The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and collegiate institutions have created and implemented services designed to assist and support student-athletes. However, researchers suggest that many student-athletes do not fully utilize these services for a variety of reasons (e.g., Adams, Coffee, & Lavallee, 2015; López & Levy, 2013; Watson, 2006). Within this population, high levels of Athletic Identity (AI) – defined by Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder (1993) as the degree to which a person identifies with the role of an athlete and seeks outside acknowledgement of that role – have been associated with the neglect of other aspects of psycho-social development (Cieslak II, 2004). Included in this type of neglect – known as identity foreclosure – is the perception of barriers to services and avoidance of help-seeking behaviors.

Although many studies have been undertaken to understand this phenomenon, few have examined the intersection of AI and perceived value (PV) of available supports. This study was designed to bridge that gap by answering the following questions:

(1a) What are student-athletes’ perceptions of their own identity?
(1b) How do they perceive the support services they are offered?
(2) Is there a relationship between AI scores and perception of support services?
(3) Are there differences exhibited based on demographic grouping factors?

Method

Subjects for this cross-sectional, exploratory study were recruited from two institutions in the Midwest via a gatekeeper within the respective Departments of Intercollegiate Athletics. A conglomerate survey instrument was assembled and pilot tested for face validity. AI scores and PV ratings of support services were recorded and analyzed to ascertain relationships between these factors. One-way ANOVAs and Spearman correlations were utilized to identify differences between traditional interest groups for each component as well as to provide preliminary relationships between the dependent variables. Significant differences were detected between groups and correlations between AI and perception of support services were identified.

Results

Mean student-athlete AI scores are comparable to previous findings, suggesting worthiness of continued phenomenological exploration within collegiate sport. Contrary to previous research, however, findings suggest no statistically significant differences in AI scores across previously-identified interest demographics such as gender and race. Institutional support services were generally reported to have positive valuation across all groups with significant, service-specific differences amongst divisional competition level, scholarship status, gender, race, academic major, and academic year groupings.

Discussion

AI is often noted for its negative implications, but there may be a positive correlative relationship between elevated AI scores and heightened perceived valuation of support services (namely academic support, study center, personal leadership, and transitional services) by student-athletes. This suggests that although student-athletes with higher AI may be more prone to consequent negative effects than those with lower AI, they may also be more receptive to courses of action aimed at supporting their academic and career development. This supports the suggestions of this and previous researchers that further research on athlete tendencies and implementation of proactive interventions/supports for student-athletes are worthwhile research endeavors.