Perceptions of Justice within Intercollegiate Athletics among Current and Former Athletes

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The topic of social justice within intercollegiate sport has focused primarily on administrator perceptions. To better understand the athletes' perspective and the impact of athletic identity on social justice, 166 current and former NCAA athletes participated in a survey related to their perceptions of inequities during their collegiate athletic experiences. Results indicated that although no significant difference existed between current and former athletes and their levels of athletic identity, former athletes were more likely to perceive inequities. Thus, the data suggests that a shift in perspective, unrelated to athletic identity, may occur once an athlete leaves college. The results further suggest that former athletes may provide a more critical perspective that is needed to further advance social justice within intercollegiate athletics. The theoretical and practical implications of this research are discussed.

Introduction

Within any society or institution the established standards for equitable treatment and fair exchange constitute that setting's standards of social justice. These standards are subjectively formed and maintained by the individuals, groups, and institutions present (Tyler, 2000). Reciprocally, the meanings associated with established justice standards inform the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of individuals, groups, and institutions within a particular setting (Tyler & Smith, 1998). Also influential within these contextual systems of social justice are issues of power and status, as social roles, scarcity and necessity of resources, and cultural socialization all inform fairness standards and procedures by which related decisions are made. Thus, in contexts where power and status are hierarchical, there is considerable concern for establishing and maintaining standards of social justice that are free from bias and judged to be fair by all involved parties. Further, and perhaps more importantly, there is the necessity of giving a voice to individuals and groups that possess lower levels of power and status, as they are most likely to suffer in situations where the standards of justice reflect inequity.

One context that has been identified as being fraught with social inequities is intercollegiate sport (e.g., Mahony & Pastore, 1998; Messner & Solomon, 2007). In this context a presumably simple transaction occurs whereby athletes exchange their abilities and talents for

university rewards such as scholarships, an education, accolades, and other social rewards. Recent research has posited that despite receiving these "rewards," athletes are acutely aware of injustices within intercollegiate athletics and, to some extent overlook such offenses (Warner & Dixon, 2011; Warner, 2012).   These offenses include, but are certainly not limited to, instances of preferential treatment given to team members in one sport over another and the disproportionate allocation of resources (e.g., certain teams having larger budgets to work with). As Clay-Warner (2001) suggested in her examination of the effects of group membership perceptions of social justice, injustice may be ignored in an effort to maintain identity-related self-esteem. Thus, taken together, the purpose of this inquiry is to explore the concept of athlete identity as it relates to perceptions of (in)equity within intercollegiate athletic departments. Secondarily, this work is intended to extend the literature on the topic and implications of justice in sport.

Review of Literature

Justice Research in Intercollegiate Sport

While the issue of justice within intercollegiate athletics can be applied to and focus on a multitude of topics (e.g., academic standards, financial support for athletes, etc.), the majority of the literature related to issues of equity has focused on two primary areas; Title IX and distribution of resources. Indeed, both areas have received a great deal of scholarly attention. For instance, the implications of Title IX have been examined from several vantage points (e.g., Anderson & Osborne, 2008; Kane, 1988; Messner & Solomon, 2007; Sartore & Sagas, 2007) and while research suggests that advances have been made toward providing equitable opportunities for women relative to their male counterparts, there is a great deal of evidence that inequities still exist (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Many researchers have noted that providing opportunities for women is a superficial solution that ignores the deeply engrained problems of sport's gendered culture, power imbalances, and disproportionate allocation of resources (Hoeber, 2008; Staurowsky, 2003). Further, and as suggested by Hoeber (2007, 2008), notions of gender equity and equality are ambiguous among sport administrators leading them to often deny or rationalize accusations of unfair resource allocation. Hoeber found that Canadian athletes, coaches, and administrators also rationalized gender inequities as being natural and consistent with the status quo. Hardin and Whiteside's (2009) findings revealed that Title IX's historical rhetoric has led many of today's sport participants and spectators to believe that men and women are not equal as athletes and thus, should not be treated equally by athletic departments.   Rather, the common belief is that women should earn the right to be treated the same as men and, until that time, women and men should be treated differently. Hardin and Whiteside's findings clearly indicate that both the purpose and effects of Title IX (i.e., to end sex discrimination) are vastly misunderstood by many.

