

The Athletic Identity of Collegiate Athletic Trainers: A Descriptive Study

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Context: Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that many athletic trainers (ATs) are former athletes and selected the profession because of its affiliation with sport. Qualitative research has indicated that collegiate ATs may have a strong athletic identity, but the concept of athletic identity has not been quantified in this population.

Objective: To quantitatively assess the athletic identity of collegiate ATs and determine if group differences exist.

Design: Cross-sectional observational study.

Setting: Collegiate clinical setting.

Patients or Other Participants: A total of 255 ($n = 93$ men [36%], $n = 162$ women [63%]; $n = 2$ did not indicate sex [1%]) ATs employed in the collegiate setting.

Main Outcome Measure(s): Data were collected via a web-based survey platform that was designed to measure athletic identity. Demographic information was analyzed for frequency and distribution. Mann-Whitney U tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests were calculated to determine if group differences existed.

Results: The large majority of respondents (90%) self-identified as having participated in organized sport and yet scored moderately on the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale

(22.9 ± 7.9). No sex differences were present in overall athletic identity ($P = .446$), but women had higher levels of negative affectivity ($P = .045$) than men. Testing also revealed group differences based on current employment setting for social identity ($P = .020$), with scores for those in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I less than those in Division II, Division III, and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. Exclusivity in NCAA Division III was lower ($P = .030$) than that in NCAA Division II and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics ATs.

Conclusions: Components of athletic identity appeared to vary based on the employment setting of collegiate ATs and may be related to the number of hours worked in the summer. The moderate athletic identity scores of collegiate ATs were comparable with those of former athletes who selected career paths outside of sport. This may indicate adaptive career decision processes.

Key Words: negative affectivity, social identity, exclusivity, foreclosure

Key Points

- Most collegiate athletic trainers self-identified as former athletes, though they scored moderately on the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale.
- Women had higher athletic negative affectivity scores than men.
- Athletic trainers employed in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I setting had less athletic social identity than those employed in Division II or III or the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics settings.

Evidence indicates that many individuals who pursue a career in athletic training are former athletes^{1–4} and that recruits chose athletic training programs based on a strong affiliation with sport.³ Although the athletic careers of many athletic trainers (ATs) did not extend past high school, often as the result of injury,⁴ participation in sport activities has been suggested to affect self-perceptions and athletic identity, regardless of the activity level.⁵ Collegiate ATs have discussed how their prior involvement in sport facilitated the continued importance of athletics and physical activity in their lives, which was speculated to also influence their decision to pursue a career in athletics as opposed to a different health care profession.¹

Identity is defined as a process that blends personality and connects an individual to the social world.⁶ *Athletic identity* is a concept in which individuals self-identify with the role of athlete. The athletic self-perception is developed as a

response to group affiliations and social interactions based on sport⁷ and influences the degree of importance of athletics in an individual's life.⁸ Athletic identity has been studied extensively in various areas related to career. The challenge for many individuals who exhibit a high level of athletic identity is striking a balance between their development as athletes and their development as individuals and future professionals. Previous authors^{9,10} found that student-athletes who highly identified with their role as an athlete were more likely to explore a sport-related profession as compared with professions outside the athletic environment. Additionally, a high degree of athletic identity has been linked to the increased risk of delayed career development,¹¹ burnout,^{12,13} and anxiety.¹⁴ However, potential positive outcomes are also related to a strong athletic identity. These include a greater likelihood of long-term involvement in exercise behaviors and an enhanced development of sense of self.⁸

Investigators¹⁵ who examined the work-life interface have highlighted the role individual-level factors, such as personality and values, play in both individual- (ie, job satisfaction, turnover, health, stress) and organizational-level outcomes (ie, job performance, culture, policies, labor force composition). Within the collegiate employment setting, organizational factors including inadequate staff size, inequity between hours and salary, and a perceived lack of work schedule autonomy have been cited as factors negatively affecting job satisfaction and career intention.¹ In recent years, athletic training researchers^{1,16,17} have begun to explore individual-level factors, and former ATs have indicated that individual-level factors contributed to their departure from the profession.¹⁸ An examination of athletic identity, an individual-level factor, can help us better understand the work-life interface of ATs.

