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Managing an Identity: Social Identity Complexity and NCAA Faculty Athletics Representatives

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The NCAA requires each member institution to designate a faculty athletics representative (FAR) to act as a liaison between academics and athletics. FARs occupy a unique position within the institutions where they are employed, as they are tasked with managing both academics and athletics simultaneously. The purpose of the current research was to examine FARs through the use of social identity complexity theory, and to help explain the way by which these individuals psychologically align with their various memberships. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to provide a deep understanding of the various perspectives of FARs. The results indicated that FARs see themselves as a member of both athletics and the academy and consequently think of themselves as a facilitator or moderator between the groups. This study is intended to fill a gap in the literature pertaining to the complex nature of the FAR position, and how FARs manage multiple social identities.

Keywords: Faculty Athletic Representatives, Social Identity Theory, Social Identity Complexity, Sport in Higher Education

A 2017 headline from *The Atlantic* entitled “Why sports and elite academics do not mix: The athletic programs at highly selective institutions are out of synch with the schools’ mission”, is just one example of the increasing concern over the divide that exists between college athletics and academics (Cole, 2017). The question of how sport aligns within the academic mission of the institution, has brought about controversy and disconnect between academics and athletics. Weight, Cooper, and Popp (2015) explored the division between college athletics and the academic missions of the institutions and discovered a “clear current divide between athletics and academics, ultimately creating an us versus them mentality” (p. 519). The debate over the utilization of athletics within the university setting has seen calls for athletics to take a larger role in assisting with the academic goals of the institution (Sperber 1990), yet some athletics departments have decided to designate themselves as a separate entity (e.g., Kansas Athletics, Inc.). Herein lies the issue of the two unique groups with distinct goals occupying the same institutional setting.

In an attempt to unify athletics and academics, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) requires each member institution to designate a faculty athletics representative (FAR; see article 6.1.3) to act as a liaison between academics and athletics (Cooper, 1992; Hagwell, 1998). According to Hagwell (1998), the core responsibilities of the FAR as mandated by NCAA handbook include: (a) responsibility for the institutional relationship with the NCAA and conference of membership; (b) fostering relationships between faculty, administration, and the athletics department; (c) and concern for the well-being of student-athletes including academic and athletic performance. To carry out these responsibilities, the FAR is tasked with duties such as certifying student-athlete eligibility, evaluating student-athlete academic performance, and facilitating communication among faculty and athletics. The FAR position was further explained by Leary (2014) who asserted that FARs help facilitate compliance and institutional control of athletics, while still maintaining their normal faculty responsibilities. In all, FARs occupy a unique position as their role is heavily impacted by academic and athletic aspects of the university (Cooper, 1992; Leary, 2014; Munger, 2014). The multiple tasks and responsibilities required by the FAR position, coupled with the distinct group differences between academics and athletics, may challenge FARs to balance their various social identities.

While scholars have explored the FAR position and its fit within athletics and academics, there still remains a question of how FARs psychologically navigate a complex environment where various group memberships presented conflicting values. FARs occupy a distinct position on campus, in which they must exist in multiple competing group environments (Weight et al., 2015). A better understanding of the management of FARs multiple social identities could help them improve their functionality within both of their group memberships. In describing similar situations, where individuals possessed multiple social identities, Roccas and Brewer (2002) proposed social identity complexity theory in order to help explain the identity management process. Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to explore the competing academics and athletics social identities of FARs, and how social identity complexity can be used to explain their identity management.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

According to Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison, social identification is constructed via social comparisons and reflections made by the individual. However, Tajfel (1974) suggested that an individual's self-perception may not be sufficient to determine one's social identification as "he [*sic*] is a member of numerous social groups and that membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that he has of himself [*sic*]" (p. 69). Furthering the discussion on simultaneous group membership and social identification, Tajfel put forth that identities should be evaluated through four related concepts: social categorization, social identity, social comparison, and psychological distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1974). Social categorization is "a process of bringing together social objects or events in groups which are equivalent with regard to an individual's actions, intentions, attitudes and systems of beliefs." (p. 69). Social identity is "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [*sic*] knowledge of his [*sic*] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 69). Social comparison suggests "no group lives alone-and the reinterpretation of attributes and engagement in social action...only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparisons with, other groups" (p. 70). Psychological distinctiveness is "knowledge that he [*sic*] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him or his [*sic*] membership" (p. 70). As evidenced by Tajfel's work, an individual's identification is developed through multiple simultaneous group memberships and in-group or out-group membership play a significant influence on an individual's social identity.