Whereas a great deal of focus has been given to gender and equity within sport, another area of research focus has been the inconsistency in the manner in which athletic departments manage and distribute resources in general (e.g., Dixon & Warner, 2010; Fulks, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Specifically, a number of scholars have examined the perceptions of social justice amongst intercollegiate athletic department administrators and/or coaches (e.g., Hums & Chelladurai, 1994; Mahony, Hums, & Riemer, 2002, 2005; Mahony & Pastore, 1998), but few studies have considered the perceptions of athletes, leaving a gap in the

literature. Recognizing this, Mahony, Riemer, Breeding, and Hums (2006) sought to gain insight from college athletes (as well undergraduate non-athletes). They found that students felt that equality of treatment and need were the fairest allocation methods within an intercollegiate sport setting. That is, students preferred when distributions were equal in a given situation or based on need, as opposed to being based on results, contribution, or opportunity (see Tornblom & Jonsson, 1985). This was in agreement with Hums and Chelladurai's (1994) findings among NCAA coaches and administrators.

More recently, Warner and Dixon's (2011) investigation of former collegiate athletes revealed that perceptions of equity in administrative decision-making processes were key to fostering a sense of community during their collegiate athletic careers. In their words, "more than anything, athletes wanted to feel that their teams were treated and supported in an *equitable* manner across the department" (p. 264). Furthermore, Warner and Dixon's data revealed that the former athletes in their study were acutely conscious of decisions being made within their athletic departments even if the decisions did not directly impact the individual athlete or their team. The perceived equity of these indirect *and* direct decisions had a significant impact on the athletes' experiences. Warner's (2012) follow-up work with current collegiate athletes corroborated these findings and further revealed that despite being aware of inequities and it having a negative impact on their experience as well, the current athletes simply accepted or overlooked any transgression. Thus, this allowed social inequities to be perpetuated.

It should be noted that Warner and Dixon's (2011) results cited "equity" (i.e., fair exchange) as being fundamental to athletes. This was in contrast to Mahony and colleagues (2006) findings that cited "equality" (i.e., equal share). The current study recognizes the difference between the two terms and concepts and adopts the former because equitable resource allocation is the fundamental premise of Title IX and is therefore the more appropriate concept to study. Based on the extant literature it is clear that a better understanding of athletes' perceptions of social justice and equitable treatment within intercollegiate athletics is needed. Specifically, a gap in the literature exists regarding the role of athlete identity and how this impacts these perceptions. Additionally, more empirical evidence of differences and similarities between current athletes and former athletes is needed. Therefore, this research seeks to understand not only the relationship between athlete identity and social justice, but also if athletes who are removed from active participation view issues related to social justice and equitable treatment differently. Such knowledge would likely shed light on how to garner support from these important stakeholders so that the status quo is challenged.

Theoretical Framework

Athletic Identity

Identities are multifaceted and to a large extent, contextually determined (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993b; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, one's identification of who he or she is (i.e., to what group he or she belongs) is situationally bound (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Specifically, salient societal meanings inform the development of identities through roles or role identities (Burke, 1980; Stryker, 1980). Role identities are comprised of the meaningful self-definitions one (and others) applies to him- or herself as a result of the structural positions he or she occupies (Stryker, 1980).   Simply put, role identities can be conceptualized as expectations of the self and

of others. Fulfilling the expectations of one's role identity may validate one's self and further strengthen his or her self-definition as a member of the group. Fulfilling role expectations may also enhance one's self-concept and self-worth (Burke & Reitzes, 1981).

Brewer and colleagues (Brewer et al., 1993b) defined athlete identity as the degree to which one identifies with the athlete role. Athlete identity (i.e., role) is an important component of an athlete's self-concept and therefore, can influence the choices that one makes (Cornelius, 1995). Athlete identity thus possesses cognitive, behavioral, and affective components that influence the thought processes, actions, emotions and attitudes of those who strongly identify as such. Research has identified that athletes who strongly identify with the role of being an athlete often dedicate themselves solely to their athlete identity and subsequently ignore other identities across various contexts (Adler & Adler, 1987; Brewer et al., 1993b; Wiechman & Williams, 1997). While this high level of dedication has the potential to reap rewards for the athlete, team, athletics department, and university, the potential for negative consequences also exists. For example, athletes who highly or exclusively identify with the athlete role are particularly susceptible to emotional and psychological disturbances when their athletic careers end (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993b; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Likewise, strongly identified athletes may demonstrate an over-commitment to the athlete role. There is some degree of malleability in athletic identity, however, as it may vary in relation to past and current athletic experiences (Horton & Mack, 2000) and athletes may distance themselves from the athlete identity when a loss or failure occurs (Brewer, Selby, Linder, & Petitpas, 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000).

