Determining the Impact of a Psychoeducational Group on Student-Athlete Identity

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of a psychoeducational group on middle school student-athlete identity. Literature regarding stigmas, academic eligibility, time commitment, athletic burnout, substance usage, role conflict, and moral orientation, was reviewed to identify challenges faced by student-athletes. Supportive programs and the benefits of psychoeducational groups were discussed to provide information on combating these challenges. This study followed a quantitative, action research design, and the Academic and Athletic Identity Scale was administered as part of a pre and post-test data collection to measure a psychoeducational intervention. The data collected showed that the psychoeducational group intervention increased academic and athletic identity recognition. Limitations and implications were discussed to provide further recommendations for future research.

Keywords: psychoeducational, middle school, student-athlete, identity recognition

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Introduction

Student-athletes are at significant risk for developing athletic burnout, engaging in unhealthy coping mechanisms, and possessing underdeveloped academic ability when aligning with an athletically based identity (Bryson-Juhnke, Juhnke, & Henderson, 2013; Gould & Whitley, 2009; Richter, 2010). A student-athlete is defined as "a participant in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the educational institution in which he or she is enrolled" (Gerdy, 2000). Schools place an extremely large burden on student-athletes; they are expected to be successful in both the academic and athletic domain. They must meet the same academic demands as other students, while finding time to balance the rigorous athletic demands placed upon them by coaches, parents, and athletic directors. Student-athletes are expected to maintain personal self-esteem standards, as well as self-esteem standards imposed by coaches, friends and families alike. Student-athletes are placed into a unique set of circumstances, held to extremely high expectations, while receiving minimal accommodations to promote success.

The challenges and rigors faced by student-athletes play an extremely large role in helping to determine identity during adolescence (Proios, 2013). When individuals are in the process of determining identity, roles and responsibilities are considered. Some student-athletes may experience role conflict when the requirements of one demand become incompatible with another (Chartrand & Lent, 1987). When role conflict occurs, student-athletes may align with an 'athlete-student' identity if their athletic priorities take precedent over academic priorities. This is a problem because an 'athlete-student' identity can lead to unfavorable life outcomes, which can have significant short and long-term implications, as discussed further in the literature review. In order to help student-athletes achieve success on-and-off the playing field, it is

imperative that an effective intervention takes place designed to promote a balanced academic and athletic identity.

Overview

The National Federation of State High School Association (2011) estimates that more than 7.6 million United States students participated in competitive athletics during the 2010-2011 academic year. Furthermore, adjusted rules and regulations have been adopted by the New York State Public High School Association (NYSPHSAA), specifically geared towards seventh, eighth, and ninth grade participants, which is known as modified level athletics. According to the NYSPHSAA Modified Program Handbook (2009), it is the duty of all concerned with the modified program of athletics to do the following: (1) To conduct the athletic program so that educational objectives shall be achieved, so that the highest ideals of sportsmanship are upheld, so that no single phase of the educational program is promoted at the expense of other equally important programs; (2) To realize that the athletic program should be balanced with all other activities essential to youth, including those which may be conducted by out-of-school groups, to avoid an excessive load for any student; (3) To administer the educationally based athletic program in its proper perspective, with minimal loss of school time, limited publicity, competent officiating, and limited awards focused on participation.

In a study conducted by Harris, Alterkruse, and Engels (2003), a list of challenges was created to show the wide variety of issues student-athletes experience on a short-term and long-term basis. These challenges include devoting a considerable amount of time to athletics, underwhelming academic performance, role conflict, psychological distress, academic eligibility concerns, social isolation, and career concerns. These challenges can lead to athletic burnout and overall unhappiness in other aspects of life, such as social isolation and self-confidence. When

comparing the challenges discussed by Harris et al. (2003) and the philosophy discussed in

NYSPHSAA Modified Level Athletics Program Handbook (2009), it is clear that there is a

disconnect between accepted student-athlete standards and identity development (i.e. 'athlete-

student' versus student-athlete); this can play a significant role in determining future successes

on and off the athletic field. This is significant because the disconnect may cause conflict when

adolescent student-athletes are determining identity, defining roles and responsibilities,

acknowledging commitments, and recognizing moral standards.

The purpose of this research study is to determine the impact of a psychoeducational

intervention on adolescent student-athlete identity alignment. It was hypothesized that student-

athletes would see an increase in their academic and athletic identity recognition following the

psychoeducational intervention. The Academic and Athletic Identity Scale (AAIS, Yuhkmenko-

Lescroart, 2014) was used to measure student-athlete identity recognition before and after the

psychoeducational intervention to determine impact.

Review of the Literature

The following literature review will discuss challenges, as outlined by Harris et al.

(2003), faced by adolescent student-athletes, and how those challenges impact identity. The

impact of previously researched support groups will be discussed to provide evidence to the

benefit of a psychoeducational group structure, with an emphasis on using Self-Determination

Theory (SDT), towards a balanced student-athlete identity.

Challenges

Student-athletes face several challenges on a day-to-day basis that can have significant

immediate and long-term implications when left unaddressed. These challenges include

inaccurate stigmas, academic challenges, time commitment, athletic burnout, substance usage,

self-perception, role conflict, and moral orientation (Blann, 1985; Chartrend & Lent, 1987;

Parsons, 2013; Raedeke, 1997; Richter, 2010; Simons, Bosworth, Fujita & Jensen, 2007). In-

depth examples of these challenges and their impact on student-athletes' identity development

will be discussed.

Stigmas. Stigmas created to place student-athletes into groups can have a significant

impact on their immediate and long-term psychological well-being, as well as their internal

confidence to succeed (Simons et al., 2007). The creation of stigmas stems from society's desire

to place individuals into groups, which helps to simplify the social atmosphere by minimizing

and facilitating the comprehension of information (Allport, 1954). This placement of individuals

can develop into stereotypes, biased reactions, and potentially negatively associated attitudes

(Schneider, 2004). Traditionally, student-athletes are not usually thought of as stigmatized

because they privileged. Unlike most other stigmas, they chose to be athletes whereas most

stigmatized individuals have little choice in their stigma (Simons et al., 2007).

