events in intensifying national identity, providing a rich context to explore the intertwining of personal and national aspirations (Smith, 1991; Huddy & Khatib, 2007). The observed increase in national identity post-participation corroborates the findings of Holt (1999) and Crolley and Hand (2002), underlining the mega sport event as a conduit for expressing and reinforcing national identity. Athletes, while seeking personal accomplishment, find themselves embodying their nation's ethos and aspirations, thrusting them into symbolic and representative roles that echo the distinctiveness of their nations' traditions, culture, and symbols. The nuanced implications of this research emphasize how national symbols and anthems serve to consolidate this intensified national identity during such events, as indicated by Houlihan (1997), and how it can mold the behavior and perceptions of athletes.

Thirdly, these findings refine our comprehension of athletic identity, spotlighting the resilience and stability of this self-concept even amidst transformative experiences such as the Olympic Games (Brewer et al., 1993). The continuity in athletic identity post-participation in international events suggests that the salience and value attributed to the athlete role are deeply fixed elements of athletes' self-concepts (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Schwenkler, 2021). This lends support to the assertion that athletic identity might not easily waver one way or the other, even when juxtaposed against experiences of elevated responsibility and heightened status, such as mega sport events that come with their own prestige and global recognition (Sparkes, 1998).

Lastly, insights into the distinct challenges faced by international student-athletes during reintegration accentuate the critical importance of addressing cross-cultural adjustments and the intensified negotiation of identities developed during international competitions (Kim & Hums, 2010; Macaulay, 2022; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The theoretical discourse is enriched by the revelation of the intricate interplay between national, athletic, and group identities, and the profound implications these have on the experiences of reintegration, particularly spotlighting the struggles and potential identity conflicts of international students with heightened national identities (Sparkes, 1998). Discussions surrounding role engulfment and stress management may introduce nuanced dimensions to our theoretical understanding, indicating potentially significant implications of an imbalanced emphasis on athletic identity and the associated stress on athletes' self-concept and overall identity development (Stoa et al., 2020; Zvosec et al., 2023).

Limitations

There are several potential limitations to this study. Firstly, the design of the study was cross-sectional with measurements before and after the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Thus, the study might not capture long-term changes in identities or any changes that could occur during other significant events or over a more extended period. Second, the data were collected using self-reported measures, which could lead to response bias. Participants might respond in ways they perceive as socially desirable or personally favorable rather than providing accurate responses. Third,

the rate of attrition (i.e., the drop-out of participants between pretest and posttest) could introduce bias in the results. If the athletes who dropped out of the study differed systematically from those who stayed, it could skew the findings. Fourth, the use of Likert-scale items may be subjected to cultural interpretation, and language nuances may have affected the responses. This is especially relevant given that a significant portion of participants were international students. Fifth, while the study controlled for a few demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity, it did not consider other potential influencing factors like socioeconomic status, years of experience in the sport, or prior participation in Olympic or other international competitions. Finally, though the researchers have attempted to minimize potential confounding variables by the timing of the surveys, there could be other factors influencing the athletes' sense of identity during the Olympic period that the research does not account for. These could include personal factors such as stress or success in the sport competition, or broader social and political factors.

Future Directions

The current research unveils the complexities and intricacies of identity negotiations experienced by college athletes transitioning between the Olympic and collegiate environments. The research underscores the necessity to consider these identity shifts when providing support systems for athletes. Additionally, it illuminates the role of team, athlete, and national identities in shaping athletes' experiences, performance, and long-term development. The insights gained from this research may serve as a foundation for the establishment of targeted interventions and programs designed to better manage athletes' role-switching, thereby facilitating their athletic achievement and overall well-being. Although the process of transitioning between the Olympic Games and college sports presents unique challenges, it also offers invaluable opportunities for growth and development. Therefore, it is imperative for stakeholders to exploit these findings to enhance the experiences of college athletes and, by extension, continue to elevate the status and impact of the Olympic Games. The results of the study make notable contributions to the sport management literature by illuminating the multilayered dynamics of role-switching, ultimately inspiring future studies in the intersection of elite and collegiate sports.

This research also underscores the need for future research that continues to explore the intricate interplay of personal characteristics, experiences, and the different facets of identity in sport contexts. Future research should indeed extend the scope of this study to comprehensively explore the experiences of international athletes at universities and their transitional experiences between collegiate and international competitions, such as the Olympics. Longitudinal data and analysis could offer invaluable insights into the seeming evolving dynamics and implications of such transitions, allowing for a deeper understanding of how athletes interpret and navigate such shifts. These could include investigating the psychological, social, and cultural ramifications of transitioning between varied levels of competition and representation, and how such transitions influence athletes' sense of identity, belonging, and performance.

Moreover, this research opens a broad avenue for exploring the multifaceted dimensions of identity negotiation and reintegration for athletes in diverse contexts. Investigations can delve into how the various elements of athletes' identities (i.e., group, national, and athletic), interplay and recalibrate during such transitions. The distinctive experiences and challenges faced by our international athletes in reconciling their enhanced national identities with their roles in college athletics can be explored in greater depth, offering nuanced understandings of the identity flux experienced by athletes. By doing so, subsequent studies could frame a richer, more integrated narrative around the complexities inherent in international athletes' journeys, contributing to a robust research line that studies the intricate intertwining of identity and representation in both the collegiate sports and global sports domains.

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Good Intercollegiate Athlete Representation: "All Hands On Deck"

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The current landscapes of intercollegiate sports and higher education are experiencing shifts toward more democratic representation. In college sport, student-athlete representatives are more engaged in policy decisions, hold voting rights, and are included on boards and committees. Despite this shift, little is known about what good intercollegiate athlete representation entails and how multi-level, democratic governance systems may support or impede good representation in the context of college sport. This paper explores qualities of good college athlete representation (CARep) and factors contributing to and/or detracting from the process of good CARep in the context of a democratic multi-level intercollegiate sport governance system. Findings showed individual attributes of good CARep, including interpersonal skills and leadership, were based on democratic representation virtues (i.e., fairmindedness, trust building, good gatekeeping) and helped foster democratic values of civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion. The intercollegiate sport governance system supports the work of athlete representatives primarily through its educative function. More specifically, administrators were key to identifying experiential learning opportunities for athlete representatives, which contributed to the process of good representation through responsiveness, inclusiveness, and egalitarianism. Lack of administrative support and education for all relevant interest groups characterized governance system inconsistencies impeding good CARep, primarily at institutional levels where the purpose of student-athlete committees varied and/or athlete representative roles were less understood. Implications for practice and directions for future research on good athlete representation are presented.

Key words: athlete representation, democratic representation virtues, intercollegiate sport governance, multi-level governance

Good democratic governance requires good representation (Dovi, 2007). Globally, higher education has redefined student representation, emphasizing the importance of student voice in models of democratic governance (Klemenčič, 2014; Matthews & Dollinger, 2022). Students are critical actors in higher education governance, who have authentic and valuable voices and "should be considered as active agents engaged in institutional and system-level" decision-making (Naylor et al., 2021, p. 5). While student voice is a contested concept in higher education (Matthews & Dollinger, 2022), it is commonly characterized as hearing what students say to make improvements to their experiences. Student-athlete representation is typically conceived from the democratic concept of the principal-agent relationship (Kihl & Schull, 2020) where representatives perform the roles and activities required to advance constituent policy preferences. For example, in the context of intercollegiate sport, college athlete representatives have successfully advanced legislation on their behalf such as time commitments (Hosick, 2017), one-time unrestrictive transfers (Hosick, 2021), and extension of medical care requirements for athletically related injuries (Hosick, 2018). Dovi (2007) argued however that good representation entails more than deliberating and advancing policy preferences on behalf of constituents. Rather, good representation involves fostering the values and norms (i.e., civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion) of well-functioning democratic institutions (Dovi, 2007), which in the context of intercollegiate sport occurs in multi-level systems of governance (i.e., local, conference, and national). Athlete representatives may be effective in gaining positive legislative outcomes but fail to do so in a democratic fashion which can undermine multi-level intercollegiate sport governance (e.g., encouraging athletes to participate in policy discussions).

Despite legislative successes of college athlete representatives, we do not have any clear understanding of the extent that they foster the values and norms of democratic sport governance. Additionally, scarcity of understanding exists around the *process* of college athlete representation (CARep)—for example, how athletes' voices are infused into intercollegiate sport governance systems, as well as what institutional structures facilitate or impede good representation. Dovi (2007) argued "there are substantive and distinctively democratic standards for distinguishing good representatives from bad ones" (p. 1). Understanding the democratic standards and processes of good CARep can offer conceptual clarity that can assist in improving the democratic functioning of the multi-level intercollegiate sport governance systems in practice. Another theoretical contribution of this research is identifying how a multi-level system of sport governance affects the quality of CARep beyond advocating for athlete policy preferences.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine what comprises good CARep within a multi-level intercollegiate sport governance system, including governance system supports and challenges affecting good CARep. Our research questions were two-fold:

1) What does good CARep entail within a democratic intercollegiate sport governance system?

2) What governance system features support and/or impede good CARep?

To address our research questions, we first explain the research context (i.e., restructured NCAA Division I governance system), and highlight the importance of the study. Second, we develop the conceptual framework before presenting our results and discussion. We conclude with implications and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Research Context: NCAA Governance Restructuring

The NCAA is a complex, multi-layered governance system serving as the most prominent governing body for college sports in the United States (Nite et al., 2019). Division I is considered the elite division and is the context of our inquiry. The Division I governance structure features three levels including institutional, conference, and national levels (Osborne, & Weight, 2019). Athlete representatives are involved at all levels of governance; however, their roles vary somewhat within the different levels (Broome, 2018; Krapf, 2015).

In 2015, NCAA's Division I structure was revised to reflect a more democratic governance system (Shannon, 2017). A key aspect of the new design was the Association's goal to increase awareness and responsiveness to its membership, particularly, athletes as the previous structure did not fully engage nor represent their interests (NCAA, 2014). CARep was enhanced in this new democratic model. First, athlete representatives were given voting rights at the national level (Broome, 2018; Kihl & Schull, 2020). However, at conference and institutional levels (except for one conference) athlete representatives are still not afforded voting rights. Second, athlete representatives serve on national subcommittees and where applicable have a vote (Broome, 2018). Additionally, Student Athlete Advisory Committees (SAACs) provide representation to athlete constituents. In accordance with the multi-leveled democratic system, SAACs are organized at institutional, conference, and national levels (NCAA, n.d.). Their primary objective is to enhance the student-athlete experience through notions of inclusion and self-governance. Within the reorganized governance structure and corresponding shift to emphasize self-governance, SAAC missions at all levels were revised to include increased focus and scrutiny on democratic representation practices including legislative proposals, student-athlete issues, and other governance roles and responsibilities (Broome, 2018).

Relative to our study, the roles and responsibilities of college athlete representatives at conference and national levels require more stringent selection criteria (Kihl & Schull, 2020). Appointment criteria is based on the NCAA's notion of "quality representation" (e.g., good management and organization skills, leadership, verbal and written communication skills, interpersonal relationships, commitment to community support, and understanding the legislation process; NCAA, 2021); however, these skills do not necessarily reflect good democratic representative qualities articulated in the literature (e.g., Dovi, 2007). Therefore, our focus is to examine what

good CARep entails within this multi-layered, semi-democratic intercollegiate sport governance model redesigned to give voice to athletes. Additionally, the democratic nature of NCAA's governance system is suitable for examining how specific system features may enhance or detract from CARep within intercollegiate sport governance systems.

Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework focuses on individual attributes and skills of good representatives, the process of representation, and relevant features within multi-level, democratic governance systems. Our review primarily draws on the wider body of political representation and democratic governance systems literature, which we position in relation to student representation in higher education and athlete representation.