Social Identity Theory

Whereas athletic identity has been conceptualized as a role (Brewer et al., 1993b), the role itself is indicative of a social group who performs it – the athlete. Thus, when identifying as an athlete one not only adopts the roles affiliated, but he or she also joins a social group made up of similar others who adopt the same roles. This is consistent with social identity theory (SIT) which posits that in an effort to make sense of the social world and one's own place in it, people classify themselves and others into various social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While one has the ability to identify as a member of multiple groups concurrently, the strength to which an individual identifies with a particular social group is dependent upon the saliency of situational factors (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Further, the basis for which one identifies with a particular social category is also influenced by the need to enhance one's self-esteem. Thus, when identifying with a particular social category fosters self-esteem, other members of this social group comprise one's in-group, and are subsequently evaluated more positively than members outside of this group. At the same time, members of other social categories comprised of dissimilar individuals constitute one's out-group and are likely to be evaluated less positively and perhaps even negatively (Brewer, 1999; Gaertner & Dividio, 2000).

Indeed, a fundamental tenet of SIT is that individuals draw self-worth from their social group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As such, individuals prefer to be members of groups that possess high levels of social status, as membership leads to higher self-esteem. Likewise, and in an effort to maintain high levels of self-esteem, individuals within this high status group will rate other members of their own group favorably. This form of bias, termed in-group favoritism, is not unique to high status group members, as members of lower status group may also experience in-group favoritism. For instance, Branscombe and Wann's (1994) findings indicated that, when threatened, highly identified low-status group members (i.e., in-group

members) may display negativity toward out-group members as a way of restoring self-esteem. Other research has demonstrated that in-group favoritism can lead to selective information processing such that group members may ignore information that reinforces their low-status (e.g., Billig, 1991; Clay-Warner, 2001).   As suggested by Clay-Warner (2001), one type of information that might be ignored is with regard to procedural injustices, as unfair treatment reinforces low status.

Integrating the literature on athlete identity with the literature on social identity, it can be surmised that when athletes categorize themselves as such, they adopt the role of and prototypical behaviors and norms of the social category of "athlete" (Tajfel & Turner, 1978; Turner et al., 1987; Stets & Burke, 2000).   Such categorizations allow athletes to draw some degree of self-esteem and self-worth from their group membership. Likewise, categorizations allow athletes to form strong ties with and favorable attitudes toward other athletes (i.e., in-group members) while differentiating themselves from others (i.e., out-group members). Thus, athlete identity can be positive to the extent that it helps establish a sense of self and a sense of belonging within the athlete community. Athlete identity can also be negative to the extent that athletes seek to maintain their self-esteem and positive social identity by potentially ignoring the social inequities that may exist (Clay-Warner, 2010); specifically, the social inequities that purportedly exist within intercollegiate athletics (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Further, as a result of contextual cues making salient one's athlete identity and its ensuing expectations, it is also reasonable to surmise that the way in which athletes view social inequities varies by their proximity to the athletic department. Consistent with these points of view, we offer the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Current athletes will possess higher levels of athletic identification than former athletes.

Hypothesis 2: Highly identified athletes will be less likely to perceive intercollegiate athletics as being inequitable than will lower identified athletes.

Hypothesis 3: Current athletes will be less likely to perceive social inequities within intercollegiate athletics than will former athletes.

Method

Participants

A convenient sample of 166 randomly selected current and former athletes completed an online survey designed for this study. Of the valid responses, the sample was predominately female (67.5%), and Caucasian (84.6%). A substantial number were scholarship athletes (45.6%), however, many were also non-scholarship recruits (30.2%) and non-scholarship walk-ons (19.5%).   The majority of sample were involved in Division I athletic programs (40.8%), followed by Division III (40.2%) and Division II (17.2%). A large majority (96%) of the current and former athletes in the sample competed in sport traditionally identified as non-revenue generating, the most frequent of which were softball, cross country, and baseball.

