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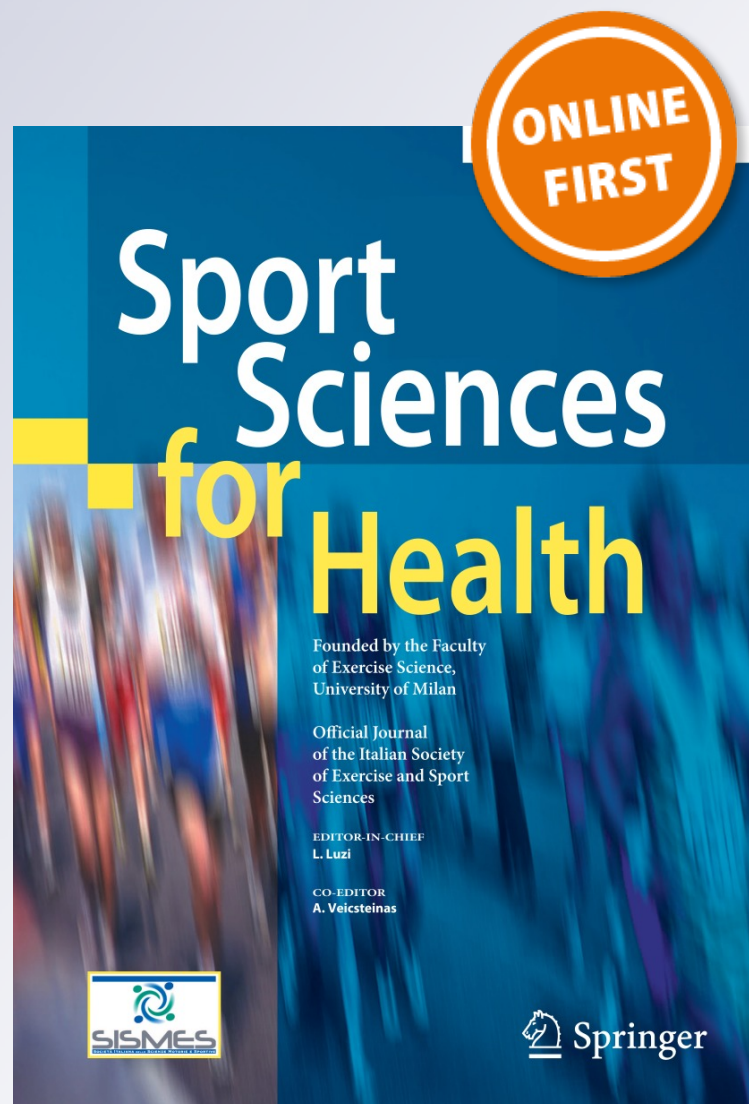
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SHORT COMMUNICATION

I am what I am? The Baller Identity Measurement Scale (BIMS) with a Division I football team in American higher education

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Scott Bukstein · Ginny McPherson-Botts ·
Suzanne Malia Lawrence**

Abstract The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of culture and socio-cultural contexts on academic and athletic motivation of American male college football student-athletes. This study measured perceptions of student-athletes' athletic and academic identities tied to motivation for performance using a culturally relevant assessment tool, the Baller Identity Measurement Scale.

Keywords Identity · Student-athlete · Motivation · Baller

Introduction and literature review

American male collegiate student-athletes in high-profile sports such as football and men's basketball are exposed to unique cultural dynamics that encompass several constructs with respect to attempting to have a healthy individual identity and developing the requisite motivation to succeed athletically and academically. Athletic identity salience and foreclosure [1, 2], motivations of student-athletes [3, 7, 8], cultural approaches to revenue sports in the context of identity [4], and global identity approaches to elite sport participation and higher education [5, 7–9] are

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key to new knowledge production as researchers assess academic and athletic identities.