Representation and Standards of Evaluation

Representation is widely conceptualized using a formalistic approach which results in electoral accounts of representation and a subsequently narrow focus on elected representatives including mechanisms of authorization and accountability (Pitkin, 1967). However, representation also occurs in nonelectoral contexts (Saward, 2008), and a variety of representatives—including nonelectoral, appointed or self-appointed representatives—may act and speak for (i.e., represent) constituents whom they are not formally authorized or accountable to. Thus Kuyper (2016) argues it is "theoretically necessary to decouple representation from electoral democracy to understand how nonelectoral representation should be understood and evaluated" (p. 310). Kuyper's point is particularly relevant in democratic governance systems that do not model formalistic views (e.g., intercollegiate sport governance).

Evaluating representatives in democratic systems is pluralistic due to various groups, interests, and subjectivity among constituents. That is, "criteria for identifying good representatives are contingent, varying with the particular opinions, interests, and perspectives of different democratic citizens" (Dovi, 2007, p. 2). In advocating for broader understandings of representation, Dovi defines a political representative as any actor who advances policies and acts on behalf of another person or group of people. In this view, representatives also include nonelectoral, appointed, and self-appointed representatives (Kuyper 2016). A broader understanding of representation importantly shifts the focus from mechanisms of authorization and accountability to relevant activity of representatives and can provide more insight into the work of good representatives.

Scholars studying representation have suggested a good representative is one who advances the policy preferences of their constituents. However, Dovi (2007) maintains that good representation is more than advancing policy preferences and fundamental democratic values and norms must inform the advocacy work of representatives. More specifically, good representation means "representatives excel at representing in a democratic fashion" where they work to "foster the norms and values distinctive" of institutional governance, meaning they possess the ability to

settle political conflicts fairly and justly by fulfilling three virtues: 1) fair-minded-ness; 2) trust-building; and 3) good gatekeeping (p. 2). These virtues, while inher-ently individual, contribute to the realization of democratic values including civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion, which collectively further advance dem-ocratic advocacy and provide substance for what is considered good representation (Dovi, 2007). Kuyper's (2016) framework of systemic representation also provides normative standards for evaluating nonelectoral representatives and can be applied to a broad range of actors including individuals appointed to representational roles in membership-based organizations such as the NCAA and other higher education settings. Kuyper (2016) contends nonelectoral representatives should be assessed by their position in a wider democratic system made up of empowered space, public space, and the transmission space between the two. Empowered space refers to legis-lative work where collective decision-making takes place. The public space has little restrictions on who can participate, and thus a variety of contributions, discourses, and viewpoints emerge and interact. The space between the empowered and public spaces is referred to as bidirectional-transmission belts. Here, deliberations in pub-lic spaces have the potential to impact decision making in empowered spaces, and likewise, deliberations in empowered space may influence and inform constituents' interests (Kuyper, 2016).

Kuyper (2016) further contends the application of deliberative democracy is best suited to evaluate nonelectoral representatives. More specifically, a representa-tive's deliberative capacity, characterized by inclusive, authentic, and consequential deliberations across comprehensive governance systems and/or interconnected spac-es, should serve as the standard of evaluation (Dryzek, 2009). Democratic analysis within a systemic framework is relevant in evaluating nonelectoral representatives because representatives are nonetheless "implicated in shaping, defining, organizing, and mobilizing [constituents] interests" (Kuyper, 2016, p. 314), and evaluations are not limited to representative-constituent relationships.

Representation: Process and System Approaches

Processes and features of governance systems where representation takes place should also be considered when examining representation (Dovi, 2007). Childs and Celis (2018) outline a three criteria framework to evaluate representation processes including: responsiveness, inclusion, and egalitarianism. Responsiveness refers to the extent to which representatives make claims that are congruent with their con-stituents (Severs, 2010) and is indicative of relationships between representatives and the represented (Childs & Celis, 2018). Inclusion evaluates the representational process from a holistic perspective to evaluate the extent to which all relevant voices are represented. The egalitarian criterion evaluates the extent to which all voices are considered equally to create action driven by their respective interests (Childs & Celis, 2018).

Rey's (2020) system of representation approach provides an analytical frame-work to examine dynamics of representation and "help reveal crucial attributes of representation that are not visible just by looking at individual representatives" (p.

2). Four general functions of governance systems can be helpful in diagnoses or evaluations including the extent to which systems are democratic, inclusive, deliberative, and educative (Rey, 2020). Importantly, these functions are regulative (i.e., provide prescriptive norms to strive for) and systemic (i.e., performed collectively) (Rey, 2020). For example, the democratic function regulates that governance systems should enable holistic self-governance where each person can influence the direction of the system through their representatives. Key to the democratic function is the system's responsiveness (Severs, 2010).

The inclusive function ensures systems are representative and reflective of its citizens' characteristics and interests, which points to descriptive representation (Dovi, 2007; Parkinson, 2006). In other words, representatives should look like and/ or at the very least, share similar experiences and interests with those they represent. The extent representatives achieve descriptive representation can also serve as a means for evaluation (Dovi, 2007). The deliberative function ensures citizens' interests are constructed through deliberative processes that includes a variety of actors, wherein each actors' arguments are discussed, scrutinized, and evaluated (Rey, 2020). If descriptive representation is met, many perspectives will be deliberated. Finally, the educative function is somewhat self-explanatory—for systems to work well, all participants involved should understand them.

It is also important to note that multi-level democratic governance systems face more challenges associated with the added complexity of multiple layers, the variety of constituents, and interdependent decisions and interests crossing levels of governance (Daubler et al, 2018; Vukasovic, 2018). U.S. higher education systems are multi-leveled, beginning with the base academic department, to the unit it is housed in, the institutional level, and finally within a larger university system of affiliated institutions (e.g., state systems). The NCAA is a separate governance system operating within the higher education context, which is also multilevel, consisting of institutional, conference, and national levels.

Student Representation and Shared Governance Systems

In higher education, student representation is part of the broader student engagement literature typically associated with governance. Higher education also experienced shifts away from formalistic representation accounts towards recognizing representation as a participatory process to enact student voice and advance democratic practices in educational settings (Matthews & Dollinger, 2022). The benefits of student representation are well documented including developing student citizenship (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009), developing student representatives' capabilities and skills (Flint et al., 2017), and enhancing student voice in university governance (Douglas et al., 2008).

Context, culture, and meanings underpin the role of student representation, engagement, and student voice, and thus it is important to examine a variety of settings where good student representation occurs. Much can be gleaned from the representational work of athletes in a multi-level and complex intercollegiate sport governance system including broader understandings of student civic participation in similar higher education governance systems. Thus, investigating intercollegiate sport gov-

ernance systems will contribute to the student representation literature in higher education. Furthermore, a theoretical gap exists demarcating democratic standards and system features for successfully infusing the intercollegiate athlete voice into higher education governance systems to ensure representatives can effectively impact legislation and decision-making related to their sport experiences.

Institutional athletic committees are part of shared governance systems (Boland, 2005; Heaney, 2010). While there are various manifestations of shared governance unique to each institution, a common definition is governance models that engage all interested parties (e.g., faculty, staff, alumni, students) in decision-making processes (Heaney, 2010). Intercollegiate athletic departments are part of the broader institution, and while they have autonomy in day-to-day athletic operations and decision-making, many institutions have athletic committees where policies and other major decisions related to athletic departments are deliberated. Thus, NCAA athlete representatives operate in a unique space of intersecting governance systems that requires representatives to not only navigate, but also be knowledgeable and effective in separate systems. Furthermore, Boland (2005) contends students should be positioned as partners (rather than clients) within shared governance systems and calls for the infusion of democratic practices at all levels of decision-making, "from the boardroom to the classroom" (p. 201). Participation in decision-making requires informed representation at the planning table, and to that end, higher education shares a responsibility in the democratic socialization process of students in preparation for democratic citizenship (Boland, 2005), including intercollegiate athletes.

Sport governance systems—including intercollegiate governance systems—are becoming increasing more democratic with the inclusion of a broader base of participants, specifically athletes (Kihl, Kikulis, & Thibault, 2007; Kihl & Schull, 2020). Thus, the conceptual framework outlined provides a means to analyze and understand what good CARep entails across a multi-level intercollegiate sport governance system as well as how the democratic system, features, and processes may facilitate or impede good CARep. "The effectiveness of widespread participation in decision-making … demands ongoing and timely strategies for adults to reflect on and learn from their experiences and the experiences of others" (Heaney, 2010, p. 70). Our understanding of good CARep in the context of intercollegiate sport governance is an understudied phenomenon and is therefore important to enhance our conceptual knowledge of good CARep as well as how governance systems shape it.

Methods

Sampling and Gaining Access

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to identify individuals with first-hand experience with SAAC, either as athlete representatives or in administrative advisory roles. SAAC advisors were included in the sampling criteria because they held positions offering insights and perceptions about the attributes related to performing athlete representative roles and system supports facilitating or impeding good CARep. Sampling was based on a blend of meeting sampling criteria, will-

ingness to participate, and reaching redundancy of information (Lincoln, 1985). Individuals were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study via an interview conducted at a date and time convenient to them.

Twenty individuals agreed to participate in the study including ten athletes (n=10), five institutional personnel (e.g., administrators/faculty) (n=5), and five national and/or conference administrators (n=5). Participants were engaged with institutional, conference, and/or national level athlete representatives and/or committees. In accordance with institutional ethical approval granted for this study, limited participant details are disclosed to protect participants' identities and their respective organizations.

Data Collection

During an 18-month period (October 2016–March 2018), multiple data sources were collected. The primary data source was in-depth phone interviews which assisted in focusing on "captur[ing] deep meaning of experiences in the participants' own words" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 93). Interview guides facilitated a systematic inquiry about topics addressing the research questions while permitting flexibility for interviewers to build conversations around topics and to word questions spontaneously (Patton, 2002). Each interview began with general demographic questions (i.e., role/responsibilities and how/why they got involved with SAAC). Then we asked questions about good CARep, individual attributes, and system features that were instrumental or detrimental to good CARep. Interviews were digitally recorded and ranged in length from 30–60 minutes. Interview data were first transcribed verbatim, and participants were given the opportunity to verify transcripts for accuracy. Secondary data were collected in the form of relevant documents from institutional, conference, and national SAAC bylaws meeting minutes, reports (i.e., strategic plans), and social media (e.g., Twitter) that offered information about what it means to be a good representative.

Data Analysis

Analysis involved a systematic process of data management, category and thematic development via open, axial, and thematic coding and representing data for discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Maxwell, 2012 Merriam, 2009). All data were prepared and downloaded into the qualitative software ATLAS ti. (Scientific Software Development, 2016). Data were reviewed repeatedly providing familiarity with the material. Next, data were open coded (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to assist with categorization addressing the two research questions. Code creation was conducted both inductively (i.e., in-vivo codes) and deductively (i.e., representation literature). Axial coding helped identify relationships between concepts/categories and to further develop categories and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Thematic analysis served to identify common patterns (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam, 2009) associated with good CARep. Data were constantly compared during analysis procedures to demarcate differences between system features that facilitate or impede good CARep. Reflective memos were used to document how data were categorized and patterns

identified (Patton, 2002). Memos also documented pattern and category connections to the literature, our notes of what it meant to be a good representative, and explanations of patterns and categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Standards of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability were followed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Credibility was established by conducting member checks and peer debriefing techniques (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Lincoln, 1985). During data collection, member checking techniques included probing and follow-up questions to ensure participants' perceptions were well represented and paraphrasing participants' responses to ensure accuracy of their statements (Lincoln, 1985). Participants were also given the opportunity to member check their transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the interview. We held bi-monthly peer debriefing meetings to discuss various methodological issues, emerging themes, and categories related to the representation literature. Meetings were also held to discuss access strategies and potential biases we may have while completing data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Results are presented and organized around the research questions. First, we discuss what comprises good CARep within this multi-level intercollegiate sport governance system focusing on individual attributes (Dovi, 2007) and deliberative capacity (Kuyper, 2016) of good representatives. Next, we shift to procedural (Childs & Celis, 2008) and system features (Daubler et al., 2018; Rey, 2020) within intercollegiate governance systems that facilitate and/or obstruct good CARep.