Social identification has been a popular topic within the field of sport management. Scholars such as Heere and James (2007a, 2007b), Locke and Heere (2017), and Katz and Heere (2016) have suggested that social identification determines the perceptions and inclusiveness of multiple simultaneous group memberships. Additionally, scholars have pointed towards social identification influencing the managerial aspect of sport (Oja, Bass, & Gordon, 2015, in press; Swanson & Kent, 2015). However, much of the previous research has been focused on single group identification without evaluating how membership may overlap between two competing groups. Thus, there is utility in examining the social identity complexity of FARs.

Social Identity Complexity

As identities may be developed through attachment to multiple groups, Roccas and Brewer (2002), proposed the theoretical construct *social identity complexity*, which is defined as the degree of overlap perceived to exist between groups of which a person is simultaneously a member. Although studies have been limited in size and nature, multiple scholars have provided insights into the complexities of belongingness associated with multiple in-groups. Lickel et al.'s (2000) analysis distinguished four unique forms of groups: (a) intimacy groups; (b) task groups; (c) social categories; (d) loose associations. Expanding upon these group distinctions, intimate and small groups are interpersonal connections and have face-to-face interactions, which are based on common bonds and personal ties among the group members. By contrast, large task groups and social categories are based on symbolic attachment to the group as a whole (Lickel et al., 2000).

The degree to which an individual identifies with various social groups differs significantly from member to member. According to Roccas and Brewer (2002), some groups may be completely embedded in others, while some may only overlap slightly or be completely orthogonal. In these cases, members of one in-group may be considered out-group members. When extensive overlap (i.e., similar beliefs and values) between in-groups occurs, identification is relatively straightforward. However, as an individual gains membership to multiple contrasting groups, their identity structure becomes more inclusive and complex. Roccas and Brewer's (2002) social identity complexity model postulates that as an individual becomes more immersed into multiple social groups, their identity will develop through one of four distinct models: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, or merger.

Relatedly, after reviewing each aspect of the model, it seems that it could be used to explain the cognitive processes of FARs. Intersection, according to Roccas and Brewer (2002), occurs when an individual can achieve simultaneous recognition of more than one social identity and yet maintain a single in-group representation. In this model, multiple group identities converge on a single social identity with one consolidated group. Additionally, those who do not share similar joint identities are considered out-group members. Hewstone, Islam, and Judd (1993) defined the intersection of identification as a "social exclusion pattern" (p. 781) designed to prevent membership from those who are not jointly in-group members. Regarding intersection, a FAR is both an academic faculty member and an athletics department member. However, a FAR might identify with individuals who are both academic faculty and members of the athletics department. From this perspective, an individual who is not associated with both the academics and athletics side of an institution would be considered an out-group member.

The dominance construct represents how an individual adopts one primary group identification and others identities are subordinated. With dominance, one identity will take precedence over another, and only the dominant membership will be the source of identification. If a FAR were to exhibit dominance in terms of social identity complexity, an emphasis would be placed on whichever social identity (i.e., academics or athletics) is deemed by the individual as primary, and the others would be subordinate. Principally, under the dominance model, a FAR would either act as an academic faculty member or an athletics member and whichever identity is stronger will be the social identity that is displayed in all aspects of their daily responsibilities.

Compartmentalization occurs when an individual's identity can be activated and expressed through a process of differentiation and isolation. Compartmentalization allows for identities to become catalogued whereby different contexts bring forth certain identities. Context specificity can be a model in which social identities are presumed to be context dependent and mutually exclusive (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). In a context specific example, a FAR may identify as an academic faculty member in the context of academia and identify as an athletics member in the separate setting of intercollegiate sport. Under this model, a FAR would be able to separate academics from athletics depending on the context of the situation, and therefore their identity would be context specific as well.

Merger occurs when non-convergent group memberships are simultaneously recognized and embraced in their most inclusive form. This model allows for an individual to develop identity through the sum of collective memberships. In other words, the more social in-groups an individual is associated with, the more inclusive in-group memberships become. Utilizing the merger model, a FAR's identity would develop through multiple non-converging memberships in which social identity is developed using both academic faculty and athletic identities. In this model, the social identities of the FAR would be salient with both academic faculty members and

athletic members, and therefore, the FAR would incorporate their merged view of academics and athletics when dealing with both parties.