Limited examinations of the idea of athletic identity in this population exist despite reports of ATs choosing the field because of an interest in sport and their own prior involvement in athletics. Because of the relationship between a strong athletic identity and career challenges that has been documented in the athletic training profession,¹⁹ we identified a need to quantitatively assess the athletic identity of ATs because of a lack of literature on this topic. Qualitative data revealed that collegiate ATs valued the role of athletics in their lives,¹ but, as mentioned earlier, the concept of athletic identity was not quantified in this population. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to quantify athletic identity among ATs employed in the collegiate setting. In addition, we wanted to determine if any demographic group differences existed regarding athletic identity in this population.

METHODS

Study Design

We used a cross-sectional design and collected data through an online survey program (Qualtrics) to gather descriptive information related to the athletic identity of collegiate ATs. The study was approved by Lasell University's institutional review board before data collection.

Procedures

Data were collected in conjunction with data related to the work-family guilt of collegiate ATs.²⁰ For this study, only data related to participant demographics and athletic identity were analyzed and will be presented.

A random sample of 2500 emails of certified ATs employed in the collegiate setting was generated by National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Member Services. Individuals were emailed a recruitment letter that explained the purpose of the study and a web link to the online survey. In an attempt to increase enrollment, reminder emails were sent to all 2500 email addresses at 14 and 21 days after the initial request for participation. To help ensure confidentiality, we emailed participants directly to ensure that their personal email addresses could not be linked to responses. All potential participants were blind copied on emails to further ensure confidentiality.

Participants

The inclusion criterion for this study was full-time employment in the collegiate clinical setting. We selected this setting was selected because it represents one of the highest categories of AT employment among NATA members: 25.1% of certified members at the time of data collection.²¹ The collegiate setting also encompasses numerous challenging organizational factors that influence AT careers.¹⁹ Participants were asked to self-identify their employment setting and acknowledge their position as full time. Those who completed the questionnaire but did not meet the inclusion criterion were removed before data analysis. Exclusion criteria were (1) graduate assistant or intern status or (2) full-time academic appointment.

A total of 257 (n = 93 men [36%], n = 162 women [63%]; 2 did not indicate sex [1%]) ATs employed in the collegiate setting were included in our data analysis. Additional participant demographic data can be found in Table 1.

Questionnaire

The web-based survey comprised a demographic section and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS).²² The demographic portion of the survey gathered information about participant age, sex, race, ethnicity, years of experience, contract length, current position, average hours worked, marital and family status, and previous involvement in organized sport. Before distribution, the survey was completed by 2 certified ATs with survey research experience who were employed in the collegiate setting. The purpose of this step was to establish likely participant response latency, clarity of demographic questions, comprehension of terminology used, survey flow and visual appeal, and functionality of the survey link. At the end of the trial, minor grammatical changes were made to the demographic questions.

The 7-item composite AIMS²² was used to identify participants' athletic identity. The AIMS has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of athletic identity.^{8,22} Internal consistency of the AIMS has been measured ($\alpha = .81-.93$)^{8,23} and AIMS scores increased with the level of sport involvement, perceived importance of sport competence, and other constructs that relate to athletic identity.^{8,23} The AIMS was initially designed to investigate the relationship of athletic identity to emotional disturbance during common transitions encountered by athletes and from a developmental perspective.⁸ The original AIMS was a 10-item instrument and became the most commonly used measure of athletic identity²²; however, the dimensionality of this scale was questioned by various researchers. Brewer and Cornelius²² examined its factorial structure and invariance and removed 3 items from the original scale. We used the 7-item composite AIMS because of the concerns identified in the original 10-item measures and because it has been shown to be appropriate for assessing athletic identity in both males and females²² and among athletes and nonathletes.²²

The scale consists of 3 factors—social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity—that have been shown to be subordinate to 1 higher-order athletic identity factor.²² The social identity subscale measures the degree to which individuals view themselves as occupying the role of