Student-athletes are a unique population who have been traditionally portrayed as being

coddled, as well as individuals who are seen as receiving preferential treatment (Ferrante &

Etzel, 1991). It should be noted that these stereotypes and misrepresentations of student-athletes

are not necessarily true of the entire population; however, they do create a negative academic

image surrounding all participants that are applicable to some individuals. Multiple sources

explain that school faculty and staff maintain the perception that student-athletes are not

motivated or intelligent enough to succeed academically while participating in school-sponsored

sports (Simons et al., 2007; Parsons, 2013). This perception can lead to student-athletes

questioning their ability to be academically successful, create self-doubt and shame, and

utilization of unhealthy coping mechanisms, which will be discussed further in the literature review.

Although most research has been conducted at an intercollegiate level, it is logical to presume that these stereotypes, stigmas and misconceptions also take place at a younger level. Engstrom, Sedlacek, and McEwen (1995) found that faculty members negatively questioned the academic qualifications and expectations of all athletes when compared to non-athletic students. These negative perceptions and stereotypes commonly associated with student-athletes have led to the 'dumb jock' stereotype (Simons et al., 2007). This stereotype suggests that student-athletes are seen as unqualified, illegitimate students whose only interest is athletics. Furthermore, the 'dumb jock' stereotype posits that student-athletes expect special treatment, in the form of minimal academic expectations, ability to take easy classes, and having others do their work, in order to remain eligible and participate in sports.

Academic eligibility and time commitment. Blann (1985) suggests student-athletes possess significantly underdeveloped academic skills and demonstrate less mature levels of education and career planning as compared to non-athletes. This could be due to several factors, including overwhelming amounts of time committed to sport participation and identity and role confusion (i.e. athletically aligned identity versus academically aligned identity). When student-athletes are faced with task of identifying goals and priorities, internal conflict may arise. On one hand, student-athletes are encouraged to participate in their sport and devote significant time to improving skills and abilities. On the other hand, student-athletes are mandated to fulfill academic requirements to improve learning and educational abilities. This internal conflict may arise due to underdeveloped time management skills, which ultimately impact sport participation and academic eligibility.

If student-athletes have not developed proper time management skills, it is likely that their athletic performance, social emotional needs, and/or their academic performance may suffer. Bryson-Juhnke et al. (2013) interviewed student-athletes who participated during football season. According to their findings, most high school football players practice two to four hours on school days, five to ten hours during the weekends (including games), participate in weight lifting, team socials, travel times, and other activities. Simons, Van Rheenen, and Covington (1999) reported that student-athletes devote upwards of 25 hours per week to time commitments associated with sport participation, while dealing with time spent towards managing fatigue and injury. Underdeveloped academic skills and time management ability can lead to student-athletes adopting an athletically based identity. When an adolescent's priorities are solely focused on developing sport-related skills with a majority of time devoted to sport, athletic burnout may arise (Raedeke, 1997).

Athletic burnout. It is clear that youth sport has become significantly more 'professionalized' in recent years due to more and more hours committed to in-season practice and training. There has been an emphasis placed on increasing the amount of games and tournaments participated in, higher demands for commitment in off-season strength training programs, and specialization in one particular sport (Gould & Whitley, 2009). These time commitments imposed by coaches and parents can lead to significant stress, anxiety, and ultimately, athletic burnout experienced at a very young age.

Athletic burnout is defined as a construct composed of three dimensions: (1) emotional and physical exhaustion stemming from psychosocial and physical demands associated with training; (2) reduced sense of accomplishment, which is characterized by feelings of inefficacy; (3) sport devaluation, which is defined as a negative, detached attitude towards sport (Isoard-

Gautheur, Guillet-Descas, & Lemyre, 2012; Raedeke, 1997). Raedeke (1997) explains that when

sports become devalued, athletes begin to reflect a loss of interest in the sport, as well as

negative attitudes regarding participation. This can lead to student-athletes experiencing a

reduced sense of accomplishment because certain goals or levels of performance are no longer

desirable.

In a study conducted by Martin and Horn (2013) the role of identity and passion was used

to predict burnout in adolescent female athletes. Their results suggest that harmonious passion

between sport and other life roles were identified as significant and negative predictors of

burnout. This means that athletes who exhibited levels of passion for their sport, combined with

equal passion for other life roles, were more apt to report lower levels of burnout. Their results

also suggest that high levels of obsessive passion in sport led to higher emotional and physical

levels of exhaustion, which can lead to more risky sport behavior (i.e., over training, playing

through injury, persistence to practice schedule under adverse conditions). Martin and Horn

(2013) posit that if harmonious levels of passion in other life roles diminish due to excessive

participation, it is likely that adolescent female student-athletes will experience athletic burnout

due to high levels of emotional and physical exhaustion. When student-athletes are faced with

challenges associated with athletic burnout, they often turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms,

which can include substance usage (Richter, 2010).

Substance usage. Student-athletes have to maintain good health and physical standing in

order to remain competitive and successful in their respective sports. Adolescent student-athletes

are confronted with significant changes in their social, psychological, and physical realms on a

day-to-day basis. These changes can bring about great opportunity, but can be extremely difficult

to cope with. According to Richter (2010), inappropriate coping behaviors can lead to

participation in risky behaviors, such as consumption of illicit and licit substance use. According

to Miller and Plant (1996), most adolescents have their first contact with licit and illicit drugs

during adolescence, which can have serious long-term consequences.

There has been minimal research conducted explaining substance use factors impacting

middle school student-athletes. For this literature review's purposes, it can be assumed that many

of these factors associated with substance use in high school and collegiate student-athletes are

similar to those factors in adolescent student-athletes. Hildebrand, Johnson, and Bogle (2001)

found that 36% of high school athletes were found to report alcohol use twice per week,

compared to 21% of nonathletic peers. According to Naylor, Gardner, and Zaichkowsky (2001),

alcohol and marijuana usage appeared to be particularly high among Caucasian high school

athletes. Although it cannot be assumed in all student-athlete subgroups, there is substantial

evidence suggesting that student-athletes generally report more substance use than their

nonathletic peers (Hildebrand et al., 2001).

The impact and consequences of substance use in student-athletes have been well

documented and studied. In a national study, King, Dowdall, and Wagner (2010) report that 80%

of high school coaches stated that substance usage was a problem among their student-athletes.

Mays, DePadilla, Thompson, Kushner, and Windle (2010) built on this research and posited that

sport participation among adolescents correlates with faster acceleration in problem alcohol

usage. Student-athletes who have identified problematic behaviors associated with substance use,

typically report coexisting concerns consisting, including poor relationships with teammates,

family pressures, anxiety, role confliction, and dysfunctional thoughts consisting of negative

self-perception (Donohue, Pitts, Gavrilova, Ayarza, & Cintron, 2013).