Brewer et al. defined "athletic identity" as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role" in these researchers' investigation of the self-identity of athletes through the development of a 10-item Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) for practitioners to assess an individual's athletic identity [2]. These same researchers determined athlete identity to be a socially defined one-dimensional construct and competitive, sport-specific identity [2]. In a related study, Beamon qualitatively examined the athletic identity of African-American male former Division I student-athletes, and found that respondents displayed athletic identity foreclosure marked by a self-identity and social identity centered primarily or exclusively around the "athletic self," which negatively affected their attempt to transition out of athletics [1]. Beamon investigated race as a factor in athletic identity salience and foreclosure with respect to White and African-American student-athletes, and concluded that "race seems to affect athletic identity foreclosure among athletes similar to the manner in which it has been found to play a role in other areas such as career maturity, sport socialization, sports career aspirations, and student-athlete academic success, with African-Americans having a more difficult experience than Whites" [1].
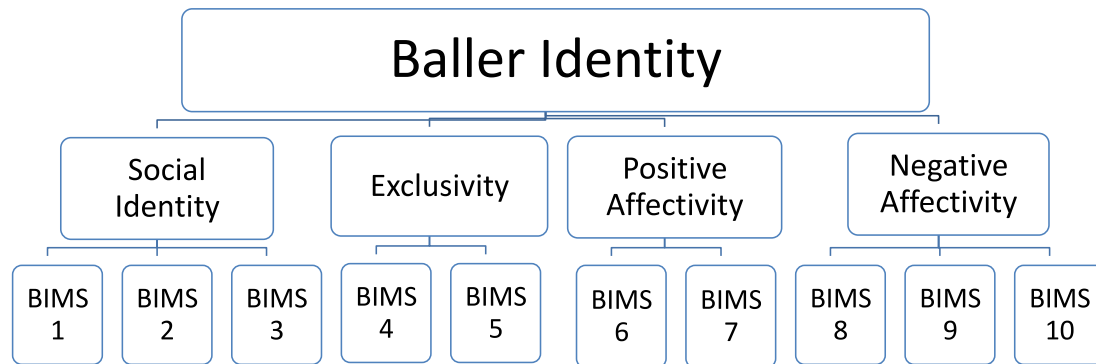
Gaston-Gayles developed the Student Athletes' Motivation Toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ) to learn more about what motivates student-athletes [3]. The SAMSAQ is a measurement scale that examines academic and athletic motivation as a key variable in predicting academic performance of student-athletes. Gaston-Gayles found that academic motivation, irrespective of athletic motivation, is important in predicting and determining future academic success, and that ethnicity was significant in the model (e.g., minority

Baller Identity Measurement Scale (BIMS)

Baller Identity

| Social Identity | Exclusivity | Positive Affectivity | Negative Affectivity |

| BIMS 1 | BIMS 2 | BIMS 3 | BIMS 4 | BIMS 5 | BIMS 6 | BIMS 7 | BIMS 8 | BIMS 9 | BIMS 10 |

BIMS First Order Factors and Corresponding Items

First Order Factors	BIMS Items
Social Identity	
BIMS 1	I consider myself a Baller.
BIMS 2	I have many goals related to being a Baller.
BIMS 3	Most of my friends are Ballers.
Exclusivity	
BIMS 4	Ballin' is the most important part of my life.
BIMS 5	I spend more time thinking about being a Baller than anything else.
Positive Affectivity	
BIMS 6	When I play Ball, I feel good about myself.
BIMS 7	Other people see me mainly as a Baller.
Negative Affectivity	
BIMS 8	I feel bad about myself when I do poorly when I don't Ball out.
BIMS 9	Ballin' is the only important thing in my life.
BIMS 10	I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not play Ball.

Fig. 1 Baller Identity Measurement Scale (BIMS). Source: [4]

students may enter college with less academic preparation and lower levels of academic motivation) [3]. Several researchers have applied the SAMSAQ to international contexts to further examine the link between motivation and academic performance [8], the impact of culture on academic performance and career development [5], and "dual career" (i.e., sport and education) aspirations and pathways for student-athletes [9].