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Demographic	No. (%)
Sex (n = 255)	
Male	93 (37)
Female	162 (63)
Race and ethnicity (n = 254)	
Black, not of Hispanic origin	12 (4.7)
Asian or Pacific Islander	6 (2.3)
White, not of Hispanic origin	224 (88.2)
Hispanic	5 (1.9)
Multiethnic	6 (2.3)
Other	1 (0.4)
Highest level of education, degree (n = 256)	
Bachelor's	18 (7.0)
Master's	229 (89.5)
Doctoral	9 (3.5)
National Athletic Trainers' Association district (n = 248)	
1	28 (11.3)
2	40 (16.1)
3	35 (14.1)
4	45 (18.1)
5	19 (7.7)
6	9 (3.6)
7	6 (2.4)
8	26 (10.5)
9	27 (10.9)
10	13 (5.2)
Current position title (n = 256)	
Assistant AT	90 (35.2)
Associate AT	28 (10.9)
Head AT	82 (32.0)
Director of sports medicine	18 (7.0)
Other	38 (14.8)
Length of contract, mo (n = 256)	
9	11 (4.3)
10	46 (17.9)
11	15 (5.9)
12	171 (66.8)
Other	13 (5.1)
Organizational reporting structure (n = 254)	
Academics	12 (4.7)
Athletics	204 (80.3)
Medical	32 (12.6)
Other	6 (2.4)
Marital status (n = 256)	
Married	146 (57.0)
Single	81 (31.6)
Divorced	18 (7.0)
Separated	1 (0.4)
Other	10 (3.9)
Sexual orientation (n = 252)	
Heterosexual	233 (92.5)
Homosexual	18 (7.1)
Bisexual	1 (0.4)
Family status (n = 255)	
No children	136 (54.0)
Children	119 (47.2)
Collegiate employment setting (n = 251)	
National Collegiate Athletic Association division	
I	100 (39.8)
II	42 (16.7)
III	76 (30.3)
National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics	15 (6.0)
Other	18 (7.2)

Abbreviation: AT, athletic trainer.

athlete. The exclusivity subscale measures the degree to which an individual's self-worth is established by participating in athletics. The negative affectivity subscales measure the degree to which unwanted athletic outcomes affect negative emotions.⁵ Higher scores on all subscales indicate higher levels of each individual factor. Earlier researchers⁵ also indicated that participation in sport may influence the self-perceptions of recreational sport participants, even if the participants did not self-define as athletes. The items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, and the scores are summed to create an overall athletic identity. Scores can range from 7 to 49, with higher scores indicating a greater athletic identity.

Data Analysis

Data were downloaded from the online survey platform into Excel (Microsoft Corp) and then transferred to an SPSS (version 22.0; IBM Corp) worksheet. The data were cleaned by listwise deleting if the participant did not complete at least 90% of the survey instrument. A total of 257 participants were included in data analysis after removal of 89 participants who did not answer at least 90% of the questions. The *a priori* level was set at $P < .05$, and all descriptive and significance testing was completed via SPSS.

Scores were summed for the AIMS and 3 factors. To determine the normality of variables, we calculated a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which revealed that the data were nonparametric. Spearman correlations were used to determine the relationships among athletic identity, age, years of experience, years certified by the Board of Certification, years in current position, and average hours worked per week (in-season, off-season, and summer). Separate Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted to determine if any differences existed in athletic identity score based on sex or family status. We performed Kruskal-Wallis tests to determine if athletic identity score differed based on race or ethnicity, highest level of education, current position title, length of contract, organizational reporting structure, marital status, or National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) division of employment.

RESULTS

Demographics

The 257 participants included in data analysis represented a 10% response rate. The average age of participants was 40 ± 10 years (range = 25–64 years), and they had been certified by the Board of Certification for 16 ± 9 years (range = 0–41 years). Participants worked 58 ± 14 hours per week providing in-season athletic training services, 45 ± 11 hours per week during their nontraditional season, and 30 ± 13 hours per week during the summer months. Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Reliability Statistics

Reliability testing revealed good internal consistency for the AIMS among our population: $\alpha = .82$. Additionally, self-identified former athletes scored higher than self-identified nonathletes ($U = 1127$, $P = .001$), further validating the survey among our sample.