Procedure

Participants were contacted via email and through various sources (e.g., social networking websites, school directories, etc.). An email invitation was extended to recipients explaining the purpose of the online survey and asking them to take part. Participants were also informed that the study had received IRB approval, that their responses would be confidential, and that their participation was completely voluntary.

Instrument

The online questionnaire consisted of three sections that, unless otherwise indicated, contained questions that were anchored a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The first section was comprised of questions related to the athlete's perceptions of equities and inequities (i.e., perceptions of fairness). These questions were based on the previous literature (e.g., Hums & Chelladurai, 1994; Warner & Dixon, 2011; Warner, 2012) and reviewed by a panel of experts. This four-item fairness construct ($\alpha = .82$) was comprised of questions reflecting the various possible areas of inequity within intercollegiate athletics. Items included questions such as, "Athletic departments distribute resources fairly," and "All student-athletes are treated the same, regardless of sport."

The second section included the 10-item Athletic Identification Management Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1993b). Whereas the instrument was first constructed such that athletic identity would be measured as a single factor, subsequent use of the AIMS has demonstrated its multidimensionality (e.g., Brewer, Boin, & Petitpas, 1993a). Subsequent works have also demonstrated the reliability and internal consistency of the AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993b; Martin, Mushett, & Eklund, 1994). Of the factors to the AIMS, a social identity component represents the extent to which individuals identify with the social role of athlete. Exclusivity, another factor, is the degree to which an individual views him or herself as an athlete and relies on his or her athlete identity over other identities. Finally, a negative affectivity component measures the negative emotional responses of an individual who would not be able to train or compete because of an injury, retirement, or another reason.

The third section then asked a series of demographic and athletic background related questions. As described above, participants were asked to complete basic demographic questions as well as questions pertaining to their intercollegiate athletic experiences.

Analyses

Means and standard deviations were computed for all variables (see Table 1). Hypothesis 1 was tested by way of a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) with athlete status (current or former) as the independent variable and athlete identification as the dependent variable. Hypothesis 2 was tested by executing a univariate ANOVA with athlete identification as the independent variable and perceptions of fairness as the dependent variable. Lastly, Hypothesis 3 was also tested using a univariate ANOVA with athlete status as the independent variable and perceptions of fairness as the dependent variable.

Table 1 - *Means and Standard Deviations for Current and Former Athletes*

Status	Athletic Identification		Fairness	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Current Athlete (N = 84)	4.48	.88	4.31	1.29
Former Athlete (N = 82)	4.58	.92	3.74	1.43

Results

Results from Hypothesis 1 showed that there was not a significant difference in athletic identification between current and former athletes, $F (1, 165) = .54$, ns. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Interestingly, the mean scores revealed that former athletes possessed a higher level of athletic identification than current athletes, however, the difference was not significant. Hypothesis 2 was also not supported, as the results revealed no significant difference between perceptions of fairness and athlete identity, $F (1, 165) = 1.14$, ns. The results did reveal a significant difference in the perceptions of fairness between current and former students, $F (1, 165) = 7.45$, $p < .01$. Thus, in support of Hypothesis 3, current athletes perceived intercollegiate athletic departments to be fairer than former athletes. The mean scores for current and former athletes were 4.31 and 3.74, respectively (see Table 1).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the concepts of social justice and athletic identity among intercollegiate athletes. The findings indicated that the participants identified strongly (see Table 1) with their athletic identity despite being a former or current athlete. Our results also indicated that former athletes perceived more inequities than current athletes. Interestingly enough, this finding could not simply be explained by athlete identity, as our study hypothesized and the extant literature would support (Tajfel & Turner, 1978; Turner et al., 1987; Stets & Burke, 2000). The results demonstrated that a relationship between identity and perceptions of inequities did not exist. That is, despite the fact that both current and former athletes highly identified with the athlete role, only the former athletes perceived athletic departments as being inequitable. This finding can be explained by both the distal and proximal effects of group identity, in-group favoritism, and the presence of emerging multiple identities. Thus, even though one may highly identify with being an athlete (Adler & Adler, 1987; Brewer et al., 1993b; Wiechman & Williams, 1997), being distally removed from an environment where

meanings are most salient allows for attention to be paid to other identities and for, perhaps, a more critical view of said environment. When an athlete is embedded in an environment with other in-group members (i.e., athletes) his or her perceptions are less critical and more accepting in an attempt to maintain his or her self-esteem. Another explanation might be that our sport systems are becoming more equitable, and it is the current athletes in this study that are reaping the benefits of this. The results point to the idea that current and former athletes respond differently to the perception of equity within intercollegiate athletics. As a result, this study challenges the notion that simply identifying as an athlete can explain the perceptions one has regarding social inequities within intercollegiate athletics.