As previously discussed, FARs occupy a unique position within American universities and colleges. The multiple tasks and responsibilities required by the FAR position, coupled with the distinct groups of academics and athletics, present FARs with a unique set of circumstances that likely require them to manage potentially competing social identities. Furthermore, the way in which an individual manages their own social identity complexity can vary. Utilizing Roccas and Brewer's (2002) typology of social identity complexity: (a) intersection; (b) dominance; (c) compartmentalization; (d) merger, and the concept that FARs are impacted by multiple, and often opposing groups, the research question was proposed to help guide the current study. The purpose of the study was to determine if social identity complexity occurs for Division I FARs and how the FARs manage multiple complex identities.

Research Question: Do faculty athletic representatives at Division I level, who maintain multiple group memberships with academics and athletics, perceive multiple social identities? If so, how do they manage their identities?

Methods

To investigate the social identity complexity of FARs, the current research took a phenomenological approach. This research design focused on the lived experience of several individuals and attempted to describe what the participants have in common as they experience a certain phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the goal of phenomenology is to develop a composite description of an experience for all individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the lived experiences of FARs in their dual associations with academics and athletics were able to be explained in terms of social identity complexity.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, it is important to clarify the underlying philosophical assumptions which directed the development of the research questions and framework so that the reader may better understand the epistemological viewpoint (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additional justifications should also be made for choices concerning the methodology and procedures of the research (Crotty, 1998). The aforementioned approach allowed the participants (FARs) to construct the meaning of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the researcher to then interpret those meanings in the context of the research. All members of the research team have ties to college athletics and higher education. Some of the group's experiences included being former student-athletes from various institutions and levels of the NCAA, extensive work in collegiate athletics as coaches and administrators, and working in academia as college instructors. These experiences helped shape the research team's view that a balance between athletics and academics is important at the college-level, and that the FAR plays an instrumental role in this process. This view then led to the identification and focus of the current research on FARs and their complex roles concerning both academics and athletics.

Participants

Nine FARs were interviewed from different NCAA Division I universities throughout the United States, and all of the universities were in different athletics conferences (e.g., Atlantic Coast Conference & Mountain West Conference). Three out of the nine participants in the current study were female, while six were male. This gender distribution of the sample in the current study is broadly representative of the true distribution of male (65%) and female (35%) FARs at the Division I level (Miranda & Paskus, 2013). Furthermore, participants in the current study had been in their respective position as FAR of their institution between 1 and 24 years. The participants in the study were obtained through purposive sampling methods. Due to the limited number of qualified candidates (i.e., one per institution), purposive sampling allowed for the selection of participants from a small pool and provided the best chance to obtain rich and descriptive information on the research topic (Jones, 2015).

Procedures

After potential participants were identified, they were solicited for participation via email. Upon their agreement to participate, an interview was scheduled via Skype or telephone. Then, two days prior to the interview, a reminder email was sent that contained a copy of the consent form. The interviews, which lasted approximately 30 minutes, consisted of a semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews pertaining to each participant's experience dealing with multiple group memberships as a FAR at their respective university. The interview questions were derived from the four models of social identity complexity (i.e., intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, and merger) to ensure that social identity complexity was being properly assessed (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The semi-structured nature allowed for follow-up questions, used for clarification and elaboration purposes, which helped to produce deep and meaningful data (Kvale, 1996).

Instruments

Based on previous literature (Cooper, 1992; Leary, 2014, Sperber, 1990; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Weight et al., 2014; Weight et al. 2015) and the background of multiple contributing authors, questions for the interviews were developed. These questions served as discussion development items for our semi-structured interviews. Examples of interview questions included: (a) Prior researchers have suggested a divide is present between academics and college athletics at the Division I level. What does your personal experience suggest about this division between academics and athletics? (b) If the athletic department realizes a great success and the academic department realizes a great success, which department's success are you more proud of and why? (c) What challenges do you face when representing academics to the athletics community? Do you have to identify more with athletic concerns in this setting? Do you still see yourself as a professor first and athletics representative second? Why? (d) As a member of both the academic faculty and athletics, how do you establish where your priorities fall? Do you prioritize one department's needs over the other? (e) Would either academics or athletics look at you differently if you put a specific department's needs ahead of the other?