Individual Attributes/Qualities

Regarding our first research question, two broad categories emerged: a) interpersonal skills and b) leadership and service. In the following section, we contextualize attributes of good athlete representatives within a democratic intercollegiate sport governance system highlighting relevant category dimensions to understand how and why such skills and attributes contribute to good CARep.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills fostered good CARep and were further characterized by four emerging dimensions: relationship building, communication, the ability to facilitate constructive conversations, and the capacity to understand and represent a wide range of perspectives. Dimensions also help contextualize the relevance at different governance system levels and thus are presented to reflect the subtlety among levels.

Institutional Level. Good representatives communicated constructively, developed relationships, and were available to all athlete constituents at the institutional level. For example:

The athletes we have on leadership do a really good job of facilitating con-

> structive conversations that see all sides … we make ourselves available outside meeting and practice times … establishing that level of trust by communicating effectively (SAAC #6).

One of the functions of democratic representatives is actively soliciting input from constituents and encouraging their participation in the governance processes (Dovi, 2007). Good representatives were able to challenge peers to critically think about issues, build engagement, and essentially lobby for constituent support at their institutions:

> Be more willing to ask harder questions, ask how they're really feeling, dig deeper than surface level … ask people to get involved … persuade to gain support … [my] communication has had to improve in more ways than I knew would. (SAAC #8)

Encouraging athlete constituents to engage in governance generated trust because they felt confident in and valued constituent participation. Athlete representatives recognized the importance of constituent participation in terms of realizing self-governance which a value of good representatives (Dovi, 2007).

Finally, good CARep included the ability and confidence to articulate interests of constituents within policy deliberations. Administrator #7 stated good representatives "weren't afraid of sharing their opinions or opinions of fellow athletes regarding any issue" and served as "[administrators] eyes and ears for their teammates."

Athlete representatives are introduced to democratic governance systems at institutional levels. It is also noteworthy that athlete representatives typically do not have voting rights at this base level of governance, and democratic participation of athletes therefore relies on deliberations and mobilization between representatives and constituents. In this context, good CARep pertains to interpersonal skills and communication as expressions of Dovi's (2007) three virtues of good representatives (i.e., critical trust-building, fairmindedness, and good gatekeeping). Democratic representatives exhibited critical trust-building and advocacy methods to improve constituents' abilities to deliberate with their representatives (i.e., self-governance). Good CARep is not simply increasing civic participation of constituents, but "rather, whether they increased the critical trust of democratic citizens" (Dovi, 2007 p. 126). Traditionally, college athletes were not involved in governance conversations to voice concerns to administration; however, recent shifts signal greater athlete participation (Hoffman et al., 2015). In this research, college athlete engagement begins at institutional levels and is facilitated through the work and interpersonal skills of CAReps extending Dovi's argument that good representatives are key prerequisites for well-functioning democratic systems to the context of intercollegiate sport governance.

Fair-mindedness wherein ideal representatives afford equal consideration to divergent interests (Dovi, 2007; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004) and deliberative capacities (Kuyper, 2016) was implicated in the ability to "facilitate constructive conversations seeing all sides" (SAAC #6). Representatives also provided good gatekeeping by cultivating constituent relationships, further enhancing constituents' understandings of their own civic participation in institutional governance. Through

these interactions, representatives learned appropriate levels of responsiveness (Severs, 2010) depending on the interests at stake (e.g., non-scholarship/scholarship athlete, Olympic sport/revenue sport) and the political nature of perspectives (e.g., gender equity, social justice). Developing college athlete civic capabilities through all three of Dovi's virtues—critical trust-building, fairmindedness, and good gatekeeping—fosters the quality of representation at institutional governance levels, and once established, representatives become further embedded in processes (Childs & Celis, 2018) of democratic representation at conference and national levels (i.e., across the system; Kuyper, 2016). The application of Dovi's three-part framework contributes to our understandings of not only the attributes of good CARep in an intercollegiate sport governance system, but also, the ways in which democratic virtues serve in the development of athlete.

Conference and National Levels. Good CARep entailed relationship building with an expanded variety of system actors at conference and national levels. For example:

> Understand[ing] more than their sport and more than athletes … it's athletic directors, commissioners, university presidents, [faculty athletic representatives] … a good SAAC rep knows those people on their campus, communicates with them regularly, and understands the lens they may be looking through. That's usually someone who can communicate well and think about other perspectives. (Administrator #2)

Understanding the myriad of intercollegiate athlete perspectives (e.g., team/individual sport, high profile/low profile sports, gender, scholarship/non-scholarship) required open-mindedness to listen and understand various viewpoints. Representatives also engaged in meeting preparation, critical analysis, and foreseeing policy responses and consequences of legislation by "play[ing] devil's advocate for both sides so we could see where all athletes were coming from on main issues ... preparing for that thought process" (SAAC #7).

Understanding and appreciating various perspectives points to Dovi's (2007) fairmindedness, good gatekeeping, and the realization of the democratic value of inclusion. The representational process also becomes clearer in establishing inclusiveness (i.e., ensuring all relevant voices contribute to representational claims) and responsiveness (i.e., having one's interests represented in a focused manner; Childs & Celis, 2018). SAAC #7's insightful perspective highlights how athlete representatives infuse inclusiveness and responsiveness into the multi-level intercollegiate sport governance system.

Persuasion was another dimension of the communication skill set facilitating good CARep at conference and national levels and was meaningful to impact legislative issues. Administrator #4 stated:

> Student-athletes get a chance to stand up and voice why they feel a certain way about issues. I've seen administrators' votes change because of how [athletes] present [issues/perspectives].

Finally, communication was instrumental in coordinating the entire intercollegiate sport governance system, serving as a conduit to "be able to manage … information

we're working on from a conference level, what they're working on at institutional levels and vice versa" (Administrator #3). The communicative space between governance levels—particularly between conference and institutional levels—demonstrate the power of the athlete voice to athletes at institutional levels who are perhaps most distant and/or unfamiliar with the process: "They've heard stories about how athletes at conference levels have changed or swayed votes … or have voted contrary to their campuses" (Administrator #6).

While interpersonal skills at conference and national levels originate from individual traits, processual aspects of good CARep continue to emerge within multi-level systems. Administrator #6 referenced back-and-forth deliberations at conference levels between formal legislative groups and a variety of interest groups which implicates democratic participation through system processes (Kihl & Schull, 2020). Furthermore, attention to deliberations between governance levels established egalitarianism within the representation process—in other words, all athletes' voices and interests are considered equally. Egalitarianism is vital within the representation process in amplifying the virtue of critical trust-building (Childs & Celis, 2018).

Rey's (2020) system representation approach embodies communication among pluralistic representatives across multi-level systems. While representation traditionally signifies bottom-up channels of communication giving voice to constituents by making their interests present in the public policy debate (Pitkin, 1967), participant excerpts above demonstrate two-way deliberative channels highlighting both the interaction of plural forms of representation and dynamics of policy-making which helps describe how "representative and non-representative actors share their individual work to build a new representation at the level of the system" (Rey, 2020, p. 2). In the context of NCAA's Division I governance system, this is important because prior to restructuring, the system did not engage or empower the college athlete voice within various levels to the extent it does in the redesigned structure. Communicative power (Kuyper, 2016) is also highlighted by establishing links between forms of representation—in this case, the deliberations between athlete constituents at institutional levels, and elected/appointed representatives at conference and national levels, as well as how institutionalized deliberations influenced legislation (Kihl et al., 2007). Communicative power also serves to judge the quality of representatives within the wider governance system including the empowered space (i.e., legislative), the public space (i.e., constituent deliberations), and the interpretive bidirectional spaces in between (Kuyper, 2016).

Leadership and Service

Factors related to leadership experience and service were also characteristics of good CARep in this intercollegiate sport governance system. The institutional level again serves as an entry point and provides initial conception of the category, while results and analysis at conference and national levels provide more nuance through the development of dimensions.

Institutional Level. Athletic leadership was a bonus for representatives, yet not a requirement at institutional levels. Rather, it was more relevant for representatives

to demonstrate leadership potential. That is, "those who don't necessarily have to be captains on their teams, but just people who are involved" (Administrator #7) were recruited for service on institutional SAACs. Here, good CARep was more malleable compared to upper levels and importantly, could vary from one institution to another. However, relevant characteristics cited were more reflective of emergent leadership teamed with the desire to serve one's peers, and we see both as antecedents to good CARep in conference and national levels of the governance system. Put another way, while emergent leadership and service do not truly define good CARep at institutional levels, they implicate developmental stages for good representatives, and support arguments that good representatives are prerequisites to both well-functioning democratic systems (Dovi, 2007) and representation processes (Childs & Celis, 2018).

Conference and National Levels. Leadership emerged as proven sport leadership experience at institutional levels and served as both a qualification for and a pipeline to representation work at conference and national levels. Conference administrator #3 stated:

> It's important for our conference members to be in leadership roles on their campus, generally, that's kind of the rule … at least one [conference] representative is going to be Chair or Vice Chair [of SAAC] on their campus. We want them to have leadership qualities and be in leadership roles on their team.

The clear delineation in governance system levels—that is, leadership associated with good CARep at institutional levels was more flexible and developmental, while at conference levels, leadership was demonstrative of sport experiences—played out as "general rules" or qualifications for good representational work.

When athletes fulfilled leadership roles on their team, institutional level leadership experience provided credibility with peer constituents at conference and national levels, which in turn facilitated good communication as their peers were more likely to both listen and speak to athletes already in leadership roles:

> They're leaders on the field and court … their teammates will listen to them when it comes to legislation … if you see your big-time player on your team involved, it can be contagious and [they] listen, care, and are more attentive … and realize they have a voice in this process. (Administrator #4)

"Big-time players" were perhaps more influential in empowering fellow athletes to be more involved, or at least increased awareness of legislative processes and the power of athletes' voices within it demonstrating the effectiveness of so called "big-time players" to mobilize constituent support in a collaborative egalitarian manner. It also underscores the view that while individual representatives should embody characteristics such as fair-mindedness, critical trust-building, and good gatekeeping (Dovi, 2007), the resulting civic equality and similar democratic values "may be more realizable collectively than individually" (Childs & Celis, 2018, p. 4), which points to broader representational processes in intercollegiate sport governance.

Furthermore, "big-time players" are more visible within conference and national levels and their leadership and messages perhaps resonate more with the broad athlete constituency across all levels of the democratic intercollegiate sport gov-

ernance system. Here again we see how an individual qualification (i.e., "big-time player") enables collective action and engagement in democratic governance. The idea that "big-time players" were sought out for representational roles at conference and national levels also exemplifies symbolic representation (Parkinson, 2006; Pitkin, 1967). More specifically, athlete representatives are assessed by the extent to which they invoke positive responses and garner acceptance among constituents, and athletes who are perceivably more likely to fulfill symbolic representational roles are high-profile athletes on both conference and national stages.

College athlete leaders on the court/field were also ideally suited for representational roles within the governance system based on their first-hand athlete experiences and important perspectives gleaned from those experiences. Conference Administrator #4 stated:

> We wanted leading scorers …athletes who are part of their own leadership councils within their team … the ones who are playing every game … who are highly recruited and can give feedback on the recruiting process or various issues that directly affect them.

Descriptive representation is the extent to which a representative resembles, or at the very least, shares similar interests and experiences with constituents (Parkinson, 2006). In this research, high-profile athletes (i.e., "leading scorers") were sought to fulfill descriptive representational roles based in part on the assumption that their own lived experiences (e.g., recruiting process) inform their ability to represent interests of other athletes and contribute important dialogue with other political actors (i.e., coaches/administrators).

At conference and national levels, descriptive representation (Parkinson, 2006;) was substantive as it relates to both inclusive and deliberative functions of democratic systems (Rey, 2020). First, democratic systems are inclusive based on the extent to which salient features and experiences of the represented are reflected within and across the system (Rey, 2020). Second, achieving descriptive representation contributes to deliberative functioning of governance systems by ensuring all interests, perspectives, and opinions of citizens are created, debated, and justified in deliberative processes (Rey, 2020). However, it is important to caution against a singular focus in descriptive representation related to intercollegiate sport governance systems. While conference and national levels are keenly focused on achieving descriptive representation by including "big-time" athletes in representational roles, there is vast diversity among college athletes within the system. For example, not all Division I athletes are recruited, and including the myriad of college athlete experiences and interests will not only further improve inclusiveness and legitimacy, but also add broader perspectives to the deliberative process ensuring all interests are considered.