Harrison et al. developed a new measurement scale termed the Baller Identity Measurement Scale (BIMS), which is adapted from the AIMS and also builds on the SAMSAQ (see Fig. 1) [4]. All three of these measurement scales help practitioners analyze and understand how athletic and academic identities impact motivation and performance. One of the primary differentiating features of the BIMS is the cross-cultural utility, specificity and relevancy of this recently developed scale. The BIMS focuses on identity constructs (e.g., "baller") that are salient with student-athletes who participate in revenue sports [1, 4]. For example, the BIMS acknowledges that a "baller" is "thought to be more salient with those normally recruited for high-profile, revenue producing sports" [4].

Similar to Harrison et al. demonstrating the viability of creating culturally relevant assessment tools when measuring athletic and academic identity [4], scholars such as Guidotti et al. have reiterated the essentiality of creating assessment tools that are globally applicable and can be "adapted to the target cultural context" [5]. Guidotti et al. found that the "validity, reliability, and comparability of SAMSAQ results could be strongly questioned when significant cultural differences are present" (e.g., where the academic system in a country such as Italy emphasizes educational development rather than elite sport participation as is often the case in Division I intercollegiate athletics the United States) [5]. Therefore, Guidotti et al. encourage scholars and practitioners to gain a "deeper knowledge of the cultural environment, the formal organization of the sport and education systems and the individual attitude of the athlete toward sport and academics" when determining whether psychometric measurement scales are transferable across countries and cultures [5]. The importance of culture in creating assessment strategies is further supported by the research of scholars such as Stambulova and Alfermann, who in part examined the effectiveness of the multicultural approach to athlete career development (i.e., assistance) that focuses on an "awareness of one's own cultural values and biases, understanding of the client's world-view, and the development of the culturally appropriate intervention strategies" [7].

The purpose of this paper is to examine perceptions of student-athlete self-identity and the impact of culture and socio-cultural contexts on academic and athletic motivation of American male college football student-athletes.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 79 males between the ages of 19 and 23 ($M = 20.86$, SD $= 2.83$). Respondents were student-athletes on an NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) team at a large state university in the northwestern United States. All returning student-athletes on the football team were invited to participate in the study. Incoming students (freshmen and transfer students) were not included in the sample in order to strengthen measures of the current team culture. The participant group was racially and ethnically diverse, and included student-athletes with sophomore, junior or senior status.

Materials and measures

Participants completed the 10-item BIMS (see Fig. 1) [4]; demographic data were collected at the end of the survey.

An informed consent form and all survey items were designed and administered with Qualtrics software using Internet-based methodology. Qualtrics is a data-collection and analysis platform currently used by numerous universities, companies, nonprofit groups, and government organizations [6]. An Internet-based Qualtrics survey was used in this study in order to minimize experimental errors related to respondent selection and accuracy of responses, and to increase precision of the study's design.

The 10-item BIMS gathered perceptions of respondents' athletic and academic identities tied to motivation for performance [4]. The instrument, which uses the term "baller" instead of "student-athlete," more precisely taps into identity formation of individuals recruited for revenue sports such as American Division I college football. The four factors measured by the BIMS are social identity, exclusivity, positive affectivity, and negative affectivity on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

Procedures

Prior to completing the BIMS, participants learned about the purpose and nature of the study by hearing a brief presentation from members of the research team. Researchers informed participants about the study's benefits and possible risks, explained the anonymous nature of the responses, and emphasized that participants could discontinue their participation at any time. Respondents agreed to take the survey only after signifying their understanding of the informed consent form that preceded the survey, and followed a link taking them to the survey instrument. The study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board for use of Human Subjects, in accordance with the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki.

Four seniors on the football team ("recruiters") used two methods to encourage other teammates to participate in this research study. First, the head coach allowed the recruiters time after a team meeting to make their requests. An adjacent computer lab was provided for the participants' convenience, and served the additional function of improving the response rate. Although respondents knew that all other current team members were involved in the study, they were blind to specific individuals' responses.

The second method recruiters used to encourage participation was to keep track of which student-athletes completed the survey, with the goal of attaining 100 % participation by eligible team members. Participants' survey responses remained anonymous, and recruiters were only aware of which team members completed the survey. Recruiters followed up with those who had not yet taken the survey by requesting their participation after the next team meeting.

