

Athletic identity: The role of race and gender in the athletic identification of British basketball players

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This study examines the role of race and gender on athletic identification of elite-level basketball players competing within the UK national leagues. In investigating this intersection, the study aims to broaden the cultural scope of the few previous studies that have examined the role of race and athletic identity; these studies have exclusively examined US student-athlete populations. Furthermore, the study aims to improve understanding of genders relationship with athletic identity in contemporary Western society. One hundred and four participants provided demographic information and completed questionnaires relating to athletic identity (Athletic Identity Measurement Scale) and racial identity (Multidimensional Measure of Black Identity). Race and gender were found to have no significant effect on athletic identification. These non-significant findings are discussed within the framework of the somewhat contrasting findings of the preceding literature. Results revealed a statistically significant effect of race on levels of racial identification, in contrast with previous studies within team sports, but supporting non-sporting literature suggesting ethnic minority individuals have higher racial identification than non-minority individuals. It is suggested that differences in societal demographics and sports economies between the UK and US may explain the null-effect of race, while with regards to gender, shifting societal perceptions of sportswomen may explain results. This paper represents the first known study that has examined the influence of race on athletic identity within the UK. Accordingly, suggestions for future enquiry into the influence of individual demographic characteristics on athletic identity are presented.

Keywords: athletics; athletic identity; gender; racial identity; sport psychology

Although everchanging, stereotypes and prejudices of race and gender are prominent in both societal and sporting cultures. Issues of race and gender in sports have received wide media coverage in recent years, and feature commonly in social discourse (Kian, 2019; Lambert, 2016). Examples such as Colin Kaepernick, and subsequently, many other NFL and NBA athletes taking a knee during pre-game national anthems in protest of racial injustice (Coombs et al., 2019) exemplifies that issues of race in sports and society are not mutually exclusive. Researchers have provided a strong case for studying issues of race and gender in sport (Harrison & Moore, 2007). Despite this, few have considered the influence being of a particular race or gender has on athletic identity, with no known studies have examined the interaction of these variables in a UK population sample. The overwhelming majority of studies have examined US student-athletes.

Athletic identity can be defined as 'the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role, within the framework of a multidimensional self-concept' (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). Brewer et al. (1993) first measured athletic identity via the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), a self-report questionnaire comprised of three dimensions; social identity, negative affectivity, and exclusivity. Notable positive outcomes associated with a strong athletic identity include superior athletic performance, a confident mindset and enhanced body image (Horton & Mack 2000; Miller & Hoffman, 2009). However, strong athletic identification may also have negative consequences, including social isolation (Horton & Mack 2000), severe identity depression (Webb et al., 1998), psychosocial difficulties in dealing with injuries or participation termination (Miller & Kerr, 2003), poor academic self-concept (Fuller et al., 2017; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005) and hindrance of career development (Hodge et al., 2008a; Melendez, 2006). Improved understanding of how factors, such as race and gender, may mediate athletic identity will aid sports practitioners in preventing and alleviating the aforementioned negative consequences of high athletic identity.

The limited research examining the intersection of race and athletic identity is surprising considering that in the US Black males are underrepresented in upward socioeconomic venues, yet in sports such as American football and basketball, they are significantly overrepresented (Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Sellers et al., 2002). While only 13.4% of the US population is Black (United States Census Bureau, 2018), in American football, Black males constitute 45% of student-athletes and 67% of professionals. For basketball, Black athletes represent 59% of student-athletes and 75% of professionals (Lapchick, 2013). The same trend is seen for females; 59.4% of female Division 1 NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) basketball players are Black (Harper et al., 2013). Although less divergent, UK statistics show a similar trend. While only 1% of the male population participates in basketball, 4% of Black males do. For females, statistics are 1% and 3% respectively (Sport England, 2000). Researchers suggest this representation bias may promote internalisation of the athletic role in Black youths, resulting in higher athletic identity (Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Harrison et al., 1999; Harrison et al., 2011), which may consequently disrupt career development since less than 2% of student-athletes reach professional ranks (Murdock et al., 2016).