Analysis

After the interview data were obtained, each was transcribed and analyzed through thematic development. Thematic analysis was utilized as a method to identify patterns associated with the phenomenon of social identity complexity theory and FARs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To analyze the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process was utilized within a deductive framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In deductive coding, the researcher uses preexisting theory as the guide when initially sorting qualitative data (i.e., the second step described below; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized the flexibility of thematic analysis and noted how their thematic analysis process is applicable with a deductive approach. This form of thematic analysis is done when the researcher intends to "code for a quite specific research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Given the specific nature of the research question, a deductive analysis was deemed to be appropriate.

The analysis procedure consisted of six stages. In the first stage, three of the researchers (i.e., Authors One, Two, and Three) immersed themselves in the data with multiple readings of the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Subsequently, an initial set of codes were developed independently by the researchers (e.g., group membership, in- and out-groups, homogeneity) based on data from the interviews and the preexisting theory (i.e., social identity complexity). For the third stage, codes were grouped into an initial set of four themes by Authors One, Two, and Three. These themes were originally named "FAR as a professor", "FAR as an intermediary", "FAR as an athletics member", and "FAR as a joiner". In stage four, themes were reviewed amongst the entire research team in an effort to confirm their congruence with the data. This was done by creating a thematic map and cross referencing the codes with the themes. With the fifth step, final themes were reviewed and defined by the entire research team. The review involved comparing and contrasting the themes with the theoretical framework of social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). To enhance the dependability and reliability of the research, the authors discussed their analysis until all were in full agreement concerning the themes derived (Creswell, 2012). This stage resulted in four themes: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, and merger. Here, the work of Roccas and Brewer (2002) informed the authors' decisions as the analysis was "driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84) and doing so provided clarity to the thematic process. In the sixth and final step, the researchers selected "vivid, compelling extract examples" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) to accentuate the themes. This step also served as a last opportunity to ensure consistency between the analysis and the research question and literature, which was completed by all authors.