When respondents arrived at the computer lab, recruiters asked participants to space themselves out in the lab to minimize possible influence of other subjects, therefore reducing error associated with self-presenting bias. Once seated at a computer, each participant was individually instructed by a recruiter. This procedure encouraged a greater clarity of instructions, and recruiters were able to individually answer any questions from participants.

The recruiter stated that the entire survey would take approximately 10 min to complete. The recruiter stressed the importance of reading the student-athlete biography and reflecting upon it by writing for approximately 5 min. Participants were not compensated or provided any tangible incentive for participating in the study.

Findings and results

Data collected from the BIMS was collected and inputted into SPSS for analysis. A test for reliability was run for each category of questions (.90 Cronbach's Alpha). An independent t test was used to compare BIMS scores by race (White and non-White). There was not a statistically significant difference in BIMS scores between White ($M = 3.18$, SD $= 1.08$) and non-White ($M = 2.79$, SD $= 1.07$) respondents; $t(76) = -1.59$, $p = 0.11$. In addition, an independent t test was used to compare BIMS scores by generation in college. There was not a statistically significant difference in BIMS scores between first generation in college ($M = 2.63$, SD $= .81$) and non-first generation in college ($M = 3.05$, SD $= 1.14$) students; $t(72) = -1.27$, $p = .20$.

Discussion and conclusions

The findings in the current study extend and build on previous work done by scholars investigating academic and athletic identity with psychometric tools. This BIMS study fills a need in the literature, as we unpacked some nuances in American higher education and sport regarding the baller identity and cultural mindset in revenue producing collegiate athletics and the perceptions and connections that some competitive football cultures have in terms of identity dynamics.

Results in this study reveal that American male collegiate football student-athletes: (1) would experience depression if they were injured and could not participate in competitive athletics; (2) feel good about themselves when they participate in competitive athletics; (3) feel bad about themselves when they do not perform at the highest level; (4) have many peers that participate in competitive athletics; (5) have many goals related to the identity of being a

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

M	SD	Question number
2.39	1.53	#55. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not play Ball.
2.47	1.32	#51. When I play Ball, I feel good about myself.
2.59	1.32	#53. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly when I don't Ball out.
2.6	1.32	#48. Most of my friends are Ballers.
2.64	1.48	#47. I have many goals related to being a Baller.
2.66	1.38	#46. I consider myself a Baller.
2.99	1.30	#52. Other people see me mainly as a Baller.
3.35	1.64	#49. Ballin' is the most important part of my life.
3.75	1.70	#50. I spend more time thinking about being a Baller than anything else.
4.45	1.72	#54. Ballin' is the only important thing in my life.

BIMS findings and results (numbers range from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). Any number ranging from 1.00 to 3.00 indicates that student-athletes agree with the construct. Any number ranging from 3.01 to 5.00 indicates that student-athletes disagree with the construct

ballplayer; (6) connect with the term "baller" as an identity; (7) perceive that others see them primarily as ballplayers; (8) do not only value competitive athletics as the most important aspect of their life; (9) do not spend more time thinking about being a competitive athlete than anything else; and (10) do not value competitive athletics as the most important thing in their lives (see Table 1).

The current findings parallel the approach and findings of Guidotti et al. [5], as athletic and academic identity of student-athletes appear to differ based on (and are impacted by) geography, cultural context, a university's emphasis on elite sport and/or higher education, level of athletic participation (e.g., Division I FBS football as compared with Division III women's basketball), philosophy of academic and athletic leaders on campus, and media coverage and messages. Current findings also extend and supplement the research of Beamon on student-athlete identity salience and foreclosure [1]. Beamon found athletes to have exclusive athletic identities (self-identity and social identity) that resulted in identity foreclosure [1]. Participants in the current study did not demonstrate identity foreclosure marked by a self-identity centered around the "athletic self" even though some participants felt that others view them and related to them in terms of their athletic identity.