Self-perception and role confliction. Adolescence is considered to be a time of significant changes and transitions when young adults begin to take on new roles and responsibilities, while gaining a sense of independence (van Linden & Fertman, 1998). This is a time when young adults begin the process of the 'construction of the self,' where individuals begin to discover who they are and how they fit into the world (Harter, 1999). During this time, adolescents' self-concept may be impacted by comparison with peers and social groups. Ultimately, this can lead to decreased levels of self-esteem and perception.

Harter (1999) found that adolescents' self-esteem correlated most highly with physical appearance, followed by academic achievement, social ability, behavioral conduct, and athletic competence. Today's media generally portrays an unrealistic, narrow representation of how athletes, particularly female athletes, should physically appear. Typically, athletes tend to have more muscular, desirable physiques, which can lead to higher levels of self-esteem of student-athletes. When self-perception and esteem needs are being met through sport participation and priority is placed on physical development, role conflict may take place.

According to Chartrend and Lend (1987), student-athletes may experience role conflict, which takes place when the demands of one role become incongruent with the other. In situations regarding student-athletes, an athletic alignment becomes the mode of identification and less attention is devoted to other roles, which can result in negative long-term consequences. Role conflict plays a factor in the creation of stigmas associated with the academic abilities of all student-athletes, instead of a select group of individuals. Although these stigmas are not accurate of the entire population, role conflict can build upon and reinforce negative stigmas associated with student-athletes' academic ability.

When a student-athlete identifies primarily as an athlete during role conflict, the individual may disregard or neglect elements needed to become a successful student. This can ultimately impact college and career choices, as well as create concerns dealing with psychological distress (Harris, Alterkruse, & Engles, 2003). When student-athletes identify primarily as 'athlete-students,' moral orientation can become skewed and accepted societal behaviors may be modified to better reflect behaviors learned through sport participation.

Moral orientation. Sport participation is assumed by some individuals to automatically lead to positive character building experiences (Bredemeir & Shields, 2006). Bredemeir and Shields (2006) posit that on one hand, there are programs where athletes learn values and behaviors that lead to development of character. For example, the Fair Play for Kids program, a curriculum of educational activities designed to develop character, has proven to be effective at enhancing moral development. On the other hand, there are numerous studies that explain how sports can bring about less desired outcomes, such as poor grades, lack of clear career choices, and lack of educational advancement, in adolescents. Examples of negative outcomes are identified by Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, and Power, (2005) where 9% of athletes in grades five to eight acknowledged cheating in sports, and 13% intentionally tried to hurt an opponent.

In order to help explain these differences, Bredemeier and Shields (1986) developed the game reasoning theory. The game reasoning theory explains that athletes perceive sports as different from 'real life' because the artificial rules and roles in sports allow for the temporary removal of normal life morals. Bredemeier and Shields (1986) go on to explain that referees, or authority figures, are responsible for maintaining the rules and regulations, while assuring that play is fair. This makes it significantly easier for athletes to disregard the moral and ethical responsibilities found in sport participation. Rudd (2008) found that athletes used gamesmanship

strategies (i.e., trash talking, physically aggressive behaviors) because they are part of the game and it is a good strategy to gain an advantage on an opponent.

Supportive Programs Designed for Student-Athletes

A brief history on the initiatives and attempts to provide support to student-athletes will be discussed to highlight efforts made to promote student-athlete success. Psychoeducational group format and the use of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) with student-athletes will be discussed to provide knowledge on the impact and motivational techniques historically designed to promote motivation and growth. Previous literature will be highlighted to show the gap in adolescent student-athlete research that this study aims to address.

History. Student-athletes clearly face several challenges when managing academic, personal, and social needs with the extreme demands required during competitive athletics. In order to promote success on-and-off the playing field, it is imperative that a support system is implemented. Previous literature and research conducted with collegiate athletes suggests that academic support alone is not enough. According to Shriberg and Brodzinski (1984), previous support systems focused on three major areas: academic tutoring, time management, and scheduling of classes. The purpose of these programs was to increase academic skills by providing more individual attention in time management and study skills. Given the complexity of the demands student-athletes face, the National Associational of Academic Advisors determined that personal issues were being neglected.

In the early 1980's, a task force consisting of the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the National Association of Academic Advisors was established (Harris et al., 2003). This joint task force created several national workshops, which provided education on the developmental, personal,

and social needs of student-athletes (Petitpas, Buntrock, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 1995). This increase in attention has led to the creation of other specialty fields, including sports psychology and counseling, with specific attention placed on performance enhancement (Chartrend & Lent, 1987; Pettipas, Buntrock, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 1995). In 1991, The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) developed a life skills program for student-athletes: Challenging Athletic Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS)/Life Skills (NCAA, 1998). This program was designed to help student-athletes: (1) Develop positive self-esteem and maximize intellectual development; (2) develop leadership skills; (3) develop a respect for diversity; (4) create meaningful interpersonal relationships; (5) promote community involvement; and, (6) build partnerships between the NCAA and the community (NCAA, 1998).

  Psychoeducational groups. Based on the previous literature, the group setting that would be most applicable for the student-athlete population would be a psychoeducational intervention. The primary goal of a psychoeducational group is to prevent dysfunctional behaviors from occurring in the future, while providing education and support (Capuzzi, Gross, & Stauffer, 2010). Psychoeducational groups are intended for populations consisting of 'normally' functioning individuals who feel threatened by an environmental issue, encounter a developmental transition, or in the midst of coping with a crisis (Capuzzi et al., 2010). In addition, psychoeducational group approaches attempt to create and maintain an environment where members have the opportunity to create a sense of belonging, experience commonality, practice new skills, and learn from others (Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill, 2002). These groups are quite common in schools due to their educational format (Capuzzi et al., 2011).

  Danish and Hale (1981) suggested an educational-development framework, which is designed to promote the athletic, academic and personal development of student-athletes. This

perspective focuses on the individual as a whole, as opposed to just as an athlete. The approach can also incorporate changing needs and skills of student-athletes over an extended period of time and various situations. Danish and Hale (1981) posit that when the psychoeducational format is used correctly, the problems and developmental issues of student-athletes can be addressed without labeling and blame. Furthermore, their research posits that the psychoeducational group emphasizes individuals' desire for acquiring skills, focuses on their capacity for learning, provides opportunity for modeling appropriate behaviors, and learned skills can be applied to a broader setting.