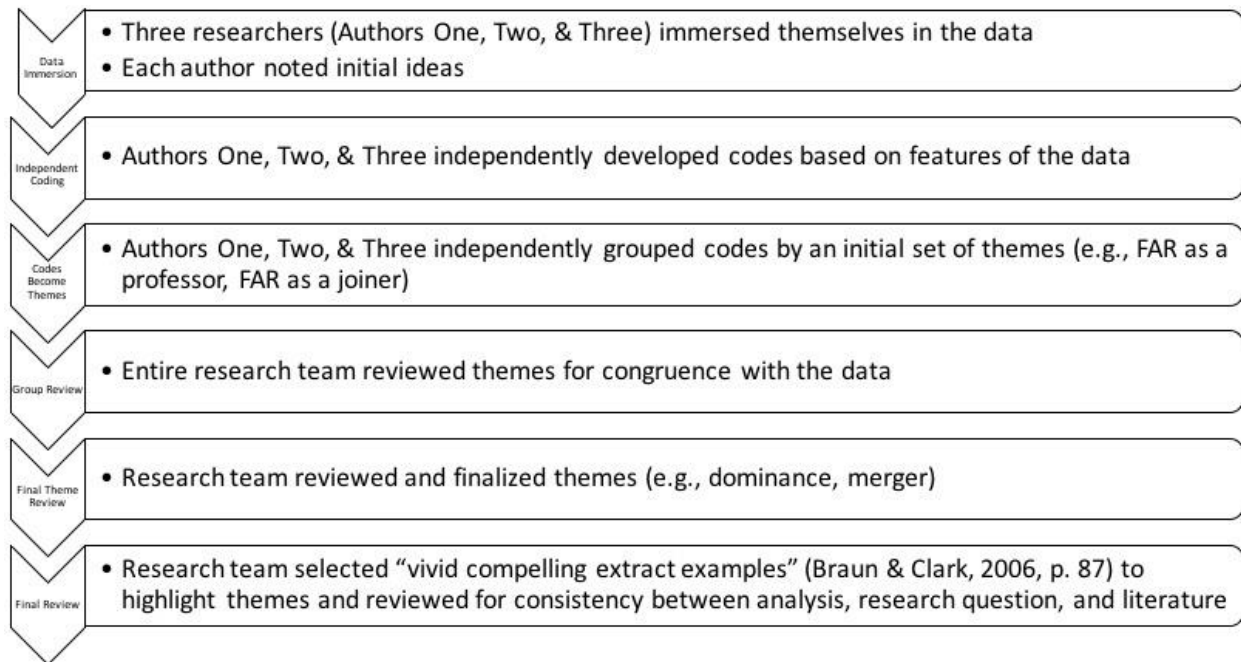


Figure 1. Thematic analysis process.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research it is important to establish trustworthiness to ensure the quality of the research. Trustworthiness is the process of addressing the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the current study (Morrow, 2005). The current research attempted to maintain credibility through the use of triangulation and member-checking. Triangulation is obtained when data are gathered and analyzed by multiple researchers, while member-checking takes place through the process of having participants review the researchers' interpretation of the data collected (Crotty, 1998). In the current study, triangulation was achieved through the collection and analysis of data by multiple researchers, while member-checking was accomplished by participants checking the interview transcriptions.

Transferability of the current research was established through the use of purposive sampling and detailed descriptions. Purposive sampling ensured that the data collected was rich with information, while detailed descriptions of this data allowed comparisons with similar situations to be made (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of the study was to convey the typical experiences of a FAR at the Division I level and make certain that the quality of the data presented allowed for transferability.

Finally, confirmability (neutrality in the findings) and dependability (repeatability) were also managed by the research team. Both confirmability and dependability were addressed above in the researcher's positionality, as well as in the research journal, which highlighted every step of the data analysis. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), utilization of these methods establishes any biases that may exist within the research team so that they may be considered along with the analysis of the data. Furthermore, the detailed descriptions in the research journal allowed for the research methods to be scrutinized as well as easily repeated.

Results

The current study utilized a qualitative approach to examine the phenomenon of FARs possessing multiple social identities (i.e., academics & athletics). Based on the distinctiveness and separation between athletics and academics, it was believed that FARs could be challenged by the various group memberships and subsequently have competing social identities. The intent of this study was to provide insights into how FARs manage their social identities. Results revealed the existence of four separate categories (intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, & merger) that can be used to help explain how FARs balance various group memberships.

Intersection

Intersection is the achievement of simultaneous recognition of multiple social identities by an individual while they still maintain an affinity for one identity over another (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Based on the data, FARs at the Division I level may identify as both an academic and athletics member and define their ingroup membership as the intersection of multiple group memberships. Participants viewed academics and athletics as parallel, yet separate, entities. Due to this relationship, FARs stressed the importance of acting as a moderator or facilitator between these two groups. When FARs are able to act in the moderator or facilitator role, these individuals may join two distinct groups together. One FAR interviewed specifically discussed how they would proctor exams for athletics teams competing on the road. This individual understood the concerns of faculty when providing an outside the class exam and the FAR stressed how they would act at the intersection of academics and athletics by acting as the intermediary.

Table 1

Intersection Theme Quotations

Participant	Responses
FAR 3	I think it is a two-way street from athletics to academics and vice versa and I see myself probably being that intersection.
FAR 6	If a professor is giving an exam and a student athlete is travelling and they need it proctored on the road, then they would come to me and I would take care of that. They like the fact that no coaches or athletics are coming to them and they are staying out of it.
FAR 1	Well, I sort of see myself as a conduit to inform people on both sides and educate them to a certain level.
FAR 7	I have to operate where athletics and academics come together, so right at that intersection point.

FAR 2

There are a lot of parallels between a faculty member, especially somebody who has a research program, and a coach. You really are in a competitive environment, you are looking at the overall success of your program, which requires a lot of management, a lot of different factors. I was just thinking, we really don't understand each other's worlds, but there are a lot of parallels there and I guess I have to work between those two groups.

It seems FARs at the Division I level maintain an in-group membership with both academics and athletics, which is necessary for intersection to occur. Academics and athletics are two distinct groups, and the FARs in the current study demonstrated they can successfully operate in both. However, intersection implies an exclusive or hybrid nature of individuals who operate in both groups, and was only exhibited by FARs when they acted as a mediator between groups. This would imply that although FARs intersect both academics and athletics, the intersection occurs minimally.