The finding that former athletes perceived athletic departments as more inequitable than current athletes could also be explained by the fact that the former athletes have greater exposure to and experience with intercollegiate athletic departments, and consequently have different perceptions. Scholars in leisure research have demonstrated that previous experience with a leisure activity impacts the perceptions of the resources available through that activity (Hammitt, Backlund, & Bixler, 2004; McFarlane, 2004; Schreyer, Lime, & Williams, 1984). Thus, with greater exposure it is surmised that athletes' perceptions of available resources change. Additionally, the importance of sport organization employees' and volunteers' perceptions and expectations changing overtime has been also underscored in the literature (e.g., Dixon & Warner, 2010; Warner, Newland, & Green, 2011). Thus it seems logical that this idea would also hold true for athletes. It can be inferred that former athletes have had greater exposure to intercollegiate athletics, and as a result overtime, similarly to sport employees and volunteers, their perceptions and expectations change. In this case, it seems as though the athletes' perceptions and expectations of fairness and equity changed over time and with greater exposure. Former athletes may therefore reflect upon their time as athletes and feel as though resources, financial or otherwise, should have been allotted more equitable then or should be allotted more equitably now.

Theoretical Implications

While social identity theory is often helpful in explaining athlete behaviors and attitudes, it is clear from this research that identity, in and of itself, does not provide a complete picture. The results of this study demonstrated that the environment and proximity to the referenced "in-group" must be considered to provide a more accurate picture. In other words, the environment or context played an important role in explaining the perception of social inequities for athletes and impact of social identity. Either current athletes are operating in more a socially just environment or former athletes are more attune to and critical of the inequities, as they are likely to draw their self-worth from identities other than that of an athlete. Considering that research supports that individuals tend to recall past events more favorable (e.g., Golden, 1992; Holmes, 1970; Yarrow, Campbell, & Burton, 1970), it is especially interesting that the former athletes, who were further removed from the intercollegiate context, were more critical of intercollegiate athletics. Consequently, scholars should use caution when asserting the impact of social identity and perhaps turn their attention to the impacts that occur when the reference group is removed.

While some research suggests that former intercollegiate athletes can experience profoundly negative psychological effects during and after athletic retirement (e.g., Adler & Adler, 1987; Brewer et al., 1993), other research identifies athlete retirement as a natural life transition that results in the same psychological impact to one's self as other life events (e.g.,

Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). Motivated by equivocal findings such as these, Lally (2007) sought to understand the issues of athlete identity and retirement more fully by investigating its presence at three particular points in time during athlete's careers; pre-retirement, one month post retirement, and one year post retirement. Lally's findings suggested that over time, nearly-retired and retired athletes began to redefine themselves by incorporating other role identities into their sense of self. Indeed, this is easy to explain given the fluid nature of identity development and expression (Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). Perhaps more interesting, Lally recognized this identity shift as occurring when athletes moved away from their athlete identities, a finding that our data does not support. Our findings indicate that athlete identity, as measured by the AIMS, is still quite high among former athletes. Thus, there is some indication that, beyond the one-year post retirement mark, identity may still be present or perhaps manifest in a different manner. These are important insights into athlete identity specifically and identity theory in general, as the role of athlete could still be present within former athletes, but defined and expressed differently later in life.