Table 2. Athletic Identity Scores by Demographics

Group	Median (Interquartile Range)			
	Athletic Identity ^a	Social Identity ^b	Exclusivity ^c	Negative Affectivity ^c
Total sample	23 (17–29)	12 (8–14)	5 (3–8)	6 (4–9)
Self-identified				
Former athlete	23 (17–29)	12 (8–14)	5 (3–7.25)	6 (4–9)
Nonathlete	18 (9.75–21.25)	9 (4.75–10)	5.0 (2.75–6.25)	2.5 (2–6)
Sex				
Men	23 (15.5–28.5)	12 (7.5–14)	6 (3–8.5)	6 (3–8)
Women	24 (18–29)	12 (9–14)	4 (3–7)	7 (4–9)
National Collegiate Athletic Association division				
I	22 (16–28)	10 (8–13)	4.5 (3–7)	6.0 (4–8)
II	24.5 (20–29.25)	12 (8.75–15)	6 (4–8)	7 (4–8.25)
III	23 (16–29)	12 (8–15)	4 (3–7)	6 (3–9)
National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics	26 (24–29)	12 (12–15)	7 (4–9)	6 (4–8)
Degree				
Bachelor's	20.5 (13.5–25.25)	10.5 (7.75–15)	4 (2–8)	3.5 (2–5.25)
Master's	24 (17–29)	12 (9–14)	5 (3–7)	7 (4–9)
Doctoral	23 (16–27.5)	10 (6.5–13.5)	4 (2.5–7.5)	8 (4–9)

^a Possible score range = 7–49.

^b Possible score range = 3–21.

^c Possible score range = 7–49.

Athletic Identity of Collegiate ATs

Our participants' average athletic identity score was 22.9 ± 7.9 (range = 7–43), with the majority indicating that they had been involved in organized sport as an athlete (236 [91.8%] = yes, 19 [7.4%] = no). The athletic identity scores for the entire sample and select demographic groups with corresponding AIMS factor scores are shown in Table 2.

Athletic identity score and number of years of participation in organized sport were significantly positively associated ($\rho [226] = 0.238, P < .001$), and athletic identity and average hours worked in the summer were significantly negatively associated ($\rho [199] = -0.203, P = .004$).

Demographic Group Differences Based on Athletic Identity

No significant relationships were observed between sex and athletic identity score ($U = 7057, P = .446$) or family status and athletic identity score ($U = 7771, P = .654$). Men (6; IQR, 3–8) and women (7; IQR, 4–9) displayed different negative affectivity scores ($U = 6365.5, P = .045$) but no sex differences in social identity or exclusivity. Family status was not related to any of the AIMS factors.

We found no differences between race or ethnicity, highest level of education, current position title, length of contract, organizational reporting structure, NCAA division, or marital status in athletic identity score. Negative affectivity and highest level of education were related ($\chi^2_2 = 10.092, P = .006$), with a mean rank score of 75.83 for a bachelor's degree, 131.47 for a master's degree, and 144.33 for a doctoral degree (Table 2). Post hoc testing revealed a difference between the bachelor's degree and master's degree groups ($P = .002$) and the bachelor's degree and doctoral degree groups ($P = .022$): individuals with a bachelor's degree had less negative affectivity than both those with a master's degree and those with a doctoral degree.

Significant relationships were present between the social identity factor and NCAA division ($\chi^2_4 = 11.653, P = .020$)

and between the exclusivity factor and NCAA division ($\chi^2_4 = 10.731, P = .030$). Post hoc testing revealed differences between NCAA Divisions I and III ($P = .019$), NCAA Divisions I and II ($P = .020$), and NCAA Division I and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA; $P = .010$) for the social identity factor. For the exclusivity factor, NCAA Divisions II and III ($P = .030$) and NCAA Division III and the NAIA ($P = 0.025$) differed (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The goal of our study was to quantify the athletic identity of collegiate ATs and to determine if demographic differences existed. Because the literature has identified that athletic training students are drawn to the profession because of a strong affiliation with a sports or team model,³ it is important to quantify the athletic identity of those currently employed as ATs to better understand if athletic identity drives entrance into the profession. We found that the large majority of collegiate ATs indicated previous involvement in organized sport as an athlete, though they scored moderately on the athletic identity scale. No sex differences were seen in total athletic identity scores, but women scored higher than men on the negative affectivity subscale. Participants employed in the NCAA Division I setting had lower social identity scores than their colleagues employed in the NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, or NAIA settings. Additionally, the exclusivity scores of respondents employed in the NCAA Division II or NAIA collegiate setting were higher than those of their colleagues employed in the NCAA Division III setting.