Good Representation and System Features: Supports and Constraints

Contextual features of governance systems also play a role in enhancing or inhibiting good CARep. Administrative support was the primary category related to promoting good CARep while governance system inconsistencies emerged to characterize challenges to achieving good CARep. Results are discussed in relation to

good representation (Dovi, 2007; Kuyper, 2016) and representational processes and systems (Childs & Celis, 2018; Rey, 2020).

Institutional Level

Administrative Support. Administrators played an essential role in teaching athlete representatives fair-mindedness and critical trust-building which were critical to engage in democratic advocacy for their constituents. Developing fair-mindedness and ultimately fostering civic equality (Dovi, 2007) included sensitivity to understand and determine which legislation to support and which to oppose. Athlete representatives were able to develop these skills at institutional levels when administrators included them in department meetings**:** "My athletic director allowed me to be involved in [coaches] meetings and asked for opinions of student-athletes on various occasions" (SAAC #1). Administrators also facilitated critical trust by translating and interpreting complex NCAA legislation to athlete representatives:

> Athletes at many institutions are not involved in the minutiae of what happens at their institutional athletic departments. The role administrators often play is one of translation … when we have legislation that quite frankly can be hard to understand, administrators often translate that into a language [athletes] can understand (Administrator #2).

Inconsistencies. Lack of administrative support at institutional levels also surfaced as a detriment to good CARep and clearly highlighted inconsistencies across the governance system. One dimension of the support deficit stemmed from institutional administrators antiquated approach:

> We have a quote-unquote "old-school" advisor who isn't as involved with conversations on national issues … which makes it difficult … I've sat down with our compliance person to go through the language. That was on me, not our advisor (SAAC #5).

Outdated administrative approaches also impeded SAAC evolution:

> You have institutions whose SAAC are still growing … a lot of institutions aren't looking at legislation … we recognized in order to use this voting privilege to its potential, we had to have all hands on deck (Administrator #2).

CARep is also constrained when institutional administrators lack full understanding of the SAAC purpose and the important role athlete representatives play: "Your average Joe athlete … maybe is involved with SAAC, [but] doesn't understand what SAAC even is. He's put there because he's seen as a leader and [the] SAAC advisor has gone to each coach for some good kids to be on SAAC" (SAAC #11). CARep is inhibited when selection criteria do not match the committee's purpose, which subsequently results in failure to engage in governance and representation work. Finally, CARep suffered when institutional administrators did not value representatives' roles in amplifying the broader athlete voice:

> If administration doesn't tell us our voices are relevant, then me telling my fellow athletes their voices are important isn't going to mean anything if I don't have [administration] backing me up. It comes from all levels, and

when there's a lack of connection or communication, that's detrimental … there must be support from administration for it to work (SAAC #6).

Administrators play a role in supporting or impeding good CARep at the institutional level. More specifically, administrators must understand the governance system to identify meaningful learning opportunities, which fosters athlete representatives' abilities to build deliberative capacities (Kuyper, 2016) and work toward self-governance through critical trust (Dovi, 2007). CARep is impeded when institutional administrators do not understand the system, the purpose of SAAC, and/ or athlete representatives' roles within the system. Furthermore, SAAC #6's quote importantly demonstrates how lack of support impedes athlete representatives work towards self-governance (Dovi, 2007), their ability to demonstrate responsiveness (Childs & Celis, 2018), and the trickle-down effect it has on their constituents. When administrators do not value the athlete voice, there is potential for the athlete voice to remain 'actively passive' (Austen, 2020) within the system, which impedes good CARep. Klemenčič (2014) argued that to infuse student voice into a governance system, it first must be valued by administrators as the relational structures impact internal legitimacy. Our findings related to the importance of administrative support in legitimizing representational roles of athletes extend Klemenčič's work to the context of intercollegiate sport governance. Furthermore, in drawing on student voice work in higher education (e.g., Austen, 2020; Klemenčič, 2014) our findings around the relevance of administrative support as both a support and in some cases, a detriment, contributes to our understandings of good CARep in the context of intercollegiate sport governance.

Conference and National Level

Administrative Support. While administrators continue to provide experiential opportunities at conference and national levels, notable differences from institutional levels included the scope of meetings athlete representatives were exposed to, and in many cases, participated in, which provided insights on legislative topics and policy options, and experience articulating constituent preferences**:**

> I've been able to sit on Board, Athletic Director's, and FAR [faculty athletic representatives] meetings … we get time to speak and then hear what different administrators have to say. We're not only gathering feedback from athletes, but I get to hear from such a wide range of people (SAAC #11).

Administrators' roles at conference and national levels also shifted subtly from education to information dissemination:

> Our [conference administrator] is in contact with us at least once a week sending updates on policy, voting, current events and really does a great job of keeping us informed (SAAC #6).

National SAAC liaisons [(i.e., administrators)] make sure all members of the committee are educated to the best of their ability on 'hot topics' relating to the NCAA (SAAC #1).

Once informed of policy updates or current issues and armed with appropriate narratives to enhance athlete understandings of complex legislative issues, represen-

tatives could effectively carry out their responsibilities: "…understanding more to bring back to athletes … we were given resources by our conference to understand what was going on" (SAAC #7).

Multi-level governance increases both the number of participation opportunities for representatives and the variety of actors involved in policy discussions (Daubler et al., 2018). NCAA's Division I Board of Directors is its highest governing body and is responsible for the overall management of the division including strategy, policy, and legislation (NCAA, n.d). SAAC #11 highlighted administrative support within meetings in the form of civic equality—that is, value placed on athletes' opinions and voices on legislative matters (Dovi, 2007). Administrators also helped athlete representatives achieve good gatekeeping (Dovi, 2007) to interpret and translate legislation to peers thereby fostering inclusion of constituents in governance.

Decision-making experiences and legislative issue deliberations within the broader multi-level system also provided important opportunities to cultivate critical trust-building (Dovi, 2007). Meeting participation provided experiential learning (i.e., how to effectively listen and understand different constituent viewpoints, share feedback, and take policy stances) to cultivate deliberative competencies and improved representatives' understandings of constituents' interests, which is important garner widespread participation and expression of interests. Athlete representatives' roles were further legitimized when administrators asked their opinions on legislation and armed them with relevant information, giving representatives more confidence in decision-making.

Good representation entails effective deliberation to build support, justify perspectives, respect opposing perspectives, and reach mutual decisions with board members (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Administrators fill vital roles arming athlete representatives with exposure and experience in decision-making and governance processes beginning at institutional levels to provide representatives an entry point to governance processes. Once introduced to governance processes, conference and national administrators provided progressively enriching experience to athlete representatives. Good CARep in this democratic intercollegiate sport governance context thus denoted the importance of administrative guidance and mentoring across levels of governance to advanced Dovi's (2007) virtues of democratic representation.

Defining functions within a governance system can provide normative criteria and diagnostics to determine what it does well and where improvements are needed. One of the functions of a system of representation is education, and Rey (2020) suggests the nature of the governance system should dictate how the educative function is fulfilled through what it promotes, cultivates, or how it inculcates participants. In this case, the system begins its educative function by exposing participants to the legislative processes and provides them with experience to develop relevant individual skills they can build upon as they move from institutional levels to conference and national levels. The progression of the educative function here is important because in the context of NCAA's governance system, CARep are young adults (i.e., 18-23 years old), likely with little experience in any governance system and rep-

resentation. Individual skills gained through educative functioning at institutional levels then transfer to conference and national levels and connect to process-based criteria (Childs & Celis, 2018). For example, athlete representatives learn how to make representational claims reflecting their constituents (i.e., responsiveness), seek to understand the myriad of athletes' interests including those who may be excluded (i.e., inclusiveness), and consider the differing interests equally (i.e., egalitarianism; Childs & Celis, 2018).

Inconsistencies. Some interest groups (e.g., athletes, administrators, and university presidents) at conference and national levels also lacked education and understanding of SAACs purpose within the system, which impeded good CARep. Athlete (#11) shared a perspective worth highlighting in its entirety:

> There hasn't been a great job of educating people how everything works. How SAAC works. Not just [institutional] level, but from the top down—from the NCAA all the way down. And it's not just athletes, it's administrators, athletic directors, presidents … [For example] at our Board of Directors meeting, [university] President on my left barely knew what SAAC stood for. And it wasn't that he didn't care, he was unbelievably interested in everything I had to say, but … he couldn't tell me who their conference representative was. He didn't even know what I did, what my job was. He barely knew why I was there … lack of education for everybody in terms of what SAAC is, how it works, what they can do, what they can't do, and the level of voice that athletes actually have (SAAC #11).

One of the goals of the 2014-15 restructuring was to ensure all athletes were represented and sanctioned to influence policy decisions (Shannon, 2017), and deficient education of a variety of interest groups teamed with lack of administrative support clearly impedes the work of athletes charged in representing the athlete voice. The lack of education and administrative support both effectively serve to strip CAReps of their legitimacy, at least in a symbolic sense. Put another way, while the governance structure affords athlete representatives voting rights (i.e., legitimacy), when administrators or university presidents do not know or do not recognize the legitimacy of athlete voices, athlete constituents may perceive that SAAC does not matter. Much like a democratic political system, if one does not feel their voice matters in the system, they can become disengaged or disenfranchised, which goes against the basic function of political representation—that is, to provide substantive representation for the whole citizenry (Rey, 2020). Furthermore, highlighting the relevance of individual virtues of a good representative—more specifically "a fair-minded representative reaches out to those who hitherto have been marginalized by political processes" (Childs & Celis, 2018, para. 7).

Education of all relevant actors is vital in the realization of the NCAA's restructuring goal. Dovi (2007) contends "when citizens lack proper capacities, democratic institutions cannot always function properly" (p. 5). While athlete representatives are charged with giving voice to their athlete peers, system breakdowns—in this case, lack of comprehensive education of all actors—draws attention to how even well-functioning democratic governance systems can have point(s) of failure (Rey, 2020). Good democratic representation is a process of advocacy and deliberations

occurring within democratic systems of governance (Childs & Celis, 2018), and strengthening the educative function has important implications for remaining systems functions (i.e., democratic, inclusion, and deliberative; Rey, 2020). In higher education settings, Bols (2017) argues that efforts to enhance student engagement often focus heavily on training and effectiveness of student representatives; however, equal weight should also be placed on staff training, engagement, and effective committee structures. Our findings confirm the need for more staff and administrative training to improves CARep within the college sport context.

In pursuing the study's purpose, we sought out to understand what good CARep entails within a college sport governance system and what factors within the governance system support or hinder representation. Related to our first research question, we found that good CARep consisted of individual attributes and qualities of college athlete representatives. More specifically, college athlete representatives demonstrated a range of interpersonal skills (e.g., relationship building, communication, and understanding the myriad of athlete perspectives) and leadership experience and service. In answering our second research question, we found that administrative support was the primary factor within the governance system that could either lend support to or impede good CARep. Importantly, the level of governance (i.e., institutional, conference, and national) provided further refinement and nuance within our findings for both research questions. In the concluding section, we further summarize, explain, and connect these finding to theoretical and practical implications and provide recommendations.

Implications and Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to examine good CARep in a democratic multi-level intercollegiate sport governance system and to understand how contextual governance features support or impede the quality of representation. In terms of the study's theoretical contributions, we applied existing theoretical frameworks (i.e, Childs & Celis, 2018; Dovi, 2007; Kuyper, 2016; Rey 2020) to the novel context of NCAA sport governance, and in so doing extended the sport management literature (Doherty, 2013) as well as the broader student representation in higher education literature. More specifically, our study makes a theoretical contribution by applying representation and democratic theory to the intercollegiate sport context enhancing our understanding of what quality representation looks like for athletes serving in representational roles, as well as how democratic system features of intercollegiate sport governance systems facilitate or diminish good representation extending previous work in sport governance and athlete representation (Kihl & Schull, 2020; Ciomaga et al., 2017).