One pertinent issue regarding race in sports is the stereotypical belief that Black athletes are inherently suited to athletic endeavours. This stereotype is observable both historically through advertising representations (Dufur, 1997) and in contemporary society through studies of prejudice (Peeters & van Sterkenburg, 2017; Sheldon et al., 2007). Furthermore, it is held commonly by both Black and White people (Burden et al., 2004) in the US and the UK (Peeters & van Sterkenburg, 2017; Sheldon et al., 2007). In basketball commentary, up to 92% of positive comments regarding physical ability are directed at Black male student-athletes (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). Nevertheless, scientific enquiry has failed to confirm these stereotypes, with much of the anthropological and biological scientific community discrediting race as a meaningful biological concept due to the vast gene flow seen between human populations (Hirschman, 2004). Black American populations show greater genetic ethnic diversity than White American populations (Genetics Working Group, 2005). Though scientific enquiry has found genetic explanations of Black athlete over-representation to be dubious (Hunter, 1996) scholars suggest the presence of these beliefs in public opinion and consciousness may further contribute to increased athletic role internalisation in Black athletes (Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Hodge et al. 2008).

The few studies to consider the effect of race on athletic identity have been equivocal in their outcomes. One study of Division 1 NCAA American football athletes found Black student-athletes had significantly higher athletic identification in comparison to their White counterparts. Individual AIMS item analysis revealed Black athletes scored significantly higher for internal focus on sports, beliefs that others perceive them only as athletes and seeing sport as their primary life focal point (Harrison et al., 2011). In another study, Steinfeldt et al. (2010) examined athletic identity in Black American football athletes at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Athletes at PWI's reported significantly higher levels of athletic identification than those at HBCUs. The authors argued PWI attendance invokes heightened minority status, and consequently, a more prominent social perception of these individuals as

'archetypal African American football or basketball players' (Simons et al., 2007, p. 267) resulting in greater internalisation of this role. In contrast to the above findings, one recently published study found no significant differences in athletic identity between races (Huml et al., 2019). Others have found higher athletic identity scores in White Division 1 student-athletes than their Black counterparts (Brown et al., 2003; Melendez, 2009) and finally, one reported that although Black athletes had significantly higher aspirations for becoming professional athletes, they had lower athletic identities (Wiechman & Williams, 1997). These findings may be explained through the attenuation of athletic identity levels in Black individuals due to high racial identity salience (Frank, 2018; Melendez, 2009). Alternatively, Melendez (2009) suggests for many Black student-athletes, sports serve a functional purpose, acting as a mechanism by which they can achieve upwards social mobility via university scholarships. Therefore, these individuals may have a lesser intrinsic desire for adhering to the athletic role, resulting in a lesser athletic identity.

Other literatures have examined the effect of racial identity levels, rather than racial categorisation, on athletic identification. Racial identity can be defined as the meaning an individual ascribes to being a member of a particular ethnic group (e.g., Thomas et al., 2009). This literature presents differing conclusions, some literature suggests negative association (Jackson et al., 2002; Melendez, 2009; Melton & Cunningham, 2012). Brown et al. (2003) proposed this occurs because goal-oriented team interaction generates 'the ultimate in-group' (p. 165), resulting in reduced racial group attachment. In contrast, others have found a positive association (Anthony & Swank, 2018; Bimper & Harrison, 2011) which may be contingent upon the partaken sport being one in which Black athletes are overrepresented, such as basketball or American football (Harrison et al., 2002). Association may also be contingent upon race. In one study, within Black student-athletes, high athletic identity was associated with low racial identification; for White student-athletes, the opposite was true (Brown et al., 2003). However, the above literature is limited by its scope. Almost all studies exploring racial identification and athletic identity have used Black student-athlete populations. Only two known studies have also examined White athletes (Brown et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 2002). Furthermore, in these two studies, racial identification was assessed using only a single item taken from the centrality scale of the Multidimensional Measure of Black Identity (MMBI), 'In general, belonging to my ethnic/racial group is an important part of my self-image' (Sellers, 2013, p.2). Although most relevant to racial identification, the centrality scale ordinarily consists of eight items. The validity and reliability of using this single item to measure racial identity are questionable (Cokley & Helm, 2001).