In response to Danish and Hale's (1981) research, Danish, D'Augelli, and Ginsberg (1984) created a collegiate psychoeducational model designed for the delivery of sports counseling services in a human development perspective. Their model is future oriented, with the goal to develop personal competence, the ability to life plan, develop self-resilience, and to identify healthy coping mechanisms. Danish et al. (1984) report that this group helped collegiate student-athletes to understand the impact of retirement, identify needs that are not being met through participation, and alternatives for meeting their needs. Harris, Alterkruse, and Engles (2003) developed a similar psychoeducational support format, which was designed for freshman intercollegiate student-athletes. Their groups talked about topics consisting of time management and studying skills, stress management, sexual responsibility, alcohol and drug abuse, career exploration and development, and life as a student-athlete. Their qualitative research found that group participants were more able to relax, relieve stress, and learn about ways to be more successful in the classroom (Harris et al., 2003).

Self-determination theory. Understanding motivation in the context of athletics is an extremely difficult, yet fundamental, task in the field of sport psychology (Readdy, Raabe, and

Harding, 2014). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theoretical approach that could explain the implications when there is a lack of psychosocial support in athletics. SDT, a macrotheory of human motivation, addresses basic issues, such as personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals, energy, vitality, and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT differentiates from contemporary theories of motivation by positing that the type, or quality, of motivation is more important than the total amount of motivation used in predicting outcomes associated with psychological health and well-being.

Deci and Ryan's (2008) research posits that the most central distinction in SDT is between autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation is made up of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that individuals identify. When individuals are autonomously motivated, they experience volition, or a self-endorsement of their actions. In comparison, controlled motivation consists of external regulation, where one's behavior is a function of reward or punishment, as well as introjected regulation, where the regulation of action has been partially internalized and motivated by factors such as approval and avoidance (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Their research posits that when people are controlled, they feel pressure to think and behave in ways designed for approval or avoidance of shame. Finally, SDT hypothesizes that intrinsic and self-determined motivation are more likely to occur when an individual's three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Research conducted by Readdy et al. (2014) was designed to evaluate the effects of an offseason extrinsic rewards program on student-athletes' motivation. Collegiate football players' offseason program was divided into three different phases, where student-athletes were given opportunities to earn 'points' for a variety of accomplishments (i.e., setting a personal record in

the weight room, earning an 'A' or 'B' on assignments). Student-athletes could also lose points

for specific negative behaviors (i.e., poor performance in workouts, receiving poor grades).

Throughout the process, the top 25 cumulative point earners had their pictures placed on the wall

in the main hallway of the football offices. Before any points were earned, student-athletes were

asked to rank how much they would like to receive various rewards to increase the experience of

autonomy.

Quantitative analyses of their results indicated no statistically significant change in

psychological need fulfillment, a decrease in motivation and extrinsic regulation, and increases

in intrinsic motivation and competency. Readdy et al. (2014) report that as a whole, participants

expressed a strong belief that there was not a correlation between the points they earned and their

football skills; however, there were minor connections between behaviors reinforced by the point

system and on-field performance at the physical, academic, and psychological level. Student-

athletes reported that the program helped to, "add all the skills together to achieve a goal" and

"develop mental toughness to achieve goals" (Readdy et al., p. 165, 2014).

Isoard-Gautheur et al. (2012) conducted research on the perceived coaching style on

burnout propensity in youth athletes using an SDT perspective. Isoard-Gautheur et al. (2012)

posit that a coach was seen as 'controlling' when they were perceived as authoritarian and

coercive when student-athletes do not feel autonomous in making choices. In comparison, a

coach is seen as 'supportive' when they are perceived as explaining and justifying in their

decisions, encouraging individuals to participate, and giving student-athletes the option to choose

themselves. Their results show that coaching style is significantly related to the psychological

needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Finally, their results also show that motivation

is positively linked to a reduced sense of accomplishment and sport devaluation (Isoard-

Gautheur et al., (2012).

There is a significant gap in existing literature and research conducted on the student-

athlete population at a middle-school level, specifically regarding identity alignment, athletic

burnout, and societal demands. Studies conducted at a middle-school level among adolescent

populations are significantly more rigorous and time-consuming due to barriers consisting of

minor consent and parental assent. It is also important to note that based on previous literature,

adolescent needs consisting of personal and social growth are less of a priority due to the

attention focused on academic achievement.

The major themes found in this literature review suggest that student-athletes face

significant challenges in various aspects of their personal, social, and academic well-being.

Qualitative research conducted by Klug (2006) suggests that helping student-athletes to perform

at their peak potential, while developing the life skills that they will need after their days of

competing end, requires greater attention than most student-athletes receive. Balancing

academic, social, and sport-related commitments can result in identity misalignment, poor

academic performance, athletic burnout, and role confusion, among other outcomes. When these

negative outcomes come to fruition, unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance usage,

may be used to create a heightened sense of self-esteem and acceptance. The long-term

implications of identity misalignment, poor academic performance, athletic burnout, and role

confusion can lead to limiting career choices, limited educational opportunities after high school,

and decreased feelings of accomplishment.

Based on the literature, it is clear that adolescent student-athletes need a well-balanced,

supportive setting designed to assist with the process of recognizing priorities during identity

alignment. Due to the extreme pressures and commitments associated with participating in athletics today, it is easy to understand how student-athletes may prioritize athletic identities and success on the field over academic identities and future success off the field. This research study aims to address challenges currently faced by adolescent student-athletes, as identified by Harris et al. (2003), with the use of a psychoeducational group intervention. This study aims to answer the following research question: What is the impact of a psychoeducational intervention on adolescent student-athlete identity?

Method

This study follows a quantitative, action research design to test the hypothesis that student-athletes will see an increase in athletic and academic identity following the psychoeducational group intervention. The action research design in this study involves using a psychoeducational group intervention designed to impact student-athlete identity, in a way that helps student-athletes develop a more balanced identity schema. The intervention consists of a six-session psychoeducational format, where topics such as identity recognition, anxiety, stress, time management, substance usage, peer pressure, and social media, are discussed. A paired t-test was used to compare data collected before and after the intervention. The data was used to calculate changes in academic and athletic characteristics and qualities within student-athletes. The data collected from this study attempts to determine whether or not a psychoeducational group intervention impacted student-athlete identity.