Dominance

Dominance occurs when an individual adopts one primary group membership and all other groups are subordinated (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The FARs indicated that they perceive a dominant in-group membership as a member of the academic community. All participants in the current study viewed themselves as a professor first and foremost. Many of the FARs stressed the importance that they do not work for athletics, do not have an office in athletics, and act in this position by a presidential or provost appointment, but their allegiance remains with the overall educational department. Moreover, a substantial number of participants stressed their affinity for athletics, however all of these individuals spoke to the extent that they would not sacrifice their faculty position for the betterment of college athletics. However, of interest in the current study, multiple FARs discussed how some of their research interests have become focused on sport and specifically the challenges facing college athletics.

Table 2

Dominance Theme Quotations

Participant	Responses
FAR 1	I do think the FAR responsibility takes up a lot of time to do and I had to move my research agenda to accommodate. I do most of my research now on sport issues, but my ultimate identity and role responsibility is professor.
FAR 2	Everybody that I know that is a FAR, a faculty athletic representative, they're all professors. And I mean that is how they identify themselves. They're professors and this is an academic appointment that they have...and I'm even thinking about how the one's that I associate with that have

been FARs for 20 or 30 years, and I think they identify a little more with the academic side just because they have been involved for so long. But I am an academic first and foremost. Don't get me wrong, I am a huge college sports fan, and a fan of my school's team, but at the end of the day, I am a professor.

FAR 8

That is how my role is constructed and that is how everybody sees me and yea I'm definitely a professor. I liken it to being an anthropologist, sometimes I go over to athletics and I am in a different culture and I am a participant observer but definitely, definitely professor. And a professor who works on the athletics side

FAR 7

So, I have a very strong sense of my identity. Like I am very aware I am faculty and I work on behalf of the institution to help athletics and all of that, but I am very aware that I don't work for athletics. I can't be FAR without being a professor first.

These results suggested FARs at the Division I level perceived their primary in-group membership to be with academics. Despite numerous FARs in the current study suggesting their dominance with academics, the addition of their allegiance and obligations to athletics may suggest a more symbiotic relationship of the two groups when it comes to FAR identities.

Compartmentalization

Compartmentalization occurs when identities are context or situation specific (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Participants suggested that FARs at Division I institutions faced a degree of compartmentalization. An identity struggle occurred for FARs when encountering the academic community and maintaining their in-group membership with academics. According to multiple participants, faculty members needed continual reminders that a FAR does not work for athletics, despite spending considerable time with the athletics department. Additionally, participants stressed the academic in-group would look at them differently if they continually supported the mission of athletics over academics. FARs believed there may be challenges maintaining their identity with the academic community due to their interactions with athletics. Additionally, FARs stressed the importance of maintaining the connections between themselves and academics in an effort to remain a credible member of the faculty.

Table 3
Compartmentalization Theme Quotations

Participant	Responses
FAR 2	I think the identity struggle comes in how I am perceived by other people. So, I have to work to make sure the other faculty realize I am a faculty member, even though I spend a lot of time working with athletics. I don't report to athletics. They don't pay my salary. I don't have an office over there. So, a lot of what I do when I interact with faculty is just trying to continually remind them of that.
FAR 7	I don't think athletics would look at me differently if I presented academics as important. I think the reverse is not true. If I went into a faculty setting and I was perceived as a homer, or bought and paid for by athletics, that would reduce my credibility in the academic community. But I work really hard to maintain that connection and to let the faculty know I am one of you.
FAR 9	I think in faculty settings I do need to portray myself more as a faculty member. These folks do know I am the FAR on campus, but I do have to work with them to make sure they understand I am a faculty member just like them. I don't think athletics would look at me differently, but if I focused on athletics in an academic meeting, even if it was an important topic, the academic community might look down upon that.
FAR 4	At times, it is challenging to work with faculty who know that I am working with athletics as well. But I work very hard to maintain that connection and to let faculty know I am one of you. However, I also need to work for athletics in specific incidences as well. So, I really need to understand who I am working with and do my best to meet their needs, while maintaining my allegiance with both groups.

FARs at Division I institutions appear to prioritize the maintenance of their identification with the academy. All FARs interviewed suggested athletics would not think differently of them if they voiced academic concerns within an athletic setting. However, all FARs discussed perceptions of the academic community not supporting them as an in-group member if the FAR put athletics ahead of academics. The participants' responses noted above indicated an element of compartmentalization required by an individual in the FAR position.