An enriched understanding of the interaction between race and athletic identity is appropriate in light of emerging literature suggesting race and the pursuit of athletic endeavours may interact to explain the relative academic underperformance of Black student-athletes (Cooper & Hall, 2016; Cooper & Hawkins, 2014). Athletic role engulfment (Harrison et al., 2002), excessive emphasis on athletic achievement (Harrison et al., 2011; Nite, 2012) and insufficient academic support (Kelly & Dixon, 2014) are thought to play a role in this. Student-athletes underperform in cognitive tasks when primed for athletic identity (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005), however, this effect is significantly more negative in Black student-athletes. In this study, White participants primed for athletic identity averaged 41% on a verbal reasoning task; equally academically engaged Black student-athletes averaged 24% (Stone et al., 2012). This may be due to Black athletes holding stronger athletic identities. Interestingly, in the athletic domain, the race has a contrasting effect. Recently, Howard and Borgella (2018) showed that when primed for the race, Black female athletes performed significantly better in a basketball free-throw task in comparison to control (age-primed) and negative (gender-primed) groups. This adds to previous literature finding Black males perform significantly better than White males in sports tasks framed as being diagnostic of natural athletic ability (Stone et al., 1999). Furthermore, research suggests that highly racially identified Black individuals are more susceptible to the performance-enhancing effects of racial priming than those lesser-identified (Davis III et al., 2006; Steele, 2011).

The secondary objective of the present study was to assess the effect of gender on athletic identity. Early research suggests greater athletic identity in males than females (Brewer et al., 1993; Murphy et al., 1996; Tasiemski et al., 2004; Wiechman & Williams, 1997) and endorsement of masculine gender roles in those with high athletic identity (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999). However, in this early research, samples consisted primarily of non-athletes or low-performance athletes. Furthermore, one study published during this period discovered diminished gender differences in elite athlete populations (Murphy et al., 1996). Furthermore, the above research may now be outdated as gender differences are less discernible in current literature and most studies find no differences (Anthony & Swank, 2018; Fraser et al., 2008; Groff & Zabriskie, 2006; Hoiness et al., 2008; Huml et al., 2019; Proios et al., 2012). Decreased sexualisation, increased financial viability of sporting careers, and increased positive characterisation of athletic qualities in sportswomen may explain this change (Dashper, 2012; Sherry et al., 2016). However, proclamations of diminished gender differences in athletic identity are not yet conclusive as some research still implies association. For example, identity foreclosure, which indicates athletic role engulfment, was recently found in male, but not female athletes (Anthony & Swank, 2018). Furthermore, Sturm et al. (2011), somewhat recently, cited gender differences in athletic identity.

Interestingly, one study discovered female athletes at NCAA women's colleges exhibit higher athletic identity than those attending coeducational colleges (Mignano et al., 2006). Possibly due to a similar dynamic discussed previously race suggesting Black athletes at PWI's display higher athletic identity than those at HBCU's due to amplified minority status, resulting in greater internalisation of the naturally gifted Black athlete stereotype (Steinfeldt et al., 2010). Through a similar dynamic, women at co-educational colleges may experience greater gender-based sporting stigmatisation due to heightened female identity status, and therefore, more greatly internalise the non-athletic female stereotype.

Despite the prevalence of sporting racial issues, little research has considered the intersection of race and athletic identity. In total, five known studies have examined athletic identity differences between racial groups, all of which were performed on student-athletes in the US (i.e., Brown et al., 2003; Harrison et al., 2011; Huml et al., 2019; Melendez, 2009; Wiechman & Williams, 1997). Others have considered racial identifications effect on athletic identity within Black populations but disregarded White populations. Outcomes of this literature are contradictory and inconclusive, with no consensus having been reached. This study aims to examine this intersection, adding to the extant literature, whilst broadening its cultural scope from US student-athletes to include UK elite basketball players. Furthermore, given the historical bias seen in gender research outcomes, further investigation is warranted. With this in mind, the current study aimed to further enlighten the understanding of genders effect on athletic identity in contemporary Western society. Based on previous literature, two hypotheses were formed. Firstly, there will be a significant difference in athletic identity between White and Black/mixed-race participants. Finally, there will be no significant effect of gender on athletic identification.