Setting

The middle school selected for this study is located in a rural-suburban school district in western New York. The middle school includes 677 total students in grades 7 and 8, with a primarily Caucasian population. Of this population, 51% are male and 49% are female. Student

race was represented by 92% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, 1% African American, 1% Asian, and 1% Multiracial. In comparison, there were 20 group participants; 80% of the population is male and 20% is female. The racial demographics of the group was represented by 90% Caucasian and 10% Hispanic.

Participants

25 student-athletes were identified as eligible participants based on a self-reported needs assessment or school counselors' recommendations. The researcher met individually with each participant to review the needs assessment and determine if the candidate was a potential fit for the psychoeducational intervention. Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) students must be enrolled in an extracurricular sporting commitment; (2) students must not be eligible for other counseling groups provided by the Counseling Center (i.e. anxiety groups, stress groups, peer relations group…etc.); and, (3) students must be willing to commit to six weeks of group participation.

Out of the 25 student-athletes recruited, it was determined that 20 student-athletes were eligible for participation. The final number was determined after the researcher met individually with potential participants, reviewed the completed needs assessment with prospective candidates, and spoke with other counseling center staff/supervisors for final approval. The five members who were excluded from participating were deemed to be better fits for other counseling groups provided at the middle school, which took precedent over this psychoeducational intervention.

Procedures

The psychoeducational group intervention was initiated as part of the overarching group counseling curriculum implemented at the middle school. The primary goal of the overarching

group counseling curriculum is to help students overcome barriers to success in various aspects

of their lives. Prior to the psychoeducational intervention, The College at Brockport, SUNY

Institutional Board Review (IRB) was contacted for approval. Approval was granted from the

IRB on December 18, 2015. Participants were required to receive parent/guardian permission

prior to participation. Group participants were given a permission slip and consent form to be

reviewed, signed, and returned prior to participating in the group intervention.

This psychoeducational group intervention met weekly, for 45 minutes, over a six-week

span. Meetings took place in the common room located in the counseling center. Participants

were required to report to classes, for 15 minutes, prior to meetings to ensure that academic

assignments and responsibilities were not neglected.

Materials

As part of the pre-test/post-test intervention, participants were asked to complete the

Academic and Athletic Identity Scale (AAIS, Yuhkmenko-Lescroart, 2014). The AAIS is an 11-

question survey that uses a 6-point Likert scale to measure academic and athletic identity.

Participants are asked to indicate how various qualities are central to their sense of being, with

'1' indicating 'Not central to my sense of self' and '6' indicating 'Very central to my sense of

self.'

The first five questions on the AAIS concern academic identity qualities, and the last six

questions concern athletic identity qualities of the participants. A copy of the AAIS can be found

in Appendix A. All of these questions are highly applicable to determining how impactful the

psychoeducational group intervention was on student-athlete identity based on the content and

factorial validity testing of the AAIS (Yuhkmenko-Lescroart, 2014).

Psychoeducational Group Format

In order to provide ample support to all participants, this researcher divided the student-athletes into two groups; group one consisted of ten participants and group two consisted of nine participants. The rationale behind dividing participants into two groups comes from the notion that psychoeducational group formats are most effective with twelve or less members (Capuzzi et al., 2010). Smaller groups should provide participants with the opportunity to gain ample knowledge, build relationships, and have the opportunity to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

The group curriculum used for this psychoeducational intervention is based loosely off a similar study conducted by Harris et al. (2003). The curriculum used in this intervention stems from the belief that student-athletes align with an athletic identity because they are underprepared to perform at a high level of academics, due to various reasons. An outline of the psychoeducational curriculum is provided in Table 1. The topics chosen for this specific intervention are taken from a similar study conducted by Harris et al. (2003).

Table 1: Psychoeducational Group Curriculum

Week One: Introduction
Week Two: Stress, Anxiety, Identity and Athletic Burnout
Week Three: Time Management
Week Four: Drugs/Alcohol/Peer Pressure/Bullying
**Week Five: Social Media Dangers, Identity off the Field**
Week Six: Termination

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place during the first and last session of the psychoeducational group intervention. The AAIS was administered to participants during the initial fifteen minutes of group. Participants were asked to separate themselves throughout the room, complete the survey, and turn the completed survey in to this researcher when finished. Participants' results were kept anonymous in order to mitigate bias and ensure confidentiality. To ensure anonymity, each pre-

test and post-test had a seven-digit code placed at the top of their survey prior to administration.

In order to comply with IRB rules and regulations, surveys and results were locked in a file

cabinet located in the counseling center office. The results of this data will be saved for one year,

at which point the results will be destroyed. A paired t-test was run after all data was collected in

order to analyze the impact of the psychoeducational group on student-athlete identity.

Results

Twenty participants took the AAIS as part of a pre-test/post-test intervention used to

measure the impact of a psychoeducational group on student-athlete identity. A paired t-test was

used to compare means before and after the intervention in order to measure changes in athletic

and academic identity. Raw data from questions on the AAIS (N=11) show that there was an

increase in the identity mean following the psychoeducational intervention. The data in Table 1

