

## **Why Play College Athletics?—The Motivations Behind Male vs. Female Rutgers-Camden Student Athletes**

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### **Abstract**

This study was conducted to reveal the motivations behind Division III student-athletes to participate in collegiate sports. A survey was sent out to all the student-athletes at Rutgers University-Camden. Eighty responses were recorded from both males and females. Descriptive statistics showed that, of the possible motivations the survey provided, playing collegiate sports because they genuinely enjoyed it was the greatest overall motivation. Descriptive statistics also showed a significant difference between males and females in the category of wanting to become a professional athlete. This information could be useful to coaches and athletic departments of Division III schools.

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Numerous students across the country are involved with youth and high school sports and choose to continue their involvement by participating in collegiate sports. There are several reasons why students choose to become collegiate athletes and, depending on which division their schools play in, these reasons can include pure enjoyment of the sport, financial gain, pressure from parents/guardians, campus involvement, a desire to continue a routine, the hope to become a professional, and more. Potential commercial benefits exist to Division I athletes, which could largely be the reason why they choose to play, whereas Division III athletes

are unable to be compensated in any way. The NCAA does not allow Division III schools to give athletically-based financial aid to prospective students (Robst & Keil 2000).

Pauline (2010) researched the differences among Division I, II, and III student athletes with respect to their decision in choosing a school and found that student-athletes from Division II and III schools were more likely to consider academics when making their choice than Division I athletes. This implies that more Division II and III student athletes' value their education and are not solely focused on the athletics. Conversely, this study also finds a significant difference between male and female student-athletes with respect to the importance of athletics at their college of choice. Males in all three divisions rated athletics as more important than females did. If Division III student athletes are not being compensated and do not consider athletics to be the most important factor in choosing a college, what is their motivation to play? If males value athletics more than females, will we see a difference in their motivation to play?

This study aims to analyze the motivations behind Division III student-athletes and determine any discrepancies between the findings of males versus females. We hypothesize that, of the 5 motivations we selected, the top motivation for both males and females would be pure enjoyment of the sport. The reason that we predict this is because the sample is solely comprised of Division III athletes who are not compensated in any way to play nor do they believe athletics are the most important factor in choosing a school. This leads us to believe that Division III student-athletes participate in sports at the collegiate level because it brings them pleasure. We also predict that more males participate in sports at Rutgers-Camden because they want to make a career out of athletics than females. Making a career out of athletics could be anything from being a coach or a professional player to being involved in the sports

management world. We made this prediction based on the findings of Pauline that indicated males rated athletics with more significance than females.

## **Methods and Materials**

A survey was created using Qualtrics and sent out via e-mail from the Rutgers-Camden athletic director to each of the university's student athletes. Fourteen days after the survey was sent out, 80 responses were recorded. Of these responses, 28 were from males (35%) and 52 were from females (65%). There were 12 responses omitted from the final data set because they ended the survey before finishing and did not return to complete it. The age range of participants was 18-22.

This study's primary focus was to look at the differences in motivations behind male and female student athletes at Rutgers-Camden. As a Division III school, there are no athletic scholarships holding athletes down; they choose to play with no restraints. The data collected was all through self-report. In order to attain the most honest reports possible, participants were notified that all results would be anonymous and only Dr. Whitlow's Experimental Psychology class would be notified of the results. Within the survey there were 29 multiple choice questions, 2 open-ended questions, as well as a single question using a 10-point Likert scale. The survey questions were grouped together into 6 different categories that were unknown to each participant, which is important so that they could not skew their answers to lean toward one motivation instead of another. The survey began with demographics. The next 5 categories were composed of questions to help determine which "motivation" each athlete fit into. The possible motivations were as follows: future career, genuine enjoyment/fun, gain a social group/campus involvement, out of comfort/desire to keep a routine going,

and following a role model or influenced/pressured. Each motivation contained 4-7 possible questions that the participant would answer. Commonly, if a participant were to answer a specific way to one question that codes for a certain motivation, skip logic was used to move them along to the next motivation. The survey took roughly 5-10 minutes to complete.

## **Results**

After we sent out our survey questions to 92 student athletes at Rutgers University, we received 80 responses that were included in the data analysis. We omitted 12 of those responses because the athletes did not finish all of the questions. Of those 80, 52 were female and 28 were male. We had five categories for reasons behind student athlete motivations for playing sports at Rutgers-Camden. The five categories were: career, fun/passion, modeling/pressured, social group, and routine. Each motivation included a set of questions. Within each question, each answer that was selected represented a score. For example, the question, “Do you wish to have a career related to sports once you complete college (such as coach, professional athlete, sports management, etc.),” had 3 answer choices: yes, unsure, and no. If the participant answered “yes,” then they were given a 1. If the answer was “unsure,” they were given 0. Finally, if they answered “no,” they were given -1. For a question such as the 10-point Likert Scale, every participant was given the same number of points for how they ranked their happiness while playing their selected sport on a scale of 1-10. After every questions’ tallies were added up, we were able to find the final score for each motivation. This process was repeated for all 5 motivations.