Studies examining athletic identity have generally used the AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993), a measure of athletic identity centrality. This was also the case in the current study, due to its compatibility with the MMPI centrality scale, which was used to measure racial identity. In identity literature, centrality refers to the extent to which an individual defines a core aspect of their self-concept with a particular role or status (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). The MMPI centrality scale was selected as it looks directly at the significance of race in an individual's self-definition; other MMPI scales look at the qualitative meaning individuals ascribe to race (Sellers, 2013). Finally, the MMPI was used as it can be easily adapted to measure racial identity in White individuals.

METHODS

Design

An independent measures design was used. The independent variables were gender (male or female) and race (White or Black/mixed-race). The dependent variables were *athletic identification* measured on the AIMS and *racial identification* measured on the MMPI.

Participants

124 online questionnaires were returned, of these, nine were removed due to being incomplete; 11 others were removed due to racial group underrepresentation. Participants were professional, semi-professional and non-professional basketball players, competing in elite national leagues. The mean age of the sample was 20.83 years (range = 10 years, $SD = 2.27$). There were 34 non-university students (21 male and 13 female); 58 undergraduate students (31 male and 27 female); and 11 postgraduate students (6 male and 11 female). From this point onwards, 'mixed-race' refers to participants with one White and one Black parent. During data analyses, Black and mixed-race participants were grouped. The rationale for this was that studies show both Black and White adults tend to categorise mixed-race individuals as Black, even when parent race is known and mixed-race category options are given (Ho et al., 2015; Krosch & Amodio, 2014; Krosch et al., 2013; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008). Furthermore, combining Black and mixed-raced groups resulted in a group comparable in size to the White group. The racial demographics of the final sample were 26 White males; 31 Black/mixed-race males; 35 White females; and 12 Black/mixed-race females.

Measures

Athletic Identity (AIMS): The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer et al., 1993) was used to measure athletic identity. This is a 10-item instrument on which response choices range from 'strongly agree' (1) to 'strongly disagree' (7) on a seven-point Likert scale. High scores indicate a strong athletic identity. The AIMS includes items such as: 'I have many goals related to sport,' and 'I feel bad about myself when I play poorly in practice or competition.' The AIMS has demonstrated good internal consistency in various studies, Cronbach's alphas range from .76 to .93 (Martin et al., 1997; Steinfeldt et al., 2010). Cross-cultural reliability has also been shown (Proios, 2012; Visek et al., 2008). The positive correlation of athletic identity with athletic

performance in previous studies demonstrates construct validity (Brewer et al., 1993; Cornelius, 1995). Discriminant validity has also been demonstrated using the Self-Role Scale (Curry & Weiss, 1989; Martin et al., 1997). Furthermore, Brewer et al. (1993) reported adequate convergent validity through analysis of instruments that assess both competitiveness and perceived importance of sports competence.

Racial Identity (MMBI): Racial identity was measured using a modified version of the Centrality Scale, taken from the Multidimensional Measure of Black Identity (MMBI), a 56-item self-report questionnaire (Sellers, 2013). The Centrality Scale comprises eight items measuring the extent to which being Black is central to the participants' definition of themselves. Items include: 'In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image,' and 'I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.' Response choices range from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (7) on a seven-point Likert scale. A high score indicates high racial identification. Cronbach's alphas of the MMBI range from .70 to .85 (Cokley & Helm, 2001; Sellers et al., 1998; Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Although originally designed for use in Black samples, here, the centrality scale was adapted to examine racial identification in White participants by replacing 'Black' with 'White' at any point it was used.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through contact with coaches and representatives of 14 English basketball teams. Questionnaires were distributed via team meetings and social media and completed online. Background demographics were gathered through a series of questions at the beginning of the questionnaire, soliciting information regarding age, gender, racial group and education status. Full ethical approval was obtained via the Loughborough University Ethical Approval Committee before initiation of data collection. Full consent was obtained from each participant before participation.

