

Role Conflict Experienced by Student-Athletes Has Major Impacts on Life

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**Abstract**

Role conflict creates stress in a person's life. Previous research shows that collegiate student-athletes experience role conflict between their dual role of student and athlete. One factor this conflict may have an impact on other than general stress is how satisfied the individual feels they are with their life. This study examines whether role conflict of student-athletes creates lower feelings of life satisfaction. To test this, participants completed three surveys that measured their identified role, perceived stress, and overall life satisfaction. The overall scores from both surveys were the dependent variable. The results revealed that individuals who identified more as athletes had more stress and lower life satisfaction. This study addresses an important aspect of managing and addressing stress and feelings of inadequacy among collegiate athletes that could have an overarching impact on the individual's life.

*Keywords:* role conflict, stress, life satisfaction, student-athlete

### Role Conflict Experienced by Student-Athletes Has Major Impacts on Life

The college experience is supposed to be one of the many great experiences we get to encounter throughout our lives. A big part of this experience is collegiate sports. Collegiate athletes take on a dual role in this experience: student and athlete, but what happens when these roles begin to conflict with one another? Role conflict has been a heavily researched topic that grants us insight to why it occurs and that it is common especially in student-athletes. The purpose of this study is to find out how role conflict can have an impact on a person's feelings life satisfaction.

Role conflict has been a popular subject for researchers especially when the topic is conflict among student-athletes. We are first introduced to role conflict through the research of Isis H. Settles, Robert M. Sellers, and A. Damas Jr. They found that because a person can take on many roles throughout one's life, this can cause stress and other psychological symptoms to occur when the roles are conflicting. In their study on student-athletes, they concluded that participants reported relatively low levels of role conflict and saw their roles as distinctly separate. This was due to the student-athletes identifying themselves mainly as students because their academic performance was more important to them than sports performance, but of the students who did experience role conflict, their role interference was negatively correlated with overall well-being (Settles, Sellers, & Damas, 2002). Another study, done by Ley A. Killeya-Jones, suggests that because both the student and athlete roles are enacted in a college environment, they will compete for resources within the individual's mind. The findings of the study showed that convergence of roles coincided with positive psychological adjustment and higher academic satisfaction. On the other hand, conflict between roles coincided with negative psychological adjustment and lower academic satisfaction (Killeya-Jones, 2006). The final study

of Gregory Wilson and Mary Pritchard suggests that students and student-athletes experience different types of stress. Non student-athletes tended to experience stress about finances and social conflicts compared to student-athletes who tended to experience more stress concerning heavy workload and not getting enough sleep (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

Previous research shows that role conflict can cause higher levels of stress among student-athletes, but does it cause feelings of lower life satisfaction? We hypothesize that student-athletes who view their roles as separate will have greater satisfaction in life than student-athletes who see their roles as conflicting.

## **Method**

### **Materials**

The participants in this study completed three different measures. The first measure was the Academic and Athletic Identity Scale (AAIS). This is an 11-item scale that measure participants' identities of student or athlete. It is derived from a 1 to 5 likert scale with one being not important at all and five being very important. The participants were asked to rank a series of statements of how important they are to the participant's life. Some example statements include "being a capable student" and "being satisfied with my athletic achievement". The second measure was the Perceived Stress Scale (PS). This is a 10-item scale that measures individual's perception of stress in their life. It consists of a 0 to 4 likert scale with zero being never and four being very often. The participants were asked to rank a series of statements of how often the statements occur in their life. Some example prompts include "in the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way" and "in the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things". The third measure was the Life Satisfaction Scale (LS). This is a 5-

item scale that measures participants' feelings of satisfaction in their life. It is based on a 1 to 7 likert scale with one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree. The participants were asked to rank each statement based on the given scale. Some example statements include "the conditions of my life are excellent" and "I am satisfied with life".

### **Procedure**

Sixty-five participants ( $N = 65$ ; female = 19) volunteered to participate in this study. Some participants received course credit for their participation in the study. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 ( $M_{age} = 19.91$ ). The participants gathered in this study read and agree to the consent form that is provided for them. Next, the participants completed three measures: the AAIS, the perceived stress scale, and the life satisfaction scale, provided to them online. Upon completing the surveys, participants were thanked and given a brief explanation of the experiment.

### **Results**

The research hypothesis of this study is that student-athletes who view their roles as separate will have greater satisfaction in life than student-athletes who see their roles as conflicting. The surveys used in this study showed a participant's perception of their own identity, their perceived stress, and life satisfaction. The overall scores of each survey were calculated. Table 1 shows the average scores for each measure taken by the participants. It shows that the participants had mostly moderate scores for all three measures. There is a moderately strong positive correlation between identity score and stress ( $r = .45$ ) and a moderately strong negative correlation between identity score and life satisfaction ( $r = -.52$ ) as seen in Table 2.

### **Discussion**

The results showed support for our initial hypothesis that student-athletes that view their roles as separate, have greater satisfaction in life than student-athletes who see their roles in conflict. Generally, this study can contribute valuable information to the discussion to different ways role conflict can affect an individual's life. From this study, we concluded that someone who experiences role conflict would have higher levels of stress and lower satisfaction in life. This shows that role conflict has more effects on an individual than just higher levels of stress which we can connect to the research of Ley A. Killeya-Jones who concluded that student-athletes who experience role conflict experience negative psychological adjustment. The study we conducted displays how role conflict contributes to these negative psychological symptoms. In accordance with the research done by Killeya-Jones (2006), we can predict that by experiencing role conflict, an individual is likely to experience negative psychological symptoms as well as have lower life satisfaction.

The primary strength of this study was that it had a large sample size ( $N = 65$ ), which can allow us to say the sample is representative because of its size and how the participants were selected. The primary weakness of this study was that there was no measure of conflict. We wanted to see how conflict between roles contributed to life satisfaction, but we only identified which role the participants resonated with more.

In the future, we should develop a way to measure how a student-athlete experiences role conflict and if they feel their roles are conflicting. This would allow us to see if it is actually role conflict causing these results and not another explanation therefore establishing higher internal validity. This could lead us to potential future studies on how to correct this conflict between roles of student-athletes and whether correcting this conflict would improve stress and life satisfaction scores. This research could also lead us to further investigate how lower life

satisfaction resulting from role conflict contributes to different mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety that many college students experience.

In summary, the results of this study can lead us to further research on this topic that could help us understand the differences between roles we face in our day to day lives and how conflict between these roles can affect our general well-being. This could be important in generating solutions to these conflicts to improve our overall life satisfaction. It is essential to see how role conflict plays a role in our lives because it helps researchers gain an understanding of how individuals are impacted by role conflict and can lead to research on how to correct conflict.

### References

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for AAIS, Perceived Stress Scale, and Life Satisfaction Scale Used by Participants who Completed the Three Surveys*

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Identity Score	3.58	1.25
Stress	4.55	1.30
Life Satisfaction	4.09	0.94

Table 2

*Correlational Statistics of AAIS Score to Perceived Stress Scale and Life Satisfaction Scale*

Pearson Correlation	Stress	Life Sat
Identity_Conflict_Score	.45*	-.52*
N	65	65

\*statistically significant