Practical Implications

        In 1989, the NCAA formulated an association wide Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). The premise of this committee was to provide a voice for student-athletes on issues related to student-athlete welfare. Legislation in 1995 further extended this idea and mandated that each institution create a student-athlete advisory committee on their respective campuses. While these policies are laudable and well-intended, the make-up of these national and campus student-athlete advisory committees are in almost all cases current athletes. Considering the findings of this study (i.e., former athletes are more likely to perceive inequities), perhaps greater strides would be made if the voice of former athletes were sought and more often included on these mandated committees. Indeed, the results of this study indicate that former athletes offer a differing perspective than current athletes. In order for social justice to be achieved in one of the United States' celebrated institutions, administrators must seek out and probe the perceptions of former athletes. Due to their more critical views, the results of this study suggest that former athletes may be more likely to be effective agents of changes.
        The current findings also carry fiduciary implications. As Shapiro, Giannoulakis, Drayer, and Wang (2010) noted, the increasing number of former college athletes suggests that their behaviors as future donors warrant investigation. This is particularly true to the extent that the attitudes and behavior former athletes hold toward donating to their alma maters, differ from non-athlete alumni (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Specifically, former non-student-athletes tend to give more back to an institution than former student-athletes. Research suggests that the motivations former athletes have for giving back to their respective institutions relate to both identifying with their alma mater and their specific student-athlete experiences (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). Extending upon this, our findings suggest that the view held by former student-athletes that athletic departments possess inequities and are unfair could negatively impact donor tendencies. For example, if a former athlete believes that his or her donation will be used to further perpetuate the inequities that he or she believes to exist, the athlete may not donate. On the contrary, if the athletic department is striving to correct inequities or markets their dedication toward fairness and justice within their department, the former athlete may be more inclined to support this effort by making a donation.

Future Directions

It is recommended that future research continue to explore the athletic identities of former athletes, as well as their perceptions of fairness and equity. The results of this study, surprisingly, indicated that despite being removed from their athlete role, former athletes possessed high levels of athlete-identity and perceived intercollegiate athletics to operate in an unfair manner. The extent to which this latter finding serves as a constraint to former student-athlete donor intentions and behaviors could have significant implications. For instance, four primary themes emerged from Shapiro and Giannoulakis' (2009) qualitative study of former student-athlete donor constraints. It was found that charitable donations back to alma maters were impacted by one's prioritization of charitable giving, connection or identification with an alma mater, experiences as an athlete, and the type of communication and distribution of information provided to former student-athletes. Perhaps a subcategory to one of these themes, perceptions of fairness and justice within this integral and overlooked population may have a substantial impact on whether a former student-athlete intends to give back and support his or her alma mater (Shapiro et al., 2010).

While the extent to which one identifies as an athlete reflects the internalization of the social roles associated with the social group of athlete, one's athletic identity is specific to the sports that he or she plays or has played and one's own experiences while playing (Brewer et al., 1993b). Because the relative power and importance of different sports within intercollegiate athletics varies (e.g., male vs. female sports, revenue generating vs. non-revenue generating, etc.), so too might the perceptions of fairness held by the athletes who play them (e.g., Fink & Pastore, 1997). Likewise, one's successes as an athlete, status on his or her team, status as a scholarship or non-scholarship athlete, etc., may all influence one's athletic identity as well as one's perceptions of fairness. Further, and specific to former student-athletes, one's current standing and financial standing and career may have some bearing. These additional factors may further elucidate the complex relationship between student-athletes, both current and former, and intercollegiate athletic departments and should be further explored.

As mentioned previously, the topic if justice within intercollegiate sport can be applied to a various issues. Thus, even though we conceptualized perceptions of fairness as an all-encompassing construct, there are several areas where perceptions of fairness might differ amongst athletes. For example, Fink and Pastore (1997) found differences in student athletes' perceptions of gender equity. Schneider and Pederson (2004) examined student athlete's perceptions of equity, as it related to athlete output and financial return. It was found that athletes in revenue generating sports felt that they should receive an equitable share of the revenue they brought into the university. Others have addressed the topic with regard to athlete perceptions of administrative decision-making (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Taken together, future research that differentiates between types of equity could provide a more in-depth understanding of student athletes' perceptions of equity within intercollegiate athletics.

Conclusion

This research sought to understand social justice and the perceptions of inequities from the student-athletes' perspective. In doing, the results highlighted the impact of athlete identity and key differences between current and former athletes in their perceptions of inequities within intercollegiate sport. Therefore, the major contribution of this research is two-fold. First, athlete

identity was not related to the perception of social inequities. Second, despite no significant difference existing between current and former athletes and their levels of athletic identity, former athletes were more likely to perceive inequities. Thus, positing that something other than the level of athletic identity changes and shifts an athlete's perspective into viewing intercollegiate athletics more critically. As scholars and practitioners strive towards fostering a more socially just sporting environment, the results of support the notion that *former* athletes are the essential stakeholders that are most likely to critically challenge and encourage change, as they may still be highly invested in the athlete component of their respective identities.

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