RESULTS

Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality were run for the MMBI in both White and Black/mixed-race groups. The MMBI had normal distribution in both White ($p = .404$) and Black/mixed-race ($p = 0.313$) groups. Therefore, a two-way independent measures ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of race and gender on racial identification (MMBI score). A statistically significant effect of race on racial identification was found $F(1, 100) = 162.343, p < .001$. Black/mixed-race participants scored higher on the MMBI ($M = 32.95, SD = 4.78$) than White participants ($M = 18.28, SD = 5.86$) suggesting race is a more central component of their identity. No statistically significant effect of gender on racial identification was found $F(1, 100) = .664, p = .417$. Means and standard deviations for racial identification for males and females are shown in Table 1. No significant interaction effect of gender and race upon racial identification was found $F(1, 100) = .214, p = .645$.

Table 1
 Means and Standard Deviations for MMBI Centrality Scale Scores in Males and Females

Gender	White (<i>SD</i>)	Black/mixed-race (<i>SD</i>)	Total mean
Male	17.42 (6.4)	32.84 (4.9)	25.13
Female	18.91 (5.7)	33.25 (4.6)	26.08
Total mean	18.17	33.05	

Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality were run for AIMS scores in both White and Black/mixed race groups. AIMS scores were non-normally distributed in the White group ($p = .034$) but normally distributed in the Black/mixed-race group ($p = .344$). Therefore, a Mann-Whitney U was conducted to examine the effect of race upon athletic identity. There was no statistically significant effect of race on athletic identity $U = 1250, p = 0.685$. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to examine the effect gender upon athletic identity. There was no statistically significant effect of gender on AIMS scores $U = 1333, p = 0.96$. The medians and inter-quartile ranges for AIMS scores for each group are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
 Median and Interquartile ranges for Athletic Identity Measurement Scale scores

Demographics	Median	IQR	n
Male	74.00	17.50	57
Female	75.00	20.00	47
White	75.00	19.50	61
Black/Mixed-race	74.00	17.00	43

IQR: Inter quartile range

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to examine the effect of race on athletic identity. Contrary to previous literature, and predictions made in the current study, results showed no effect of race upon athletic identity. Regarding the secondary objective of examining possible gender differences in athletic identity levels, no significant differences were found, in concordance with the majority of recent literature and the predictions made here. Additionally, although not a direct study aims, results revealed Black/mixed-race participants exhibited significantly higher racial identification than White participants. These findings and their practical implications are discussed below regarding study limitations and suggested future research areas.

Differences in US and UK racial demographics may somewhat explain the null effect of race on athletic identity in this study that conflicts with previous literature suggesting an effect. Scholars suggest that for Black children and adolescents in the US, professional Black athletes are especially influential in developing high athletic identification (Bimper & Harrison, 2011). However, Black people constitute 13.4% of the US population (United States Census Bureau, 2018) but only 3.3% of the UK population (Sport England, 2000). These figures may also be reflected in professional sports, resulting in fewer Black athlete role models for the UK's Black youth. Cross-cultural economic differences should also be considered. Scholars suggest Black communities in the US overvalue athletics due to the perceived opportunity for university scholarships, financial gains, and social mobility (Bimper & Harrison, 2011). While Black communities experience socioeconomic deprivation in both the US (Do et al., 2019) and UK (Furegato et al., 2016) sporting economies differ considerably between the two countries. The NBA is the highest paid sports league in the world with players earning an average of \$6.2 million during the 2016–2017 season (Sigler & Compton, 2018). Comparatively, the BBL (British Basketball League) only recently implemented a minimum player salary level (British Basketball, 2017).