Merger

Merger represents the process by which an identity can be formed when multiple non-convergent group memberships are simultaneously recognized and embraced in their most inclusive form (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Despite FARs highlighting the struggles associated with maintaining a single social identity with academics, FARs pointed towards the recognition and embracing of both the academic and athletic communities. Discussions with our participants suggested FARs embrace dual membership with academics and athletics. Furthermore, FARs stressed the importance of acceptance by both the academic and athletic community. A major discussion point for all individuals in this study was the proper education of both groups. FARs suggested that athletics and academics are actually quite similar in their effort to educate young people, and part of the FAR responsibility should be to educate both groups on these similarities.

Table 4
Merger Theme Quotations

Participant	Responses
FAR 3	I have been very welcomed by the athletic department. I participate in Christmas parties, retirement parties, those types of things. I try not to take advantage of some of the things that I could probably take advantage of just because I don't want to skew my role dramatically. I report to the university president, but I have a very strong working relationship with the athletic director too. When things come up in athletics, they have been very good about letting me know when they want or need my involvement. I think it is really easy to see both sides of the picture.
FAR 6	I think the strategy I use the most is just time to educate both, I don't want to say sides, but groups. Trying not to just say oh well this is how they do it over there, but trying to get them to understand the different perspectives.
FAR 5	Coaches and professors from my experience are actually very similar when it comes to pedagogy and how they work with young people and how they want to work with young people who excel at what they are doing. So, I look for common ground.
FAR 7	Well if a kid had a change of grade, if that kid goes from ineligible to eligible, I investigate it. I talk to the professor and find out if there was any pressure from the kid or any pressure from the athletic department to change that grade. So, the coaches and I have a very good relationship and I think they are happy that I understand what they do.

FAR 2

I am only functional in this job of FAR if both sides trust me. So again, I have to be seen as a facilitator or someone who understands both perspectives. I am not going to be the person to make the hard call, but I provide information to those sides, so that they understand what the issues are on both sides.

When discussing the management of the merger model, FARs stressed the importance of understanding multiple perspectives. Athletics and academics manage goals differently, and an individual in this position should be able to explain the importance of these multiple perspectives. Without properly understanding these two distinct groups, the FAR may struggle to properly merge these two entities. The responses provided by the FAR participants suggested their identities are formed through mutually recognized and embraced non-convergent memberships. Although each FAR interviewed discussed their primary in-group membership as a member of the academic community, the findings suggested FARs embraced both academics and athletics simultaneously.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to determine if social identity complexity occurs for Division I FARs and how the FARs manage multiple complex identities. Our results highlighted the fact that FARs strive for harmonious relationships between academics and athletics; however, at times such simultaneous relationships may be challenging. To answer the research question concerning faculty athletic representatives and their multiple social identities, the current study explored how FARs use the various elements of social identity complexity. It was determined that FARs experience some elements of intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, and merger. However, a majority of FARs perceived their main identity within the merger model, meaning they possess a strong relationship and ties with both groups (i.e. academics and athletics).

Within the context of higher education and athletics, FARs demonstrated behaviors indicative of a psychological alignment with both the academic and athletic sides of their organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). While all participants perceived themselves as primarily a faculty member (i.e., dominance), analysis of the data indicated that other elements of social identity complexity are more prevalent in the management of the multiple identities of FARs. The contrasting philosophies of academics and athletics created an environment where participants specified they must completely understand and be a full member of each group in order to gain the trust of both parties (i.e., compartmentalization). Participants demonstrated that the interests of academics and athletics were both important, however they alluded to their primary objective which is insuring the best interest of the academic institution (cf. Hagwell, 1998). To accomplish this, it was suggested that FARs act as a moderator between academics and athletics to promote the overall betterment of their college or university (i.e., intersection). Finally, to be successful as a FAR, participants noted the importance of full acceptance and support of both academics and athletics which then allows them to perform at a high level in their position (i.e., merger).