Our results highlighted several demographic differences in the athletic identity of our participants. Earlier authors⁵ determined that men had greater athletic identity than women, despite reports from Cuppett and Latin²⁴ that female ATs were more physically active than their male counterparts. Gender-sport researchers^{25,26} argued that participation in sport for women was contrary to societal expectations, which has been used to explain lower observed athletic identity in females. However, we demonstrated no sex differences in total athletic identity

scores. This result could indicate that individuals, regardless of sex, are drawn to the collegiate clinical athletic training practice setting because of their athletic identity. Future research is warranted to explore this topic further.

Female ATs employed in the collegiate setting had higher negative affectivity scores than their male counterparts. Negative affectivity is a measure of negative emotions stemming from unwanted sporting outcomes. Lamont-Mills and Christensen⁵ noted that elite and recreational female athletes had the same level of negative affectivity and speculated that females' participation in sport, particularly at a recreational level, was more related to physical self-worth or self-concept than athletic identity. They went on to speculate that for females, unwanted aspects may be more related to physical as opposed to athletic characteristics and that participation in sport may be linked to a desire to be physically active.⁵ Our outcomes could help explain Cuppett and Latin's²⁴ findings specific to female ATs' physical activity compared with that of males and may suggest that males and females are active in sports for different reasons.

Uniquely, our participants' overall athletic identity scores were comparable with those of retired athletes who chose careers unrelated to sport.²⁷ Shachar et al²⁷ investigated the athletic identity of former athletes who chose to become coaches and those who chose careers unrelated to sport. The retrospective athletic identities of the groups did not differ at the time of their athletic career retirement, but participants who pursued careers in coaching had stronger athletic identity at the time of assessment than those who entered careers outside of an athletic setting. Interestingly the athletic identity reported in noncoaches (25.42)²⁷ was similar to that of the ATs in our study (22.9). Though we did not assess athletic identity retroactively, we can say that our ATs had athletic identity scores similar to those of retired athletes who chose careers outside of sport.

Former athletes who choose careers in coaching are more likely to commit to a career without examining other professional pathways, which may indicate maladaptive characteristics.²⁷ Despite research² indicating that athletic training students selected their academic and career paths based on sport affiliations, our results suggest that, given the similar athletic identity score of noncoaches, ATs employed in the collegiate setting likely use an adaptive approach in making career choices. An adaptive career decision approach involves exploring and narrowing career options, committing to a specific career goal, and implementing the selected career.²⁸ It is important to note that we did not measure the tendency to foreclose and, therefore, cannot say with any certainty if collegiate ATs used an adaptive or maladaptive approach to career selection.

A career in athletics has been labeled a lifestyle choice rather than an occupation because of its unique demands and expectations for high performance regardless of position.²⁹ As a result, the workplace culture of athletics has been characterized by high levels of work-life conflict and role imbalance.^{30,31} Similar to the identity conflict experienced as a student-athlete,³⁰ role imbalance may be experienced by the employee within the athletic environment, potentially leading to role conflict and burnout.³² However, former athletes who choose careers outside of sport likely see a decrease in their athletic identity because

distance from sport reduces the importance of the athlete role in their lives²⁷ and enables them to capture a larger portion in the multidimensional self-concept.³³ Therefore, athletes who invest in their role as students during college may have more of an opportunity to explore nonsport career options,³⁴ highlighting the importance of diversifying self-identity, particularly early in the academic years.

Previous researchers¹ identified that many ATs were former athletes, and our findings confirm this, with more than 90% of our participants self-identifying as former athletes. Although all of the ATs in our study were employed in a career and setting that involved a high level of involvement with sport, interestingly, their athletic identity was lower than what we saw in former athletes who selected a career in coaching.²⁷ Several possible explanations exist for ATs having a lower athletic identity than former athletes who chose a career in sport.