Future research may consider the role of race in athletic identity in revenue-building sports within the UK, such as football (Relejo, 2018). Identity development models may also provide insight into the non-significant effect of race on athletic identity. Researchers suggest experience is shaped primarily by the identity individuals associate themselves with most closely (Markus & Sentis, 1982; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). However, foreclosure or high salience of racial identity may result in attenuation of athletic identity (Frank, 2018; Melendez, 2009). Without simultaneous salience in racial and athletic identities, the interaction between them is unlikely.

In line with the majority of recent literature, no significant differences in athletic identity were found between genders; decreased sexualisation, increased financial viability of sporting careers and positive characterisation of sportswomen's athletic qualities are commonly cited as reasons for this (Dashper, 2012; Sherry et al., 2016). However, researchers should also note that recent surveys show the primary motivation for university selection in student-athletes of both genders is the athletic prestige of the institution (Huml et al., 2019). In the current study, a significant number of participants were enrolled at Loughborough University, an institution known for its high sporting prestige. Having selected Loughborough University, this population may represent only the most highly athletically identified athletes; possibly removing gender effects since both males and females select universities for the same reason: athletics. The finding that both males and females in the study identified equally with the athletic role may have important implications for sports funding, policy, and governance. Currently, the equal athletic identity levels between genders are not reflected in equal opportunity for elite sports participation, both with regards to salary (Traugutt et al., 2018) and sporting provisions such as clubs, funding, and facilities (Davis et al., 2019). National governing bodies, such as England Basketball, should consider addressing this issue.

Additionally, the study found significantly higher racial identification in Black/mixed-race participants in comparison to White participants, opposing prior theories that suggest athletic participation results in diminished racial self-concept (Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Brown et al., 2003). Brown et al. (2003) hypothesised this 'sport-induced gracelessness' (p. 176), occurs via interracial goal-oriented collaboration within a team sport. This seems plausible since sports teams represent the ultimate in-group (Brawley et al., 1993; Carron, 1982; Murrell & Gaertner, 1992; Williams & Widmeyer, 1991), and athletes are socialised to perceive only opponents and teammates, not racially distinct individuals (Brawley et al., 1993; Bruner et al., 2014). However, outside of sporting research, non-athlete minority group members have been shown to exhibit significantly higher racial and ethnic identification (Carter, 2017; Carter et al., 2019; Utsey et al., 2002). Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979) explains this through a self-esteem maintenance model, suggesting in-group members identify highly with their minority status to buffer discriminatory experiences. With recent publications indicating the continued existence of racial discrimination within UK sports (Bradbury et al., 2018; van Sterkenburg et al., 2019), this model may also be applicable in sports.

This study was not without limitations and in generalising these findings researchers should consider the following issues. Firstly, although sensible due to different racial dynamics and demographics across sports in the UK (Sport England, 2009), this study sampled basketball players exclusively, meaning generalising these findings to other sports is problematic. Furthermore, exclusive recruitment of basketball players proved challenging and a final sample size of 104 participants may have contributed to the non-normality of White participants AIMS scores and lack of significance in the effect of gender and race on athletic identity. Secondly, university-students were overrepresented in the sample; 69 participants were students while only 34 were non-students. Although more representative of the general population than previous literature that has examined student-athletes almost exclusively, researchers should be cognisant of this bias and may consider addressing this in future studies. Thirdly, during analysis, Black and mixed-race participants were grouped. Although this decision was underpinned by literature (Ho et al., 2015; Krosch & Amodio, 2014; Krosch et al., 2013; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008), Black and mixed-race populations cannot be considered parallel. Current research is providing insight into the differential in the racial experience of Black and mixed-race populations in society (Liebler et al., 2017). Finally, this study employed a cross-sectional approach due to time constraints, however, the longitudinal methodology may be desirable in future studies since athletic identity is influenced by season stage (Brewer et al., 1999), and both athletic and racial identities are shaped over time (Sellers, 2013) and influenced by social context (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Sellers et al. (1998) found mixed methods approaches applying quantitative and qualitative analysis particularly beneficial in examining racial identity; future research examining racial and athletic identity may profit from using these methods.

