Responses to Athlete Activism: An Examination of the Role of Multiracial Identity Integration

Lauren Brown, DeSales University
W. Andrew Czekanski, Coastal Carolina University

Socio-Cultural - Diversity (Professional Sport)  Thursday, May 30, 2019
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  3:30 PM
Abstract 2019-122  Room: Napoleon A3

The number of individuals identifying as biracial or multiracial (both groups will henceforth be referred to as multiracial) is rapidly growing in the United States as societal attitudes and structural processes have dramatically changed over the last 20 years (Davenport, 2018). Further examination specific to this group is vital as the experiences of multiracial individuals are markedly different than those who are single-race (Herman, 2004; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). It has been determined that multiracial individuals have complex, dynamic racial identities (Brunsma, Delgado, & Rockquemore, 2013; Herman, 2004; Shih & Sanchez, 2005) that can be influenced by contextual factors such as family (Brunsma, 2006; Renn 2004) and sociopolitical conditions (Brunsma et al., 2013).

These contextual factors also influence the extent to which an individual finds their racial identities compatible, known as multiracial identity integration (Cheng & Lee, 2009). Identity integration, comprised of racial distance and racial conflict, has been consistently tied to the psychosocial well-being of multiracial individuals (Binning, Unzueta, Huo & Molina, 2009; Cheng & Lee, 2009; Jackson, Yoo, Guevarra & Harrington, 2012) and positive social engagement (Binning et al., 2009). Furthermore, scholars have suggested integrated identities aid multiracial individuals in negotiating racialized environments (Binning et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2012).

Sport is inherently racialized, with particular attention recently being paid to the activism of professional athletes fighting racial inequality. Fan responses to this modern activism have varied, however racism remains prevalent in those responses (Frederick, Sanderson & Schlereth, 2017; Gill, 2016; Sanderson, Frederick & Stocz, 2016). These highly-racialized discussions surrounding athlete activism are yet another context where multiracial individuals are often asked to negotiate their varied racial identities. Despite a plethora of recent studies examining the intersection of race, sport, and activism (including the three referenced above), there is a dearth of research exploring multiracial individuals in this context. This study will address this gap in the literature by examining the responses of multiracial fans to the racial activism of professional athletes. Building on the extant literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Multiracial individuals will respond differently to the racial activism of professional athletes than single-race individuals.
H2: The strength of a multiracial individual’s identity integration will influence the individual’s response to the racial activism of professional athletes.
H3: The response to the racial activism of professional athletes will influence consumer responses toward the athlete activist

The hypotheses will be addressed using a 40-item online questionnaire derived primarily from scales from the extant literature measuring racial identity, perceptions of athlete activism, and consumer response. Amazon’s Mechanical Turk will be used to distribute the survey. Upon the completion of data collection, an analysis of variance will be used to test H1, while a regression analysis will be utilized to test H2 and H3. The results of this study will contribute to the limited body of literature examining multiracial individuals and sport, offer added nuance to discussions of race and athlete activism, and provide greater context for sport organizations and athletes examining the impact of athlete activism.