Table 1: Raw Data Means Following Psychoeducational Intervention
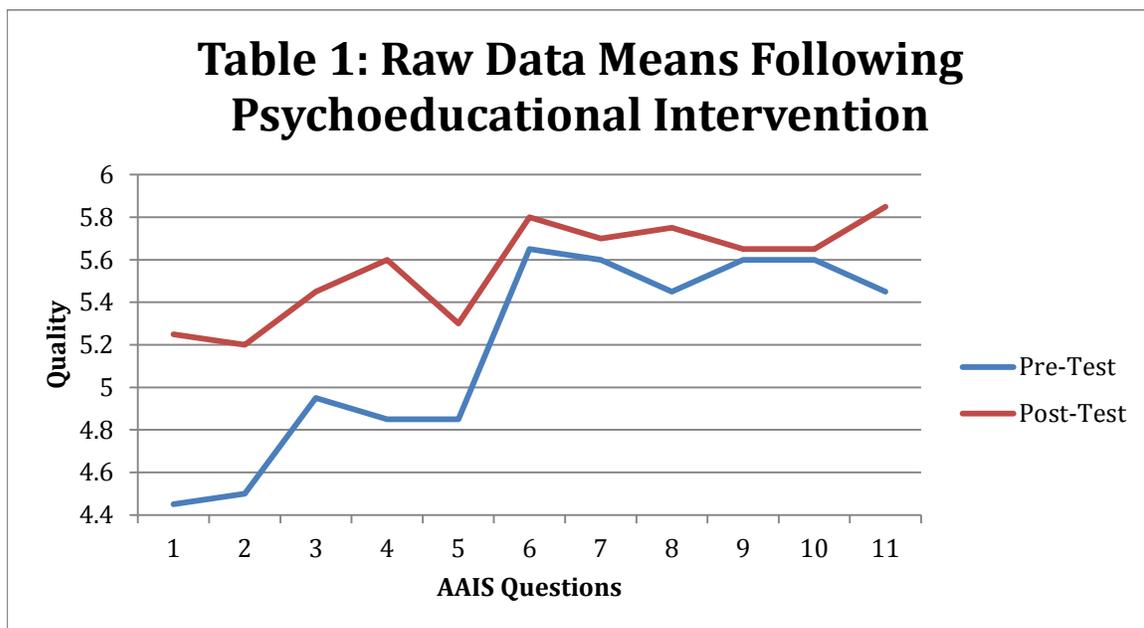
helps confirm the original hypothesis: student-athletes will see an increase in athletic and

academic identity following the psychoeducational intervention.

SPSS software was used to run advanced analytics in order to provide evidence of significance in the changes of pre-test and post-test means, as seen in Table 1. The paired samples t-test revealed that six of eleven questions were statistically significant (p > 0.05 on all items). These items include the following questions: "Being satisfied with my academic work" (p = 0.037); "Doing well in school" (p = 0.004); "Getting good grades" (p = 0.002); Having a high GPA (p = 0.029); "Being athletic" (p = 0.028); and, "Doing well during my sport competition" (p = 0.029).

AAIS Questions	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Difference in Means	Standard Deviation	Standard Mean Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (1 tailed)
Being a capable student	4.45	5.25	0.8	-1.28	0.287	-1.39	-2	2.8	19	0.06
Being satisfied with my academic work	4.5	5.2	0.7	1.66	0.37	-1.48	0.076	1.89	19	0.037
Doing well in school	4.95	5.45	0.5	0.761	0.17	-0.856	-0.144	2.94	19	0.004
Getting good grades	4.85	5.6	0.75	1.02	0.228	-1.23	-0.273	3.29	19	0.002
Having a high GPA	4.85	5.3	0.45	0.998	0.223	-0.917	0.017	2.02	19	0.029
Being a capable athlete	5.65	5.8	0.15	0.587	0.132	-0.425	0.125	1.14	19	0.136
Being a good athlete	5.6	5.7	0.1	0.718	0.161	-0.436	0.236	0.623	19	0.271
Being athletic	5.45	5.75	0.3	0.657	0.147	-0.607	0.007	2.04	19	0.028
Being proud to be an athlete	5.6	5.65	0.05	0.826	0.185	-0.436	0.336	0.271	19	0.395
Being satisfied with my athletic achievements	5.6	5.65	0.05	0.605	0.135	-0.333	0.233	0.37	19	0.358
Doing well during sport competitions	5.45	5.85	0.4	0.883	0.197	-0.813	0.013	2.03	19	0.029

Chart 1: Paired Differences

The t-scores analyzed (critical value = 1.729) confirm that seven out of eleven questions were deemed to be statistically significant. These questions include the following: "Being a capable student" (t = 2.8); "Being satisfied with my academic work" (t = 1.89); "Doing well in school" (t = 2.94); "Getting good grades" (t = 3.29); "Having a high GPA" (t = 2.02); "Being athletic" (t = 2.04); and, "Doing well during sport competition" (t = 2.03). The t-scores collected suggest that "Being a capable student" was statistically significant (t = 2.8), but the p value suggests otherwise (p = 0.06).

Using the combined t-score and p-value results, there was a significant increase regarding identity recognition in the following data taken from Chart 1:

"Being satisfied with my academic work" prior to the intervention (M = 4.5, SD = 1.66)

and following the intervention (M = 5.2, SD = 1.66), $t(19) = 1.89$, p = 0.037;

"Doing well in school" prior to the intervention (M = 4.5, SD = 0.761) and following the

intervention (M = 4.95, SD = 0.761), $t(19) = 2.94$, p = 0.004);

"Getting good grades" prior to the intervention (M = 4.85, SD = 0.75) and following the

intervention (M = 5.6, SD = 0.75), $t(19) = 3.29$, p = 0.002;

"Having a high GPA" prior to the intervention (M = 4.85, SD = 0.998) and following the

intervention (M = 5.3, SD = 0.998), $t(19) = 2.02$, p = 0.029;

"Being athletic" prior to the intervention (M = 5.45, SD = 0.657) and following the

intervention (M = 5.75, SD = 0.657), $t(19) = 2.04$, p = 0.028; and,

"Doing well during sport competition: prior to the intervention (M = 5.45, SD = 0.883)

and following the intervention (M = 5.85, SD = 0.883), $t(19) = 2.03$, p = 0.029.

This data shows that there was an increase in academic and athletic identity recognition

following the psychoeducational intervention. The original hypothesis, student-athletes will see

an increase in academic and athletic identity recognition, was confirmed by these results;

however, based on raw data and t-scores, there appears to be a larger increase in academic

identity compared to athletic identity. The average difference between means in academic

identity was 0.64 and the average difference between means in athletic identity was 0.175. This

suggests that athletic identity recognition was stronger than academic identity recognition prior

to the psychoeducational intervention.

Discussion

The question this study attempted to answer is, what is the impact of a psychoeducational

group on student-athlete identity? This researcher hypothesized that student-athletes would see

an increase in academic and athletic identity recognition following the psychoeducational intervention. The results of this study suggest that the psychoeducational group had a strong, positive impact on student-athlete academic identity, and a mild, positive impact on student-athlete athletic identity. The final results support the original hypothesis because there was a large difference in the increase of means in academic identity (+ 0.64), as well as a small increase in athletic identity (+ 0.175).