Athlete representatives' main roles in the NCAA governance system involved serving as democratic advocates to their constituents by pursuing fair deliberations to inform solutions to NCAA legislation. Findings showed NCAA athlete representatives excelled in vital individual skills including the ability to cultivate relationships and attend to various interest groups' perspectives, engage in constructive deliber-

ations, and comprehend the importance of civic participation within the system. At conference and national levels, athlete representatives engaged in deliberations with a variety of governance system actors which required the adoption of a broad perspective. At the institutional level, individual attributes were also important; however, CARep was very much developmental highlighting the practical implication for individual schools to consider their role in providing a learning environment that can augment the development of good civic participants within their athlete population.

There are two areas where athlete representatives could improve. First, while autonomy representatives shared and seemed to understand the need to apply broad perspectives at the national level, they nonetheless were more focused on sports and issues within autonomy (i.e., Power Five) conferences rather than on a more comprehensive views found within and across non-autonomy conferences. To enhance fairmindedness, autonomy SAAC representatives could sit on the Division I SAAC (Broome, 2018). Future research could also focus on nuanced differences of doing representation in autonomy conferences compared to non-autonomy conferences, as well as if and how power relations may be embedded within college athletes' representational roles.

Second, limiting athlete representatives voting rights to mostly the national executive council creates a challenge around how representatives can embrace the norm of civic equality without possessing voting rights throughout the system. Broome (2018) argued "it is important we ensure [athlete representatives] contributions to NCAA governance are maximized ... we should consider whether the voice and vote could be further increased" (p. 114). The lack of voting rights at two levels of governance system (i.e., institutional and conference), emphasizes the importance of individual skills—especially related to building trust and deliberative capacity of representatives. Representational theory could be further extended through future research focused on the ways in which non-voting representatives address a democratic deficit within democratic governance system and/or enact democratic virtues to enhance civic equality in a system characterized by a democratic deficit.

System features and support mechanisms are also important considering good CARep does not simply occur with good individuals serving in representational roles. NCAA Division I governance system supports the work of athlete representatives primarily through its educative function (Rey, 2020). Athletic administrators and advisors working with SAACs were key to identifying and providing experiential learning opportunities, coaching athlete representatives on the NCAA legislation and processes, and disseminating relevant information. Administrators provided rich immersive and experiential learning opportunities ensuring athlete representatives not only understood and exercised their individual representative skills, but also engaged in representational work that contributed to representation processes through responsiveness, inclusiveness, and egalitarianism (Childs & Celis, 2018). Therefore, good administrators with knowledge and experience within the system and who embrace and act on their mentorship and teaching roles with athlete representatives play a vital role in fostering good CARep as well as related practices.

We also found once athlete representatives reached conference and national

levels, support features were more consistent or institutionalized in the governance system. Put another way, inconsistencies constraining good CARep in governance system more often occurred at institutional levels. Training or educational resources for athletic administrators and advisers working directly with the institutional SAACs is recommended to address system inconsistencies. While the NCAA provide resources such as "*Best Practices"* for conference and institutional level SAACs (NCAA, 2015), it is unclear what, if any, resources are provided to administrators serving as mentors and/or advisers to athlete representatives on institutional SAACs. Rey (2020) contends the educative function ensures "a system can continue to produce the best kind of agents to fill its many representative roles" (p. 18). The NCAA and other sport governing bodies would be well-served to invest in education around athlete representation, including administrators, to ensure consistency at institutional levels and help groom athletes for meaningful representational roles.

Inconsistencies impeding good CARep also stemmed from lack of continuity of SAAC missions across governance levels. Further institutionalizing practices and training for administrators as well as establishing common values and mission statements for SAAC committees would create a more cohesive and aligned multi-level system to facilitate good CARep. Bols (2017) suggests a set of behaviors could be a useful tool to enhance the professionalization of student representation, and we further extend his argument to include a keen focus on the behaviors of staff and administrators to enhance the professionalization of CARep—particularly at instructional levels. Establishing clear guidelines and responsibilities for institutional, conference, and national administrators and liaisons charged with advisory roles with SAACs and mentorship of athlete representatives would go some way to align the multi-level governance system and ensure all athlete representatives are given the necessary supports to fulfill their representative roles.

This study may be unique to the sample of 20 participants who play a role in NCAA Division I governance through their involvement in institutional, conference, and/or national SAAC. The study is thus limited in its ability to generalize to other sport contexts as it is reflective of the perceptions and experiences of the 20 participants. Another limitation is our conceptualization of power is framed from a democratic representation perspective and does not take into consideration traditional notions of power infused in organizations including hierarchical status and positional power. Future research could therefore focus on traditional conceptualizations of organizational power, and if and how power and politics are infused into the governance systems.

A fruitful area to apply an organizational power and politics framing would be the implementation of a new NCAA constitution which was approved by members in all three divisions in 2022. While voting for the new constitution received wide support, critics believe that "too much money and power are concentrated in in the hands of Division I colleges, to the detriment of others" (Moody, 2022, p.1) including Division II and III institutions and Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Future research could also interrogate the political processes (both internal and external) that led to the new constitution, as this represents another area

of critique. The new constitution also decentralizes the governing body of college sport and provides more autonomy to each division to develop their own policies, and thus future research could examine how the reorganization impacts legislative and representational processes within each division. Finally, the new constitution includes more language and priorities centered around the student-athlete experience and well-being. Thus, future research should focus on the extent to which the student-athlete experience is (or is not) prioritized within the new constitution, as well as which athlete groups benefit more within the reorganized structure.

The findings around what it means to be a good athlete representative and the governance system supports and impediments within college sport are also timely in broader sport governance given the numerous calls to action to increase athletes' voices within decision-making and legislative processes across national and international governing bodies (e.g., Grigaliunaite & Eimontas, 2018). Athlete groups have called for structural changes to engage more athletes as voting members (e.g., globalathlete), and to give more weight to athletes' voices in the governance process given decisions are most impactful to athletes' experiences. For example, athlete commissions are often positioned as ancillary to governance structures, and as such, they become more consultative, are not fully engaged in legislative processes, and do not fulfill notions of democracy (Ciomaga et al., 2017). Chatzigianni (2018) calls for modernizing traditional sport governing bodies in a "rapidly changing multi-actor global environment" (p. 1455) which requires adaptability. Importantly, to make such changes effective, broader understandings of athlete representation within multi-level, democratic sport governance systems, such as the NCAA is needed. The individual qualities that contribute to good CARep as well as the ways in which the NCAA governance structure enables or constrains good CARep could help inform improvements and responsiveness to athlete representation within national and international sport governance systems shifting toward more democratic structures and features.

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Transformative Service Research in Collegiate Sport: Reframing the Service Environment Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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This study applies a transformative sport service research approach to examine student-athletes' wellness within a collegiate sport setting. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were completed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the stop of play in Canada (early 2021). Findings denoted wellness was influenced by this time period as well as organizational factors which are within the purview of existing management practices. The study details the service environment to understand physical and mental well-being while taking into consideration the general and organizational environments which influence the student-athletes. Findings demonstrate that eudaimonic-related experiences (e.g., learning, development, relationship) are related to student-athletes' mental well-being. This research underpins the role of education, policies, and communication, which draws several implications for the service environment in a collegiate sport setting and the key stakeholders involved in producing an environment to enhance student-athletes' experience. The paper elaborates on the importance of the service environment and provides evidence of what student-athletes suggest management can change and focus their efforts on towards creating a transformative service environment. Theoretical implications for the transformative service research are put forward, including the co-creative aspects to determine programming which could contribute towards student-athletes wellness. Broader suggestions for change within the sport system and future research are also advanced.

Key words: sport system, student-athletes, wellness, development, eudaimonism

Introduction

The sport environment and its competitive nature are laden with risks for student-athletes; requiring a balance between athletics and academics simultaneously (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013; Kim et al., 2020; Steele et al., 2020). Student-athletes are busy individuals spending many hours each day to focus on athletic demands such as time spent training, traveling to and from competition to academic

demands, which all influence their overall wellness (Breslin et al., 2017; Moleski et al., 2023). Bauman (2016) suggested that competitive sport may lead to poor mental health and that student-athletes face distinct mental health risk factors (e.g., negative emotional consequences of injuries, a higher risk of substance and alcohol misuse, and relationship problems). The combination of these pressures could be problematic for student-athletes which requires sport administrators to be aware of how the service environment can and does play a role in creating student-athletes' wellness.

Research in sport management has examined the impact of services experienced by a variety of sport stakeholders including athletes (Kim et al., 2020), high-performance sport student-athletes (e.g., Lundqvist & Raglin, 2015; MacIntosh et al., 2020), sport volunteers (e.g., Wicker & Downward, 2020), community organizations and their members (e.g., Dowling et al., 2021; Misener, 2020). Services and the intersection with users can impact well-being (Katz et al., 2020; Ostrom et al., 2015), making well-being essential for sport managers to understand (Inoue et al., 2020; Westberg & Kelly, 2019). Past studies addressed transformative service research (TSR) as important to understand the impact services have on a person's wellness (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Inoue et al., 2020). Transformative sport service research (TSSR) seeks to build a body of knowledge about the ways in which a person's wellness may be enhanced through a variety of sport-related services offered to the stakeholder (Inoue et al., 2020). Of consequence in this research, is the provision of services and how the student-athletes experiences those services which will purportedly influence wellness (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000). Scholars have denoted the perspective that to understand mental health, one needs to consider the perspectives of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta & Waterman, 2014). Eudaimonia is characterized by the pursuit of meaning in life and nurturing one's highest potential in a manner aligned with one's core values and genuine self (Huta & Ryan, 2010). On the other hand, Hedonia is the pursuit of pleasure, delight, and ease (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Combined with a traditional focus of physical development and health of the student-student-athletes, a person's mental health is a critical consideration within the collegiate setting.

The purpose of this study is to determine the environmental factors within the collegiate sport environment which contribute to student-athletes's wellness. The study describes what student-athletes' believe influence their wellness (defined here as physical well-being and mental well-being, including hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives). The paper further explains how management can create transformative sport service environments for the student-athletes to help promote wellness. Notably, this study offers insights specifically contextualized within the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the "stop to play" within university sport in Canada. Employing qualitative research methods, this study underscores various environmental factors crucial to student-athletes' well-being. Emphasized is the importance of fostering a more secure environment for student-athletes. Additionally, this research contributes to enriching sport management theories by underscoring the significance of the service environment to its primary beneficiary.

Literature Review

Chelladurai (2014) identified different types of sports services, including participant services (e.g., community sport programs) that prioritize the end-user. This study considers participant services within the service environment to better understand student-athletes' experiences. Transformative service research (TSR) aims to create positive changes that improve individuals' lives within the ecosystem (Anderson et al., 2013; Anderson & Ostrom, 2015), with a focus on well-being outcomes. TSR is especially relevant in sport, where services can enhance the well-being of spectators and participants (Friman et al., 2018). The present study investigated how sport environments impact the wellness of student-athletes from the aspects of the physical and mental health.

Transformative Sports Service Research

The approach of using a TSR lens in sport management is known as transformative sport service research (TSSR; Friman et al., 2018). According to Inoue et al. (2020), TSSR can be defined as: "an area of research aiming to enhance or improve the well-being of sport consumers and employees (both paid staff and volunteers) by generating knowledge that has implications for the optimal production and delivery of sport services'' (p. 286). TSSR postulates that the services rendered and how they are experienced by the consumer (in our study, the student-athletes), will produce overall feelings of wellness (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). TSSR encourages researchers, practitioners, and organizations to look beyond the traditional firm-oriented outcomes of increasing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and service quality for financial gain. Through the TSSR lens, management can look to make improvements on the provision and delivery of their services for short- and longer-term implications on student-athletes' quality of life (Baron et al., 2014; Kean et al., 2019; Ostrom et al., 2015; Rosenbaum, 2015;). Researchers highlight key mental, physical, and social facets of the service environment crucial for management to consider and, perhaps especially important during the pandemic (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2012). While TSSR stems from the consumer services marketing domain (the origins stemming from service dominant logic), management scholars have realized these same principles have consequences on a variety of sport stakeholders, including the student-athletes who has been positioned in the literature as both a prime producer and benefactor of the organized activities (c.f., Chelladurai & Reimer, 1997). Ultimately, TSSR attempts to better understand the role of services in generating personal and collective well-being outcomes for people experiencing the services.