The complicated nature of the FAR position can result in pressure from either the academy or athletics, thus straining their sense of membership to facilitate a given group's specific needs. A possible explanation for the dichotomy may lie within institutional logics. Institutional logics are defined as "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Participants in the current study suggested multiple socially constructed assumptions were a challenge. These issues could be caused from "the distinct challenge of trying to optimize performance on multiple dimensions as they pursue divergent objectives at once" (Battilana, Sengul, Pache, & Model, 2015, p. 1680) a component experienced with managing institutional logistics. Results suggested they managed the challenges of institutional logistics by constantly demonstrating the common ground between academics and athletics, ensuring the academic rules are successfully incorporated within the athletic department, and by effectively understanding the perspectives of both in-groups. As evidenced from the participants' suggestions, there is a clear divide between college athletics and academics, and one of their main responsibilities was merging these two distinct entities. Furthermore, a majority of FARs strived to change the unwelcomed attributes of a group, or engage in social actions to bring both groups closer together. The solutions employed by FARs demonstrated their commitment to both in-groups (academics & athletics) and highlighted the merger model of social identity complexity as presented by Roccas and Brewer (2002).

As discussed previously, FARs face multiple complex identification challenges from their congruent membership with multiple groups. The groups can be completely imbedded within other groups, while others can overlap slightly or be completely orthogonal (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Summarizing the difficulty of managing the complex organization of multiple groups, Svensson (2017) suggested that the diverse demands from multiple subgroups can create difficulties for organizational leaders to manage (cf. Cyert & March, 1963). Scholars have suggested in order to manage multiple competing groups memberships, hybrid organizing could be a solution (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Ebrahim, Battilana, & Mair, 2014; Giulianotti, 2011; Svensson, 2017; Sveinsson & Seifried, 2017). Battilana and Lee (2014) defined hybrid organizing as "the activities, structures, processes, and meanings by which organizations make sense of and combine aspects of multiple organizational forms" (p. 398). The FAR position is essentially one in which the individual may adopt a hybrid identification. In evaluating the process of hybrid organizing, FARs incorporated athletics members into academic meetings, personally proctored examinations on the road for student athletes, and amplified how academics and athletics are both striving to achieve the mission of the institution. It is important for a FAR to understand that they are operating in a complex environment and adopting a hybrid identification model may lead to successful merger between two competing institutional spheres on a college campus.

The FAR position may face numerous social identification challenges. As a member of both the academic and athletic in-groups, FARs are tasked with perceiving and managing their multiple, and often times, competing in-group memberships. It appears that FARs at the Division I level do have an affinity for membership in both the academic and athletic communities. Discussions with FARs in the current study suggested incorporating athletics members into the academic community and continually finding common ground between academics and athletics. Furthermore, developing a hybrid identification model which incorporates the institutional logistics of both academics and athletics may provide FARs an opportunity for success at their respective institution.

Practical Implications

The results of the current study have practical implications when selecting and supporting a FAR at an academic institution. First, as the FAR is an official appointment by the university president or provost, a FAR who is accessible and open to lines of communication between academics and athletics is likely to succeed as they would potentially operate in the merger model. There appears to be a lack of understanding between these opposing sides (Cole, 2017) and a FAR seemingly could assist in bridging this divide. Second, understanding and recognizing the different group members can help FARs serve both parties. Both academics and athletics have unique identities and the FAR position requires an individual to manage their own identity for the betterment of the institution. Third, FAR who recognizes their capacity as one who is a member of multiple in groups can be a benefit to both the academy and athletics. The gulf between athletics and academics remains resolute, however a FAR who successfully manages their multiple group memberships might be able to assist in reducing the disconnect between academics and athletics. Lastly, FARs occupy a distinct position in which they must manage multiple group memberships. The results of this study may also apply to similar positions on campus who are challenged with managing multiple social groups (e.g., student-athletes). We suggest further research is needed to understand how social complexities are managed when multiple in-group memberships are present.

Limitations and Future Research

This study, as with all research, is not without limitations. First, the study focused on FARs at the Division I level and there may be contextual differences between Divisions I, II, and III (e.g., eligibility/academic requirements, transfers, & scholarships). Additionally, we focused our research on large institutions. Individuals occupying the FAR position at a smaller institution may not face the same complex identity issues. The intent of our study was to provide rich content, meaning, and understanding through a qualitative approach to the FAR position as it relates to social identity complexity. We encourage future researchers to evaluate the FAR position from other perspectives of social identification (Tajfel, 1974). Additionally, researchers may evaluate the FAR position from a group identification standpoint (Lickel et al., 2000). Finally, future research may look to determine if FARs at Division I, II, and III all experience similar challenges to identification and social identity complexity.

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