After all of the scores were calculated for each motivation, the average was then found between all the males in each

category and an average was found for all of the females in each category. After attaining these 10 averages, a 2-tailed T-Test was performed to reveal whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between males and females in each motivation.

In the career category, an average of 35.2% of males said they were playing their sport to have a career in their future. The average female who was playing a sport for future career goals was 5.49%. In the fun/passion category, an average of 67.86% of males were playing their sport because they genuinely enjoyed it. The females in the fun category were not far behind with an average of 61.43%. In the modeling category, females outweighed the males for playing because of someone they look up to, with 21.8%. The males only had an average of 13.1% in the modeling category. Males said they were playing their sport for a social aspect with an average of 48.85%, whereas females were 38.83%. The average number of females who said she played her sport because it was part of her everyday routine was 55.13%. We found an average of 47.62% of males we played their sport due to their routine. The figures below show the data mentioned above.

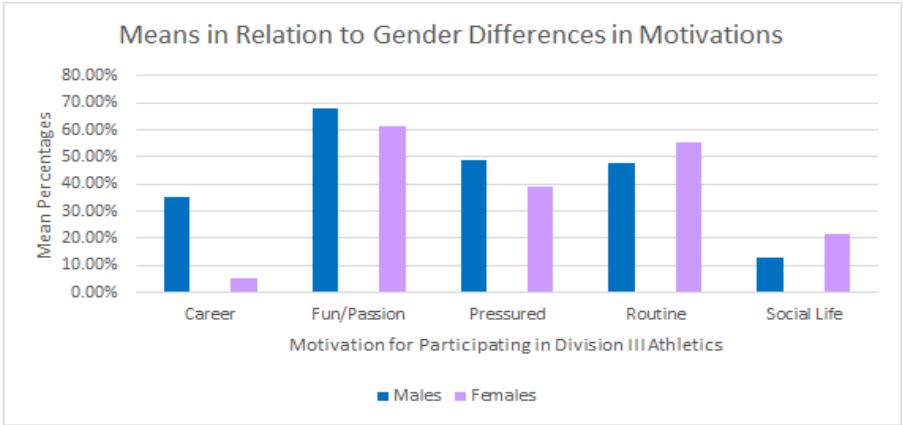


Figure 1.1 Means in Relation to Gender Differences in Motivations

After attaining all of the means for each gender and motivation, in order to identify which results indicated a significant difference in gender, we ran 5 T-Tests. The T-Tests show that 2 motivations have significant differences between genders. The T-Test value for having a future career is .000000473. This proves one of our hypotheses to be correct. We hypothesized that the motivation to participate in Division III athletics for the purpose of attaining an athletic-related career would be significantly higher in males than in females. The second motivation that was a significant difference between males and females was being pressured into playing Division III athletics. The T-Test value is .04, in favor of more males being pressured/influenced into participating in athletics than females. Below is a table that represents all of the data discussed in this section.

	Career	Fun/ Passion	Pressured	Routine	Social Life/ Involvement
Male (mean)	35.20%	67.86%	48.85%	47.62%	13.10%
Female (mean)	5.49%	61.43%	38.83%	55.13%	21.80%
T-Test (male vs female)	.000000473	.082	.040	.203	.128

## Discussion

After evaluating our results, it has been proven that our hypothesis was correct. We predicted that the top motivation would be that Division III student-athletes participate in college athletics because they genuinely enjoy their sport. We also predicted that there would not be a significant difference between males and females with respect to the overall

motivation. As previously mentioned, the T-Test result was greater than .05, therefore proving that there is not a significant difference between males and females. However, we did predict that there would be a gender difference in the career category. Indeed, our results did find the biggest gender difference in the career category with a significance of .000000473. More males said they were playing their sport because they wanted to have a future career in it than females. This supports the research by Pauline (2010) that indicates males regard athletics as more important in choosing a college than females.

The findings indicated in this research can be limited for the sheer fact that the population of the participants were only student-athletes of Rutgers University-Camden. Future research may want to poll participants from multiple Division III schools. Another limitation was that we provided only five possible motivations for students. There could very well be motivations existing outside of the five motivations we provided. Lastly, the results were based off of self-report. There is always a level of bias associated with survey responses because we have no way of telling whether or not the survey responses are accurate and truthful. These findings could lead to more research that may potentially be able to eliminate the limitations this research generated. Research into this topic could be useful to college coaches and athletic staff at universities, especially at the Division III level. Having a sense of what motivates student-athletes to participate in sports can help the staff make sure each player on their respective teams remains focused and content with their experience. Also, having players with different motivations may cause an issue with finding unity on a team. It may be beneficial to attaining a winning record by having athletes on a team that all share the same motivations. Future research may want to look at how teams that have athletes who play for different reasons affect their win/lose record and evaluate

what kinds of conflicts arise between relationships of teammates.

### Works Cited

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