Previous research has emphasized the importance of transformative sport service research (TSSR) in various contexts, such as the National Football League (Katz et al., 2020). Weight et al. (2020) explored student-athletes' views on the prevalence of transformative and destructive coaches, effective coaching methods (e.g., enhancing self-efficacy belief), and the impact of coaching methods on sport self-efficacy belief. Service studies suggest possible links between well-being and

other desirable service outcomes (e.g., performance), but further empirical research is necessary. Social support perceptions have been shown to mitigate negative experiences resulting from interactions with others (Shorey & Lakey, 2011), whereas tangible support services are intended to enhance positive experiences (Fleischman et al., 2021). Moreover, competitive sport environments, like those found in collegiate sports, can negatively impact mental health due to factors such as extended time away from family and relationship problems (Bauman, 2016; Breslin et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic further challenged student-athletes' health by causing a stop of play, competition cancellations and postponements, changes to training environments, and reduced in-person activity (Schinke et al., 2018). Scholarship has demonstrated that the service environment can either hinder or help student-athletes' performance (MacIntosh et al., 2020). Accordingly, TSSR suggests this interaction can create changes in well-being, whether positive or negative, and therefore affect a person's overall wellness. This idea is central to this study during the COVID-19 stop of play, as collegiate sports are a microcosm of larger society experiencing the health crisis.

Wellness

Wellness, a holistic descriptor of an individual's state as per Myers et al. (2000), carries significant implications for management. Wellness is a way to orient one's life and relates to the understanding of body and mind; thus, wellness considers physical health (e.g., lack of injury, fatigue) as well as mental health. The investigation of how the sporting environments influence student-athletes' physical and mental health is of significant interest in the sport management literature (e.g., Kim et al., 2020). Both physical and mental health should be concurrently examined as is consistent with the perspective of wellness. Additionally, although there is no universal consensus to define mental health, scholarship recently has emphasized the importance of focusing on the positive side of student-athletes' mental health (Schinke et al., 2018). In this regard, the consideration of mental well-being from both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being perspectives can offer a deeper understanding of mental health (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta & Waterman, 2014). Specifically, hedonic well-being refers to an individual's cognitive and affective evaluations of ones' life; often containing three components: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). Eudaimonic well-being is associated with the highest human good; thus, it is often measured by, for example, meaning in life, good relationships with others, and self-actualization, distinguishing from the hedonic pursuit of pleasurable sensations or satisfying appetites (Ryff & Singer, 2006) Environmental factors are significant antecedents of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017;) as coaches and teammates play a significant role in influencing their student-athletes' well-being. Thus, the sporting environment is a significant factor in an student-athletes's mental health.

Past research has highlighted student-athletes' mental and physical health issues. Graupensperger et al. (2020) explored student-athletes' mental health in relation to teammate support and athletic identity changes during COVID-19. Those

with strong team support and connection had better mental health and stable athletic identity. Athletic identity changes influenced psychological well-being. Schary et al. (2021) examined the pandemic's impact on student-athletes' mental health. They found no effect on overall well-being but did note increased anxiety and sleepless-ness, particularly in older student-athletes. Powers et al. (2006) defined physical wellness through principles related to overall health and physical activity. Optimal health requires good nutrition, exercise, sleep, and preventive measures. Yet, Van Rensburg et al. (2011) found that student-athletes often neglected their physical well-being, not prioritizing essentials like exercise and sleep.

Context of the Study: U-Sport

U SPORTS is the governing body for the collegiate sport in Canada and represents about 12,000 student-athletes (U SPORTS, 2021). In comparison with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States, which is a major revenue-generating entertainment business, U SPORTS's revenue is far less (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2018). In the U.S., collegiate sports are cultural milestones with vast national attention. In contrast, Canada's U SPORTS may not always garner similar excitement or media coverage, reflecting differences in cultural values and media landscapes between the countries. Besides, U SPORTS student-athletes tend to receive considerably less financial support (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2018). Universities can grant athletic scholarships up to the cost of tuition and mandatory fees, contingent on student-athletes' fulfilling basic academic criteria (U SPORTS, 2018). While Canadian student-athletes may not receive the same level of acclaim as those in the U.S. system, they stand out from their non-student-athletes peers due to their 25–30-hour weekly training, weekend game and competition travel, and the availability of support resources such as academic adjustments (Mishna et al., 2019). Notably, student-athletes in both governing bodies have equally important wellness needs, affected by their environment and available services.

Method

Given the infancy of TSSR and the insufficient understanding of the environ-mental influence on student-athletes particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic an exploratory research design was utilized in this study. Qualitative research was chosen as the method to collect data for the current study and to provide enriching accounts of the sports environment experienced by the student-athletes during the stop of play period.

Participants Selection and Recruitment

In the present study, a purposeful sampling technique was employed to ascertain the student-athletes' perspective (Patton, 2015). First, information about the study was posted on an intercollegiate sport website. Next, an email was sent by the Athletic Director to all university student-athletes regarding the study. Student-athletes interested in the study were asked to contact the primary researcher directly through

email to learn more about the research and their rights as participants (e.g., voluntary, anonymous, confidential nature of the research). If interested, the researcher and the participants set up a mutually agreeable time to conduct the semi-structured interview. Due to COVID-19 health protocols at the University, all interviews were completed using the Zoom platform during the stop of play period.

Demographics

Participants had to be 18 years of age or older, and currently a member of a college/university team. Participants could reside anywhere while taking part in this study (e.g., student-athletes that were off campus and living at home). Regarding gender, six identified as women, 10 as men. Participants were involved in a total of seven sports, including rugby (one), soccer (three), hockey (one), basketball (seven), volleyball (one), basminton (one), and football (two). Table 1 provides a summary of participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Key Demographics of Participants (n = 16)

Pseudonym	Gender	Collegiate Sport	Years in University
Morgan	Woman	Rugby	Senior
Finley	Woman	Soccer	Freshman
Riley	Man	Basketball	Sophomore
Jessie	Woman	Volleyball	Junior
Jaime	Man	Basketball	Sophomore
Skyler	Man	Hockey	Junior
Frankie	Man	Badminton	Junior
Carter	Woman	Basketball	Senior
Harley	Woman	Soccer	Junior
Peyton	Woman	Basketball	Freshman
Logan	Man	Football	Senior
Bobbie	Man	Football	Freshman
Parker	Man	Basketball	Junior
Alex	Man	Basketball	Sophomore
Tom	Man	Basketball	Senior
Peter	Man	Soccer	Sophomore

Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview method was chosen to uncover student-athletes' perceptions of the service environment and the influence on their well-being. Questions were generated in part through a review of the literature on TSR and TSSR and wellness based literature. Since were were interested in student-athletes' beliefs and behaviour in relation to the phenomena it was important to garner their ideas on service level improvements (Husbands et al., 2017). The interview questions were

designed to be broad and general regarding the service environment and prior to conducting interviews, were pilot tested with sport management students to determine the structure and ordering of the questions a well as if any questions were ambiguous.

Participants were first asked about their sporting experiences and then to discuss what aspects of their sport environment made them feel cared for as an student-athlete. Follow-up questions included asking student-athletes to detail what they considered to be best practice towards making them feel cared for in their environment. Additionally, student-athletes were asked to discuss any aspects that they felt hindered their overall wellness. Prompts regarding physical and mental wellness were used to ascertain a more complete understanding of practices that promote feelings of wellness in their sport environment and those that they felt needed to change. Interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Hennink et al. (2017) distinguished between two methods for gauging saturation: code saturation and meaning saturation. Code saturation typically serves as a gauge during data collection, indicating when all relevant concerns associated with the study topic have been captured without new ones emerging. In this study, code saturation was achieved by the ninth interview, facilitating the extraction of a diverse set of thematic concerns. In contrast, reaching meaning saturation necessitates 16 to 24 samples, according to Hennink et al. (2017). To pursue meaning saturation, this study engaged a minimum of 16 respondents, enhancing the study's rigour relevance for student-athletes.

The interview transcripts were revised and emailed to the participants to confirm the accuracy of the information. Participants had 10 days to respond to the transcript verification email, and if at that time, no response was provided, the transcript was considered verified. One participant provided minor changes. Once reviewed, the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 11 software which was used to organize and manage the data.

Thematic analyses are used to help identify, analyze, and report themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, an independent analysis commenced, where the researcher would read the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Inductive analyses were used to generate initial concepts of what student-athletes experienced and perceived to be promoting wellness (see Patton, 2015). These first-order codes and their relative occurrences within the transcripts helped produce some potential themes (Camiré, 2016). Upon completing this level of coding, four authors then compared and discussed their first order coding, and the various relationships they perceived important (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These discussions allowed for second-order coding to be developed. Through constant comparison and collaboration over three separate coding meetings, the researchers team refined, named, and defined the results as presented below. In the member-check process, participants were asked to review their transcript, reflect on the experience and clarify any points, and confirm the relevance of the researchers' explanations (Camiré, 2016).

Results

A total of 16 interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed, featuring participants who had competed in high-performance sports at varying levels, from club to international competitions, such as FISU and single sport championships. The interviews, averaging 34 minutes in length and producing approximately 4,500 words per session, generated over 100 pages of data. Three main themes were identified as (1) Unsafe Sport Environment, which included concerns related to physical health, mental health, and general environment, including the impact of COVID-19; (2) Safe Sport Environment, which covered issues related to physical health, mental health, and general environment, along with organizational aspects such as policies, communication, and facilities; and (3) Suggestions for improving the service environment in college sports, which focused on two key aspects: (a) the support system and (b) the need to increase education for both players and parents at an earlier age.

Theme One: Unsafe Sport Environment

Of consequence in this study was that student-athletes had diminished feelings of wellness (both physical and mental) when they or someone they knew experienced or perceived negative elements within the sport environment. This included physical health (e.g., overtraining and injury from poor techniques taught and injury in the game) and mental health (e.g., experiencing micro-aggressions from relationships with the coach, administration, or teammate). Participants expressed how the use and integration of misbehavior by others led to the destruction of value and, hence, the deterioration of well-being. The role of the coach and their behaviour was influential towards the student-athletes experiencing unsafe sport. Some examples of this included the coach using threatening words, belittling a player in front of teammates, picking favorites, or excluding student-athletes from drills. Additionally, student-athletes discussed the importance the impact of COVID-19 environment and the stop of play.

Physical Health

Student-athletes noted many experiences with poor physical health that influenced their wellness including, excessive training and practice intensity, the coach or trainer not giving or allowing breaks during training and practice, poor nutrition information and, playing through injury. As they expressed, these areas of concern can be detrimental to their physical health. Of interest, most student-athletes felt that further education is required from coaches and trainers to ensure proper biomechanical movement patterns, a better understanding of preventative measures and avoidance of overuse injury as they felt that this would put the student-athletes' interest first. One of participants noted that: "I said just going with a high volume like practice every day, not having breaks. I think that's bad practice" (Parker, personal communication, April, 2021).

"The whole career that having to worrying about, if I get hurt, is that going to stop, the help the school is providing, if I get hurt, are all my all my scholarship going to go away, just let the athlete know we have your back, this program is there to protect you"(Bobbie, personal communication, April, 2021).