The vast majority of athletic identity research has used adult populations; however, childhood and adolescent periods are of great importance to identity development (Sokol, 2009). Future research may consider focusing on these developmental periods. In particular, research may examine the role of race and gender in the athletic identity development of adolescents enrolled at elite sports academies. These academies provide the opportunity for progression to professional ranks, however, only a minority of attendees acquire contracts with chances of becoming a professional football player estimated to be between 0.04% to 0.4% (Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012; Malina, 2010). Some suggest an intense focus on sport at these academies may promote identity foreclosure (Good et al., 1993; Manley et al., 2016) which may hinder non-sporting career development (Stambulova et al., 2015) and leave attendees at risk of psychosocial issues following sports participation termination (Carapinha et al., 2019; Sanders & Stevinson, 2017). Improved understanding of athletic identity formation in youth academies may aid sports practitioners in facilitating healthy identity development and mitigating the navigate psychosocial impacts sports career termination may invoke. Moreover, understanding adolescent athletic identity may provide insight into the lesser athletic participation rates of adolescent females (Kang et al., 2017). With regards to gender generally, meta-analysis or systematic review of athletic identity literature may help determine whether gender differences in athletic identity have reduced over time, as is suggested by the current study and recent literature (Anthony & Swank, 2018; Huml et al., 2019; Proios et al., 2012). Future studies of gender may consider investigating the possible differential in athletic identity levels between males and females in sports stereotyped as being especially masculine or feminine. For example, by looking at male and female rugby players competing at equivalent levels; or similarly, by investigating athletic identity levels of sports players of one gender across multiple sports of differing masculine or feminine connotation.

In the review of the current literature, no studies were found to have examined the effect of race on athletic identity outside of Black and White ethnic groups. Previous research focuses mainly on Black athletes' overrepresentation in US revenue-building sports and the effect of this on athletic identity. In the UK however, other noteworthy examples of overrepresentation exist. For example, in England, 7.6% of South Asian report playing cricket regularly in comparison to 1.5% of White males (Sport England, 2009). South Asians are stereotyped as being good at cricket but are often negatively stereotyped for football ability (Burdsey, 2006;

Fleming, 1994). It would be interesting to investigate whether the athletic identity of South Asians in cricket and football differs as a result of these stereotypes. Finally, no known studies have examined the effect of race on athletic identification in individual sports such as athletics. Brown et al. (2003) suggested interracial team membership is pivotal in reducing racial identification through sport. Future studies of racial identity and athletic identity in individual sports may help to prove or disprove this.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, and contrary to previous literature, race and gender showed no significant influence on athletic identity in elite UK basketball players. Differences in societal demographics and sports economies between the UK and US may explain the null-effect of race; while with regards to gender, it is suggested that shifting societal treatment of sportswomen may explain results. Furthermore, Black/mixed-race participants exhibited significantly higher racial identification than their White counterparts. Although contradicting prior suggestions that team-sport participation diminishes racial identification resulting in 'sport-induced gracelessness' (Brown et al., 2003, p. 176), the findings resonate with non-athlete study results (Carter, 2017; Carter et al., 2019; Utsey et al., 2002) and the social identity theory self-esteem model (Tajfel, 1979). These findings represent the first known study to examine the influence of race and gender on athletic identity in the UK. Based on current literature, future research should consider extending enquiry into non-White/Black ethnic groups, childhood and adolescent populations and those performing in non-team sports or sports with substantial gender stereotypes. Furthermore, since basketball holds a relatively small stake in the UK sports economy in comparison to the US, future research in the UK may benefit from examining revenue-building sports, such as football, to better understand economic influences. The absence of athletic identity differential between genders in this study points towards a need for national governing bodies, such as England Basketball, to provide equal provision for sport across genders. Scientific enquiry investigating the influence of an individual's demographic characteristics on athletic role identification is scarce in the UK. If sport is to achieve a future in which there exists a level playing field, a greater empirical understanding of athlete's experiences is necessary.

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