First, ATs are allied health care providers who work with the unique subpopulation of physically active individuals. Analysis of the services provided by ATs³⁵ and the rationale for the use of athletic training services³⁶ clearly emphasizes the role of the AT as a health care professional rather than a member of a sports team. Although a weak influence, the opportunity to help others and provide medical care has been identified as an attractor to the athletic training profession.³ Because ATs have made the decision to enter a health care profession, it is possible that their own self-identity has expanded, which could explain the lower comparative athletic identity score. This could reflect that many individuals persist in the athletic training profession because they wish to be health care professionals,² rather than solely to work in sport, demonstrating an expanded self-identity extending beyond athletic affiliation over time.

Conversely, this expansion of self-identity to include the role of health care professional may also contribute to attrition from the athletic training profession. Investigators^{37,38} have identified that the bureaucracy and politics of the traditional athletic setting can lead to burnout in collegiate ATs. Additionally, the ability to have a successful career as an AT and persist in the field, particularly within the NCAA Division I setting, has been discussed in the context of one's ability to "fit the mold" of the environment.³⁸ Although we did not explore the relationship between athletic identity and organizational culture within this athletic setting, it is possible that the evolution of both athletic identity and self-identity influences ATs' perception of their ability to "fit the mold" long term, subsequently influencing attrition within the clinical setting or profession.

Lastly, given the high number of hours that collegiate ATs work (58 ± 14 hours per week in our sample), time to engage in personal sport activity may be lacking, causing a subsequent drop in athletic identity. Earlier authors^{1,24} indicated that ATs valued and made time for physical activity in their lives. We did not assess athletic identity retrospectively, and this concept is not substantiated by our work. Additionally, we observed a weak negative correlation between athletic identity and the number of hours worked in the summer. This finding could indicate that individuals who worked less in the summer had more time to engage in sport or that individuals with greater athletic identity chose employment settings that required them to

work less in the summer so that they would have more time to engage in recreational athletic activities. More examination is warranted to explore this possibility. The ATs employed in the NCAA Division I setting had lower social identity scores than those employed in the Division II, Division III, or NAIA settings. The social identity subscale measures the degree to which individuals define themselves as athletes. A relationship between athletic identity and the number of hours worked in the summer in combination with the negative correlation associated with summer hours is thought provoking. Previous researchers³⁹ determined that NCAA rule changes that allowed more sanctioned activities in the summer affected the summer workloads of ATs employed in the NCAA Division I collegiate setting. Our findings further support the suggestion that summer hours may affect the ability to engage in athletic activities.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study was not without limitations. Although we intentionally selected the collegiate employment setting because it represents one of the largest employment settings and most often operates in an athletic organizational model, our results cannot be generalized to other athletic training employment settings. Although many ATs select employment settings that allow them to treat athletes as their patients, ATs work with diverse groups of patients across many job settings. Future investigators should quantify the athletic identity of ATs employed in other settings, particularly those working in nontraditional settings. It may also be beneficial to compare the athletic identity of ATs with that of other health care professionals to explore any differences. For our cross-sectional study, the data were collected at one time point and did not involve any retroactive assessment of athletic identity that would have allowed us to determine if the athletic identity of ATs decreases over time. Retrospective evaluation of athletic identity could provide valuable information to further study the career choices of potential athletic training students and, as our profession transitions to the professional degree level, to help characterize why students are attracted to the profession. A retrospective examination of athletic identity could also shed light on the career exploration process of ATs and aid in explaining attrition from educational programs or early careers. Additionally, we recommend that future authors explore any potential relationships between athletic identity and individual outcomes (eg, burnout, long-term exercise behaviors, anxiety), as earlier researchers^{8,12–14} linked athletic identity to these constructs.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although collegiate ATs have selected a career tangential to sport, their athletic identity is similar to that of former athletes who selected careers outside of sport. This may indicate that ATs are involved in adaptive career decision processes. Components of athletic identity appeared to differ based on employment setting, though it was not clear if this was a result of the work setting or represented a component of self-identity that dictated career choices. Previous investigators highlighted that many ATs were interested in the profession because of their own involvement in sport, and we confirmed that the majority of

collegiate ATs participated in organized sport at one point in their lives. These findings may begin to offer insight into why and how potential athletic training students choose to enter the profession and warrant further exploration of why ATs persist in the field, as the factors that influence prospective athletic training students may evolve as the profession transitions to a professional-level master's degree.

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