Another participant discussed their involvement in [contact sport], stating that injuries are common in practice and from games due to the "physical intensity" and noted that "it is not the same for everyone…some [players] are more aggressive than others" (Morgan, personal communication, April, 2021). This student-athletes went on to say that:

This attitude, which was particularly pervasive in contact sports, was a likely cause of physical injury, according to athletes. "One of my screws was hitting my ligament, so I had to get another surgery. A second surgery, I shouldn't have practiced, but it was me wanting to play really bad and the coach seeing me wanting to play" (Riley, personal communication, April, 2021). Participant lamented on the risk of injury in their sport and the physical nature of practice:

"I think even just the dynamic within women's sport is very interesting, especially on the field as soon as you become the black sheep. Putting yourself at risk for injury, harder tackles, people being more careless when they're competing. It's a very interesting dynamic that I've noticed, but it's definitely there and creates an unsafe feel" (Finley, personal communication, April, 2021).

Generally, student-athletes felt that the physical side of wellness was well supported within the service environment since they were surrounded by many experts that could aid them with their knowledge and education in training and physical therapy, while also having available doctors to support their injury-related needs.

"I've noticed that some physical therapists, if adopted to the university sport culture and they won't try to heal you as we try to heal you faster, so you can play instead of heal you in a better way for. I have heard some of my teammates say that they haven't been assessed properly. They have to go seek is your therapist elsewhere. I think that's an unsafe" (Finley personal communication, April, 2021).

Mental Health

Student-athletes emphasized the significance of their relationship with coaches, the availability of mental health professionals, and awareness of services offered. While university support was present, its accessibility was sporadic and occasionally perceived as too intertwined with the team. Greater knowledge about these services, both within and outside the team context, was desired. The coach and student-athletes' relationship significantly influenced mental health, with some student-athletes' feeling overwhelmed by sport-related pressures, struggling to balance academic and athletic demands, leading to feelings of diminished self-worth and anxiety. For student-athletes, the role of the coach and their behaviour towards the play could pro-

duce negative feelings and emotions. "Riley" said the following: "the coach said it, to kind of threaten to work harder because I'm wasting my time basically, but that's how (we) my teammates and I, interpreted what he said" (Riley, personal communication, April, 2021). Furthermore, this participant noted that the [coach] "doesn't really care beyond [the sport]. The only thing they care about is your performance. Sometimes you felt like you were just one in a group of people. You weren't really any kind of focus of theirs." This led to anxiety and feeling uncomfortable around the coach. Participants also talked about coaches picking favorites, being excluded from drills and feeling tension particularly as a rookie. Another participant talked about the hierarchy and fear to speak up, stating:

> "The fact that teams are very hierarchical in structure, it's quite a pyramid. I would say especially if you're in your younger years, you don't want anything that you're saying about the team to get up and affect your role and affect your coaches or your older teammates or your teammates that are better than you" (Jessie, personal communication, April, 2021).

Student-athletes discussed experiences with feeling like there was bias or judgement from the coach or other players, bullying (e.g., online) and in practice, or pressuring student-athletes into something they were uncomfortable with.

> "It kind of just made me uncomfortable whenever I talked to him. Even when he was my own coach. It was kind of just you could tell players to do certain things like go to the corner to get a puck or something or you could tell a player to hit somebody to make a good hockey play. But once you are telling people to intentionally go out and hurt somebody it kind of ruins the game for everybody" (Skyler, personal communication, April, 2021).

It is important to note that while student-athletes felt there was a need for a sport psychologist and were aware of this service, that people still may not access those services. "Finley" noted that it is not enough to "write on paper somewhere that there's a mental health specialist for student-athletes, but you never met them, or you never been shown how to access that resource." Thus, there seems to be more attention needed regarding how student-athletes can access these services internally to the organization while also having some additional support outside of the direct team environment.

General Environment

The pandemic was an important discussion point regarding student-athletes wellness. student-athletes noted the communication challenge was influencing their wellness regarding a 'lack of feeling connected' to the team (coach and players) and network (e.g., family). While technology was available to assist in communication, most student-athletes felt their relationships with their team were diminished due to the physical distance. Indeed, student-athletes expressed feelings of isolation, lacking the usual training habits due to health and safety protocols, feelings of unease due to not knowing if they would get to play or if a cancelation/postponement was looming:

> "[…] so last year we had to go back home in March and then since then I've

been back to [city] to practice in October to November but really because of COVID everything shut down, so I've basically been back home since and yeah it's been pretty hard to be honest with school and everything and not having to be able to be active like we used to" (Morgan, personal communication, April, 2021).

Clearly illustrating COVID-19 and the stop of play had a major impact on how student-athletes were feeling during the time of the study. Participant noted how challenging it has been for them:

"I came into the [program] in the winter semester last year, and I have yet to step in the change room. The change room is like a haven for team culture, like that's your home. It has been kind of bizarre to try and get to know my peers. It's definitely been an interesting experience…its been tough" (Finley, personal communication, April, 2021).

"Its kind of just made me uncomfortable whenever I talked to him. Even when he was my own coach it was kind of just you could tell players to do certain things like go to the corner to get a puck or something. But once, or you could tell like a player to hit somebody to make a good hockey play. But once you are telling people to intentionally go out and hurt somebody it kind of ruins the game for everybody" (Bobbie, personal communication, April, 2021).

Theme Two: Safe Sport Environment

For student-athletes, wellness was based upon physical health (e.g., learning and training proper movement and technique for their sport, preventing, and treating injury), and mental health (e.g., understanding the need for mental health support, overcoming the stigma, role of stakeholders). Student-athletes notably discussed being responsive to and ideally proactive when it comes to social movements, and that the policies, communication, and facilities available for student-athletes in the service environment mattered.

Physical Health

Injury prevention, proper training, proper nutrition information, rest and recovery, support staff education/certification and availability, drug knowledge, and proper safety protection for certain sports (e.g., football) were notably discussed. Taking care of players' bodies through providing them with the appropriate resources and educational tools was considered important towards producing student-athletes' wellness. Participants noted that to promote physical health, it is paramount to hire properly trained and certified staff (including nutritionists, athletic and physiotherapists). Participants discussed the importance of prevention and treatment towards fulfilling physical aspects of wellness:

"I think it's a good idea to put in place programs that help the athletes […] so that they don't have to worry, oh, if I get hurt, is that going to stop me […] if I get hurt, are all my all my scholarship going to go away, like, just let the athletes know we have your back, this program is there to protect

you" (Skyler, personal communication, April, 2021).

Several student-athletes discussed the concern with keeping in good physical condition to enable their playing career to be healthy. Student-athletes believed that all coaches and trainers should be well educated in the proper techniques for their sport and support their physical health with appropriate exercises to aid in injury prevention and overuse problems.

Mental Health

Ensuring that players' mental health is a priority and is taken care of through services like mental health coaches/psychologists/therapists were deemed essential by student-athletes. Many of the participants discussed the importance of knowing there is a professional to help them during times they feel stressed, anxious, or depressed. They also discussed the need to move passed the stigma of people experiencing these states and being seen as weak. Student-athletes discussed feeling somewhat in conflict with the value placed on winning and the idea that toughness, persistence, and determination are key values in sport. Participants notably discussed this as a paradox in sport where one must be tough/resilient/steadfast, and if they are not, then the person appears weak, a perception that leads to feelings of inadequacy.

A first point of contact in the service environment for many student-athletes is their coach. The coach role was found to, unsurprisingly, at times hinder and at times promote positive mental health:

> "He's worked on confidence on visualization, with us, through [sport], and even just outside of what he's been working on to help improve the mental side of [the game]. I was struggling to get to sleep. He just took me aside and taught me some breathing techniques just to help me calm down before trying to get to sleep when I'm stressed out at night" (Skyler, personal communication, April, 2021).

The coach checking-in was important for the student-athletes; however, the need to have another person at arm's length or not involved with the team was also seen as paramount to producing safety as explained by "Skyler":

> "If you need somebody to talk to sometimes your coaches or teammates aren't always the best because you fear some sort of judgement or something. When the team can give you kind of a list of contacts. Like hey if you are having an off day call this person and call this person. It will never get back to us" (Skyler, personal communication, April, 2021).

Ultimately, student-athletes were aware of the services to support mental health but did not necessarily use them despite the potential benefit.

General Environment

Student-athletes discussed their general environment and the need for proactive responses. Student-athletes felt that social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter) have been a focus of much discussion within the team and university setting both during the pandemic (and before). Systemic issues with racism and discrimination were discussed which notably were related to how people were feeling overall during

the pandemic stop of play. For instance, one of participants talked about issues of racism and noted that the coach had made a comment to them, "I'm from [country]. They made a comment to me about being a terrorist, and it was a coach, so that made me feel unsafe." This person went on to say that as a "person of color, I would hear things stereotypes, about [my country] or about any other racial minority…a lot of ignorant things about the country" (Harley, personal communication, April, 2021).

Student-athletes discussed the importance of acknowledging and responding to these movements. Another participant noted that "there are a lot of negatives of everything going on. However, I feel like just having a positive environment and just you know teammates and coaches, if we can share it helps the environment become more positive" (Jessie, personal communication, April, 2021). For people of color that were interviewed, there was an acknowledgement on the effort being made by the university to bring education and awareness to team. Participant noted that in "February, the university did a lot…they brought in a lot of black students, and they have done a lot of meetings and they've educated everyone about it. They've done a lot of service to ask about our experience with racism or discrimination in sports" (Harley, personal communication, April, 2021).

Organizational Aspect

Student-athletes felt that the organization could promote safe sport through their policies (e.g., code of conduct), positive communication and available services in the facilities (use of physical space). One of participants noted the importance of having good programs and qualified coaches and medical staff, suggesting even that if they got "hurt or injured, that they had "a good doctor", that if they were injured in some way, that "the program has their back" (Skyler, personal communication, April, 2021).

Student-athletes noted that team system issues, communication challenges with coaches, players, trainers, and support staff could at times cause feelings of isolation While at times, people talked about being judged, bullied (e.g., online), having a sense of lack of communication, judgement, and favoritism.

Policies. Having documents in place (e.g., Code of Conduct) is important to prevent and respond to issues Student-athletes face:

> "I've never experienced something that I think would break that code of conduct. So, I can't say for sure what is written because I've never seen it before. But I don't know. It's reassuring, I guess, to know that in case, something was to ever happen, there's something that's written saying that it should not have happened" (Frankie, personal communication, April, 2021).

Positive Communication. Student-athletes noted that at times**,** personal one-on-one communication, and check-ups (or checking in) with the coach was important for them and that it helped provide for a sense of being cared for, like in a family. Participants remarked on the importance of "feeling of family and being one of the team." They noted that "coaches do not always know how the student-athletes feels and that it should be more acceptable for an student-athletes to speak up without fear

of reprisal to playing time, status with the team" (Riley, personal communication, April, 2021). Another participant says: "important to promote shared experiences of dealing with injuries and to talk about what it means to play through an injury" (Peyton, personal communication, April, 2021).

> "Being in touch with me, making sure that not only I'm okay, but I'm doing what I need to do in order to perform my best at practice. To 'check-in' and knowing what's best for me, even if I don't in the moment" (Riley, personal communication, April, 2021).

Facilities. Student-athletes felt that the use of facilities was important and that the created space bolstered their feelings of safe sport and feeling important. For instance, student-athletes remarked on the physical facility having services for the student-athletes to train and treat their physical health, but also having space dedicated to supporting their mental health. Student-athletes' comments regarding the facilities included being happy with the fitness environment, having good equipment to train and prepare their body, and also having a space just to 'chill' and hang out.

Theme Three: Suggestions to improve the Service Environment

In general, student-athletes were concerned predominantly with their physical and mental health throughout the interviews. The notion of how to create an improved environment to foster student-athletes wellness centered around two mains ideas: the importance of the support system (i.e., coaches, administrators, trainers, psychologists) first and then the need for further education of important stakeholders to bolster their own understanding of how to create safer sport environments.

Support System

The people around the student-athletes are the immediate support system. Student-athletes noted that ensuring proper coaching education and credentials of staff in their team was of the utmost importance to establishing trust. Participant noted that "number one is having a supporting staff for your team that really gets you […] they know when to push you and when to ease off." Student-athletes noted the need for educated coaching and support staff to understand how to prevent physical injury and the importance of understanding safety protocols (for things like dealing with a concussion). Importantly, student-athletes also expressed that beyond their immediate support of the coaches and trainers was a need to have a third party available or a person not directly associated with the team as expressed here by "Skyler" that "if they have a contact they can call that's not directly with the team all of the time it probably helps make kind of a safe space for those individuals" (Skyler, personal communication, April, 2021).