One of the major contributions of this study is that we addressed Stambulova and Alfermann's [7] call to analyze the role of culture and socio-cultural contexts in terms of human behavior and career development of athletes, researchers, and practitioners. Stambulova and Alfermann explained that "one of the modern concepts in cross-cultural psychology is a cultural syndrome defined as a pattern

of attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-definitions, unstated assumptions, norms, roles, and values shared among people speaking a particular language and living during a specific historical period and in a definable geographic region" [7]. These same authors acknowledge "only occasionally has a nod to culture been made in order to explain an odd experimental result" and they encourage scholars and practitioners to "consider the cultural adaptation of questionnaires, surveys, or interview guides" [7]. We extended the research inquiries on athletic identity by examining the "baller" identity and social label of football players who aspire to compete at the highest level through a cultural adaptation of the AIMS and SAMSAQ. Another contribution of the current study is that we addressed the researchers' challenge to "develop 'cultural mindsets' for career research" and "study not only athletes but also the career development environment as a multilevel context penetrated by national culture and several sub-cultures" [7]. In the current study, which addressed and analyzed the unique and multifaceted cultural mindset and experience of college football players, this echoes the culture of major college football programs, the need to address the high status identity of ballers as popular figures on college campuses, and also how the impact of the baller identity relates to career engagement (or lack thereof) as the subculture of college football has become a "super-culture" with respect to the identity of the star football athlete.

Fortes et al.'s work on student-athletes also supports the current paper's approach of assessing the identity of football student-athletes through an investigation of academic and athletic motivation [8]. Fortes et al. state "students come with diverse cultural background and societal traits. It is therefore important to identify the factors that motivate the students to improve their academic performance and also ascertain the reasons for athletic motivation" [8]. These same researchers also encourage advisors and student counselors to encourage student-athletes to remain motivated by and focused on athletics, but not just as participants—but rather as a field to work in as sport business leaders and educators. Our current study's focus on analyzing the baller identity of student-athletes and attempting to educate these student-athletes that they have transferrable skills that apply on and off the playing field is supported by the finding by Fortes et al. that "Universities and colleges should make students aware of the possibility of developing careers in the area of sports and athletics" to address the "lack of understanding about the career possibilities in athletic areas" [8].

One finding that possibly runs counter to the current study is the empirical finding of Lupo et al. [9]. These researchers found that despite an overall lack of institutional support (e.g., no additional support services to ensure a flexible agenda for elite student-athletes), Italian and Slovenian student-athletes remained highly motivated for a dual career (i.e., combination of sport and education) [9]. While our findings did not specifically measure institutional support, previous research has indicated that football student-athletes experience more challenges with respect to balancing education and sport when institutional support is marginal, corrupt or inadequate [10]. As a result, the culture of American football players in Division I athletics often leads to athletes seeking all the athletic rewards of being a baller and correspondingly struggling at times with the dual career identity formation found by Lupo et al. [9].

Further research might investigate the importance and impact of language and labels with respect to athletic and academic identity. For example, terms such as "athlete" and "jock" are labels that have been previously attached to males who play football and basketball in the United States. The current findings indicate that student-athletes connect with the term "baller" as an identity. Similar to the recommendations by Guidotti et al., future research should focus on cross-cultural studies to facilitate future cross-cultural comparisons on items such as language and labels [5].

A possible limitation of the current study is the lack of generalizability of the findings. The study focused on 79 participants on one college football team. Future research should utilize the BIMS to measure athletic identity of male student-athletes in other revenue sports (e.g., men's college basketball) as well as males and females in non-revenue sports in order to further examine the cultural relevancy of the BIMS with respect to student-athletes participating in high-profile, revenue producing sports.

In terms of recommendations, for those student-athletes who feel that the baller identity is more salient to them—interventions should occur to address their aspirations to be professionals in sports. In other words, the baller and "cool factor" should be linked to other vocations and occupational areas such as education, business and in general workforce identities. Scholars and practitioners must continue to analyze cultural dynamics and address institutional influences when developing and implementing athletic programs and academic services for student-athletes. Giving student-athletes a voice to discuss athletic and academic identity [1] can provide scholars and practitioners with information and insight that will assist in the development of programs, processes, and policies.

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