The results of this psychoeducational intervention are highly promising when analyzing the raw data mean results, as well as the results of the paired t-test. Raw data responses on all eleven questions on the AAIS increased from the initial pre-test results to the post-test outcome following the psychoeducational intervention. Additionally, there was a larger increase in the differences in means on the academic identity recognition compared to the increase on the athletic identity recognition. This suggests that prior to the psychoeducational intervention, student-athletes valued athletically based priorities more than academically based priorities. This is consistent with previous literature stating that student-athletes value athletics over academics (Chartrend & Lent, 1997; Ferrante & Etzel, 1991; Harris et al., 2003; Raedeke, 1997).

Data used from the paired t-test results show that the increased mean on four out of five academically based questions were statistically significant. Additionally, the increased mean on two out of six athletically based questions were statistically significant. The data from the results that were not statistically significant suggest that the increases in mean of identity recognition were likely due to chance. With that being said, this researcher is interested in determining if there is a relationship between the questions, "Being a capable student" and "Being a capable athlete." This researcher is interested to understand how adolescent student-athletes are

interpreting the term 'capable'. The word 'capable' can be seen as a subjective term, and this researcher wonders if a more concrete term would be more applicable for this survey.

Athletically based identities saw an overall mean increase, but only two of six questions proved to be statistically significant using a paired t-test. The two questions that saw statistically significant increases were "Being athletic" and "Doing well in my sport competition." This researcher wonders if these questions proved to be statistically significant due to elements of athletic burnout found within the student-athletes participating in the intervention. Previous research on athletic burnout suggests that student-athletes feel less sense of accomplishment, which is associated with "Doing well in my sport competition," and physical exhaustion due to training, which is associated with "Being athletic," while experiencing athletic burnout (Isoard-Gautheur et al., 2012; Raedeke, 1997; Yuhkmenko-Lescroart, 2014). Martin and Horn (2013) conducted research that suggests student-athletes will see other life roles diminish (i.e. academics) when faced with athletic burnout, which may explain the results found in this current study.

Limitations

Several limitations in this study should be noted. First, the overall understanding of the AAIS and lack of interest in responding accurately may have conflicted or skewed the data. There is always a concern of bias on a self-reporting survey; however, in this case it is possible that bias may have been higher due to irrational beliefs, fear of judgment, specifically fear of being 'graded,' or simple misunderstanding of questions due to the young age of participants, among others. In order to mitigate this concern, future researchers may be inclined to spend more time explaining the AAIS with participants. Participants should be more thoroughly briefed

about the importance of honesty, nonjudgmental attitudes' of researchers, and rights and responsibilities' of participants.

Another limitation of this study is that many of the students who participated in the study were utilizing individual counseling services simultaneously. It is probable that some of these students discussed issues pertaining to stress, anxiety, or athletic/academic performance, among others; therefore, it cannot be assumed that the results are solely based on the group intervention. This researcher did not use individual counseling as exclusion for participation. In order to mitigate this concern, it may be beneficial for researchers to select participants who are not participating in individual counseling sessions. This would help to further elaborate on the impact of the psychoeducational intervention on student-athlete identity recognition.

Another limitation encountered consists of the small sample size (N = 20) used in the intervention. This sample was a poor representation of the entire population, which ultimately limited the generalizability of the results. In order to make results more generalizable and accurate, it is imperative that a larger participant pool is available. One way to mitigate this concern would be to make the intervention available to student-athletes from multiple school districts. This would help to increase the sample size and allow for more diversity within the sample. The sample size used for this particular study was not representative of the student-athlete population. By having a larger population to choose from, it is likely that the results obtained will be more representative of the impact of the intervention on student-athletes' academic and athletic identity.

Finally, the gap in time between the initial distributions of needs assessments and the second group intervention may have limited aspects of this study. The initial needs assessment for both groups were administered in early October and the second group psychoeducational

intervention did not start until the first week of January. It is possible that the student-athletes in the second group had less of a need to participate in the group intervention because of participation in individual counseling sessions or natural reductions in stress and anxiety, among others. With that being said, it is also possible that this gap in time may have added to participants' levels of stress and anxiety. This gap in time may have significantly impacted the priorities and qualities of participants' athletic and academic identities during the pre-test and post-test AAIS administration. In order to mitigate this concern, it is imperative that future researchers conduct interventions simultaneously after distribution of needs assessments. Results of the AAIS are more likely to be reliable and repeatable when multiple groups have the same gap in time between distribution of needs assessments and the intervention.

Implications for Future Research

The positive increase in academic and athletic identity recognition in student-athletes reinforces the notion that more research is needed in the area of student-athlete identity. Specifically, there is an extremely pressing need to conduct research at the middle school level. This is a pressing need because there is little existing research that explains and discusses athletic and academic identity conflict during adolescences. In order to further understand how to remove barriers to success, it is imperative that future research attempts to answer questions regarding maturity level, career choices, role conflict, and identity recognition. Additionally, middle school is an ideal setting to conduct this research because, "young people undergo more rapid and profound personal changes between the ages ten and fifteen than at any other time in their lives" (NMSA, 2003, p.3).

With that being said, this current study adds to the existing literature and further builds off work conducted with high school and college level student-athletes (Danish et al., 1984;

Danish & Hale, 1981; Harris et al., 2003; Ryska & Vestal, 2004). Psychoeducational groups

should continue to be used in a school setting for student-athlete education and identity

recognition to help remove barriers to success. The reason a psychoeducational format is ideal

with student-athletes is because of their educational environment, supportive format, and the fact

that the group can be ran with a 'coaching' format, similar to the experience of playing a sport

(Capuzzi et al., 2011). Furthermore, this format can be seen as less daunting and stigmatized

compared to traditional therapeutic groups.

   For future studies, this researcher recommends adding a larger, more representative

sample size. This can be accomplished by offering psychoeducational interventions to student-

athletes from other school districts. The benefit of having a larger sample size will provide

researchers the opportunity to compare student-athlete identity by gender, age, sports

participated in, and GPA, among other variables. It is assumed that in doing so, more

conclusions regarding identity conflict can be drawn. These conclusions can help educate

parents, teachers, and coaches on ways to remove barriers to success and push student-athletes to

fulfill their peak potential.