Furthermore, what became clear through the interviews was that student-athletes relied on more than one person alone at a time, and that they needed to access more than just the head coach to deal with physical and mental health concerns. It is hard for only coaches to focus on creating safe sport environments as a priority since coaches also feel pressure from the school to win or produce respectable results. Thus, other stakeholders (e.g., administrators, ancillary staff) should be aware of the

problems and the importance of creating a safe sports environment.

Educating Players and Parents

Creating an environment for student-athletes to communicate and share their thoughts with one another was considered being proactive. This process arguably should take place through educating player's and coaches about safe sport. One of participants noted that:

> "I think a big thing is promoting it to parents of a young aged athletes. I think just like you retain a lot as a kid, I think parents are often listening and making perception of sport. Between the early ages when their kids are enrolled in them. I think making clear advertising and demonstrating exactly how your specific program is going to incorporate safety into sport through physical and mental aspects" (Logan, personal communication, April, 2021).

Along with this idea, student-athletes also discussed the need to promote an understanding of physical and mental health at an even earlier age (e.g., within club sport) and that doing so would help create an environment that can promote wellness throughout the sporting system. As expressed by a participant:

> "When you are younger you should have all these things kind of engrained into your head no matter how boring they are. You need to watch the stuff and that way, when you get older, if you make a higher level or something you don't have to worry about that stuff. I think when you are older you don't need it as much as long as you are taught it growing up" (Bobbie, personal communication, April, 2021).

Educating both players and parents early is vital for enhancing student-athletes wellness understanding. Student-athletes highlighted the significance of a safe collegiate space for dialogue, fostering student-athletes development and peer learning about wellness practices. Ultimately, advancing wellness understanding through education and advocacy will cultivate a more supportive environment.

Discussion

In the year 2020, the COVID-19 virus spread with great velocity throughout Canada. To curb the spread of the virus, the Canadian government implemented stringent policies that advocated for physical distancing and minimized interpersonal proximity. Although some studies have attempted to explore the experiences of student-athletes during the pandemic using surveys, these methods have limitations in terms of providing a comprehensive understanding of the depth and variety of perspectives during COVID-19 (Shepherd et al., 2021). This study highlights the unique challenges faced by collegiate student-athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting stoppage of play through qualitative research. The results indicate student-athletes have been experiencing feelings of isolation caused by the imposition of health and safety protocols, which have disrupted their usual training routines. Furthermore, they have expressed a sense of unease, as the uncertainty regarding the

likelihood of participating in their sport, along with the possibility of cancellations or postponements, has added to their concerns. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, we can work towards creating a more supportive and resilient athletic community. This study illuminates the wellbeing of Canadian student-athletes, both theoretically and practically. By highlighting student-athletes' perspectives, we identify how their wellness is affected by the transformative environment and its implications for their overall health. Our results indicate the pivotal role of service quality from coaches and staff in influencing student-athletes' well-being. Thus, enhancing knowledge and skills regarding student-athletes' wellness among these professionals is crucial. The findings also underscore environmental pressures requiring an organizational response, especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic's crisis management (e.g., training from home), whereby everyone's immediate environment created equilibrium challenges. This research is in response to a call for exploration into the emerging TSSR (Friman et al., 2018; Mulcahy & Luck, 2020). The current research contributes to the importance of sport services and how they are produced, delivered and consumed by the student-athletes and emphasizes the importance of understanding the needs and wants of the student-athletes related to physical and mental health.

Theoretical Contributions

The first contribution of this research is responding to a need for investigating the emerging sport research paradigm of TSSR, which is situated at the intersection of sport and services, with well-being as the result (Friman et al., 2018, Mulcahy & Luck, 2020). TSSR as an emerging viewpoint offers fresh insight for establishing holistic student-athletes (Kean et al., 2019). Cronin (2016) and Lerio-Werelds (2019) pointed out that value creation should be examined from a different perspective in TSSR research rather than a purely economic one to examine advantages that create a positive transformation to the well-being of individuals and society. This study has made contributions on the significance of the service environment on student-athletes' wellness and gives evidence on what student-athletes recommend management modify and concentrate their efforts on to create a transformative service environment. In addition to expanding research on the relationship between service environment and student-athletes' wellness, the results highlight the need to consider some mediating factors such as emotional and social components within the university/college sport setting throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second contribution relates to expanding the perspective on positive organizational behaviour from a theoretical approach by uncovering key factors involved in producing wellness within the service environment. This allows for a more holistic view of how services might improve a student-athletes' well-being. For example, how institutions communicate with their customer/consumer; what services are available to aid them when needed can engender an environment that produces feelings associated with wellness. With TSSR, the overriding idea of creating wellness, we argue, requires a holistic viewpoint.

For management, considerations regarding physical and mental health are par-

ticularly relevant in collegiate sport. A focus which considers physical and the positive side of psychological health including hedonic (e.g., feeling of pleasure) and eudaimonic (e.g., focus of learning, authenticity, and meaning in life) well-being, would help management consider how to better support the student-athletes. One key dimension contributing to eudaimonic well-being is positive relationships with others (Ryff & Singer, 2006), a central finding to the coach and student-athletes' relations, student-athletes and other stakeholders (theme: positive communications). While there is no consensus that one is more important than another, hedonic well-being does not last long as it is an affect-related concern, whereas eudaimonic well-being has a cognitive aspect and is oriented towards learning and development which coincidently, are key areas of purported concern in collegiate settings. It suggests that paying more attention to the eudaimonic side of well-being provides student-athletes with the opportunity for a more sustainable personal development.

Practical Implications
Unsafe Sport Environment
Research denotes that wellness is essential for human beings (e.g., Myers et al., 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) and is strongly influenced by their environment. In this study, student-athletes noted their inability to control everything in their environment (e.g., training, practice, game, social in and out of sport) but that the support needed for their physical and mental health was for the most part, present. However, just because services were present does not indicate that they are used or to what degree they are sought by the student-athletes. Indeed, facilities and infrastructure, combined with an educated workforce can support both physical and mental well-being (e.g., therapists, administrative support, use of technology). According to the collegiate student-athletes in this study, there is an over emphasis on physical health of the student-athletes particularly within the grass root sport system but also within collegiate sport. While there have been steps in recent years to attenuate mental health concerns (Schinke et al., 2018), there has been less emphasis placed on the importance of mental health. Participants discussed that while physical health is undoubtedly important, the benefits of rest, recovery, and additional psychological support are not fully implemented, and a stigma still remains when discussing mental health.

Safe Sport Environment
In this study, student-athletes noted that the service environment created many opportunities for preventive and supportive health mechanisms to make them feel prepared and well, physically. Student-athletes lamented the role of wider support for the safe sport movement including stakeholders such as the coach, teammates, administration, and support staff. These people within the service environment play various roles. Student-athletes expressed a need for mutual support, transcending individual team boundaries, highlighting the importance of inter-team dialogue. This sentiment underscores the organizational culture's role in team success (Cole & Martin, 2018). The findings emphasize both institutional and team cultures as influen-

tial for student-athletes' well-being. Student-athletes should voice concerns without fear of consequences. Establishing outreach programs and spaces for sharing, rest, and recovery can reinforce student-athletes wellness values. To truly integrate student-athletes into the sporting organization, the service environment should evolve, ensuring student-athletes are acknowledged and their feelings not suppressed. This mandates changes in physical spaces, service design, and addressing student-athletes' needs and desires.

Suggestions to Improve the Service Environment in College Sport

Student-athletes also noted that there were improvements still needed within these service factors. For instance, the general and organizational aspects of the student-athletes' environment weighed on them, which requires the organization to examine their policies, communication, and facilities through various initiatives. This also denotes the importance of the support staff to ensure the environment is in fact focused on propagating student-athletes' wellness (Inoue et al., 2020; Lee, 2017). While programs may in fact be available, they also are not necessarily used or well understood by the players. Additionally, student-athletes' wellness within the created space of the university environment has been tested during the pandemic stop of play. Findings point towards the continued effort for administration to focus on facility usage and come up with possibly 'new' spaces designed to foster support for the student-athletes (Chang & Chelladurai, 2003).

The results of this study allude to the need to have employees (i.e., coaches, training staff) engage in formal training which involves the learner/consumer (in this case the student-athletes) and how they experience wellness in the service environment. Since, TSSR aims to improve the well-being of people (e.g., student-athletes), it becomes critical to have educated personnel in both physical and mental health. For instance, the results emphasize the importance of tailoring training to cater to the distinct needs and wellness views of every student-athlete. This suggests the necessity to move away from a one-size-fits-all training and develop approach and resonates with the unique challenges faced by student-athletes across diverse sports and roles. Adopting an student-athletes centric training model is validated by studies which highlight its role in fostering better outcomes, especially in the context of student-athletes welfare (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010). Furthermore, the results indicate the student-athletes needed to access more than just the head coach to deal with physical and mental health concerns. Besides, participants lamented that student-athletes also need space to speak up without negative repercussions to their playing time or fear of other types of reprimand. Therefore, it's beneficial to host regular feedback sessions, giving student-athletes a platform to voice their emotions, issues, and service environment experiences. Such insights can be woven into the continuous development of staff training materials. The value of such student-athletes' input in refining training methods and fostering a mutual understanding between coaches and their administrators has been emphasized in academic circles (Cushion et al., 2006). Our findings also note the key role the student-athletes play in crafting/creating sport programs to aid in their own wellness pursuit. Given the importance of eudaimonic

well-being as seen in the safe sport theme in our study, there is further argument to look at the eudaimonic side of student-athletes' well-being and its pursuit within collegiate sport particularly in light of evidence emerging on the mental health of student-athletes during the pandemic (Graupensperger et al., 2020). Therefore, as part of the development of a transformative service environment in sport teams or organizations, leaders and managers need to possess proper mental health literacy to manage the organizations (Gorczynski et al., 2020), which can result in more sustainable development of the people and stakeholders within the organizations.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

First, the present study was limited to collegiate sport and in particular, a team sport setting. The data is not intended to be representative of all student-athletes. Perspectives from student-athletes who are a part of a team were sought in the current study. Therefore, further research in diverse collegiate sport settings (e.g., indivvual sports) is recommended. Additionally, the present study suggested transformative sporting environments that impact student-athletes' wellness. However, other mediators such as emotional and social components within the university/college sport setting will contribute to the understanding and influence of the environment on student-athletes' wellness including several factors outside of the control of a university setting. Further studies that are conducted on the service environmental factors and student-athletes' wellness could have a longitudinal research design and may highlight periodic moments where wellness oscillates such as a stop and return to play, a championship run or some other pertinent context. This study was conducted at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when most student-athletes had to train at home. During COVID-19 home confinement, student-athletes were likely to experience some level of detraining, which is the loss of some or all of the morphological and physiological changes caused when one is training regularly (Sarto et al., 2020). Therefore, thoughts about student-athletes' wellness may have been heightened. Consequently, future research on TSSR within collegiate settings is warranted.

Conclusion

The impetus to prioritize development, learning, and continual improvements in order to foster stakeholder wellness across sports systems remains steadfast. The realm of collegiate sports, where the tenets of higher education uphold development and learning as cornerstones, concurrently emphasizes triumph on the playing field. Nonetheless, a concerted focus beyond the playing field is imperative to comprehend how services affect stakeholder wellness. In this regard, research and practice within sport management would derive benefits from delving into student-athletes' wellness and developing service programs that promote and actualize positive outcomes. It is incumbent upon management to ensure the creation of transformative sporting environments that stand as testament to the high importance accorded to student-athletes wellness. The recent pandemic and social movements have wielded considerable influence on people's actions and organizational planning, necessitating

further research to fully comprehend how student-athletes can develop, maintain, and optimize their wellness with a view towards enhancing performance. It remains an important focus for management to create safer spaces where student-athletes can thrive within the service environmentand and, this includes the various stakeholders that are key parts of the student-athletes' experiences.

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