   This researcher also recommends conducting research with student-athletes not receiving

any other form of counseling (i.e. individual or therapeutic group counseling). By utilizing this

approach, the impact of a psychoeducational format can be more concrete and exact. In this

study, student-athletes had the opportunity to receive individual counseling concurrently with the

psychoeducational intervention. The impact of this psychoeducational intervention cannot be

fully determined due to extraneous circumstances. Additionally, steps should be taken to

determine a consistent time between initial needs assessment administration and the

psychoeducational group intervention. The differing gaps in time during this study may have

impacted the results collected during pre and post-test data collection during the AAIS

administration. It is highly imperative that all extraneous variables, such as time, be accounted

for so that future findings can be more statistically significant and accurate.

Future researchers may be interested in collecting qualitative, or mixed methods results,

in order to gather feedback on areas of greater need or feelings commonly associated with

student-athlete identity recognition. The questions on the AAIS are very specific to feelings of

accomplishment, pride, and overall success. Future researchers may be interested in learning

more about stress, anxiety, and pressure associated with playing school-sponsored sports. It is

assumed that this data will be beneficial in developing preemptive psychosocial techniques and

education that can be used to help student-athletes make independent, sound decisions regarding

their future. Furthermore, qualitative research can give future researchers topics to incorporate

and expand on, which student-athletes may see as more beneficial to their needs.

Finally, it may be beneficial for future researchers to allow for more time to conduct

research, as well as add a follow-up with student-athletes to see if the psychoeducational

intervention provided a more permanent change. By following-up with student-athletes after the

psychoeducational intervention has been completed, researchers can determine if the intervention

has had a temporary or long-lasting impact. The goal of this study was simply to determine

whether or not there was an impact on student-athlete identity following the intervention. In

order to measure the impact on future success, longitudinal research that can be measured

throughout student-athletes' high school years should be conducted. This can provide a more

complete picture to the impact and future benefits of psychoeducational group interventions.

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Appendix A

Academic and Athletic Identity Scale

<u>Directions</u>: Imagine that the figure below is a diagram of you.

The middle circle (6) is made up of qualities or characteristics that are very central to your sense of who you are as a person. The next circle (5 or 4) is made up of qualities that are quite central to your sense of self, and the outer circle (3 or 2) is made up of qualities that are somewhat important to your sense of self. Qualities that are not part of your sense of identity belong outside the circles (1).

To get a good idea of how you will **compare and rate** the different qualities, <u>please read all of the items before you go back to rate each of them</u>. Please think about this figure as you rate the items below. Most people will use a variety of answers, rating some qualities as very central and others as less central to their sense of self.
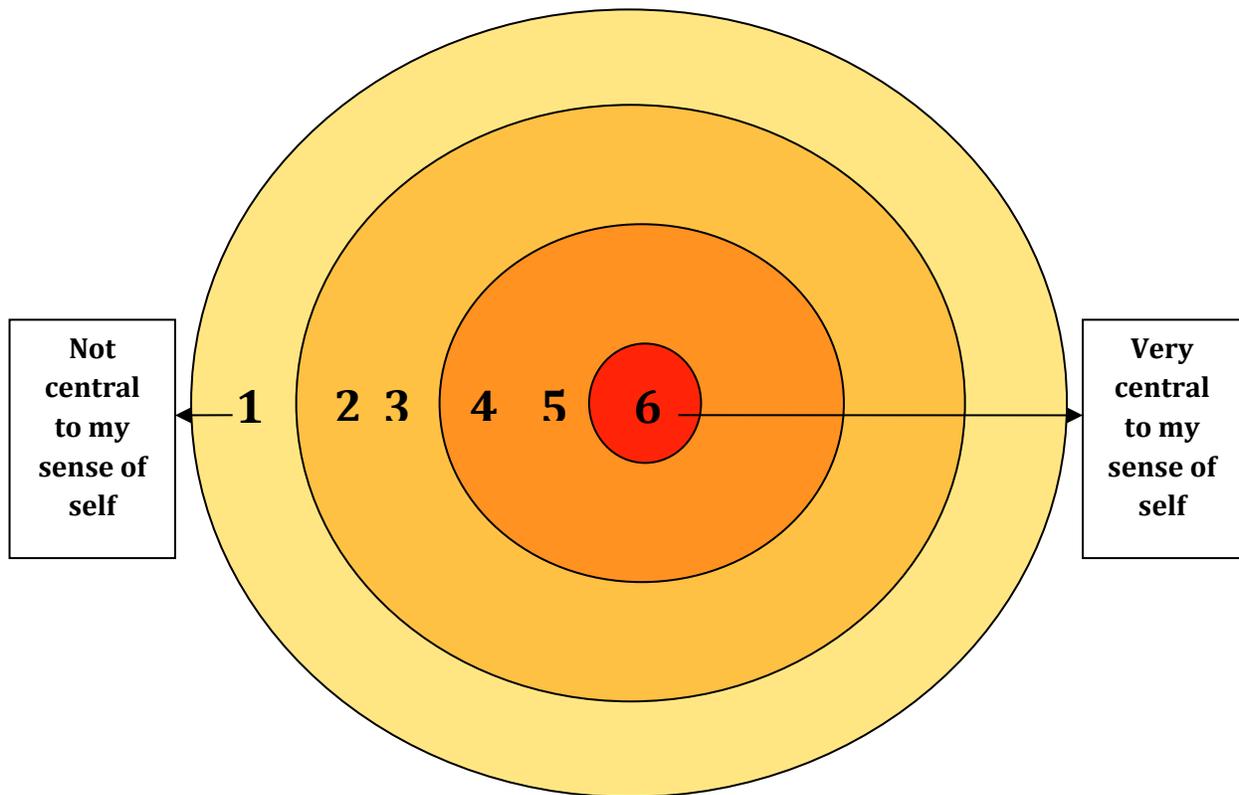
Please indicate how central to your sense of who you are is each of the following characteristics or qualities. **If a quality seems good or desirable to you but is not an important part of who you are, you should answer "Not central to my sense of self" (1).** Circle the response that best represents your opinion.

How central to your sense of who you are is each of the following characteristics or qualities…	Not central to my sense of self	Somewhat important to my sense of self (2 or 3)		Quite central to my sense of self (4 or 5)		Very central to my sense of self
1 Being a capable student.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2 Being satisfied with my academic work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3 Doing well in school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4 Getting good grades.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5 Having high GPA.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6 Being a capable athlete.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 Being a good athlete.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8 Being athletic.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9 Being proud to be an athlete.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10 Being satisfied with my athletic achievements.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11 Doing well during sport competitions.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Reference

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