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AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT-ATHLETES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC ABILITIES.

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Tiffany Ann White

August 2010

AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT-ATHLETES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC ABILITIES.

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AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT-ATHLETES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC ABILITIES.

Tiffany Ann White August 2010 48 Pages

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A common stereotype in our society is that athletes are not as capable of performing well academically as their non-athlete counterparts; they are "dumb jocks". Do athletes feel that others have lower expectations of them academically? This is important because previous research in education has shown that expectations play a role in academic achievement (for example, Rosenthal and Jacobson's Pygmalion effect (1968) and self-fulfilling prophecy research). The current study examined student-athletes' perceptions of this stereotype. Three areas were addressed: athletes' perceptions of their peers' awareness that the student is a student-athlete, perceptions of their instructors and peers academic expectations of athletes, and perceptions of their instructors and peers willingness to offer help with coursework because they are athletes.

This study not only examined athletes' perception of how they are treated by their professors and non-athlete students in the academic realm, but also how the athletes view the academic abilities of their athletic peers compared to their own academic abilities. The person/group discrimination discrepancy is a phenomenon indicating that individuals tend to report a higher level of discrimination directed at their group as a whole than at themselves as individual members of that group. This study examined if student-athletes' report similar feelings about their own academic ability as compared to athletes as a whole.

Results of this study indicated that student-athletes perceive professors as having higher academic expectations and being willing to provide academic help because they are athletes. Student-athletes perceived other students as being willing to provide academic help, but having lower academic expectations of athletes.

As hypothesized, the personal/group discrimination discrepancy did emerge among student-athletes. Overall, student-athletes assigned the highest grade point average (GPA) to themselves, followed by a lower GPA for teammates, and significantly lower GPAs to university athletes as a whole. Further exploratory analyses were conducted. The exploratory analyses indicated that student-athletes' perceptions of academic ability for themselves compared to teammates and university athletes as a whole varied by gender, race, and academic scholarship. Results indicated that female athletes and males athletes (excluding football players) perceived themselves as having the highest GPA followed by a decline for teammates and university athletes respectively; however, football players perceived themselves and university athletes obtaining approximately equal GPAs with a significantly lower perceived GPA for teammates. Athletes on academic scholarship assigned the highest GPA to themselves followed by teammates and university athletes, respectively. Finally, African American athletes assigned the lowest GPA to themselves, whereas Caucasian athletes assigned themselves the highest GPA.

Introduction

For centuries, athletes have faced the negative stereotype of "dumb jock," the belief that athletes are not as capable of performing well academically as their non-athlete counterparts. This idea can be traced back to the beginning of sports. As early as the Greek games, when sport was becoming more popular, athletes began engaging in specialized training for their sport. "They concentrated so much on athletic training that they ignored intellectual development. Eventually causing athletes to be seen as useless and ignorant citizens" (Coakley, 2004, p.15). In today's society, this stereotype persists.

Studies by Adler and Adler (1987), Baucom and Lantz (2001), Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991), Sailes (1993), and Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, and Jensen (2007) have examined how individuals perceive athletes in the academic community. However, there is very little research that has examined whether athletes perceive they are treated differently or are afforded different expectations in the academic realm.

Existence of Stereotype

Sailes (1993) surveyed 869 undergraduate and graduate students about their views of student-athletes. Sailes found that 45% of the students felt that student-athletes were not as smart as the average student, 44% felt student-athletes took easy courses to stay academically eligible, and 37% felt student-athletes were not as academically competitive as the typical college student. The perceptions/expectations that students reported are consistent with the "dumb jock" stereotype and may have a significant impact on how an athlete feels about him/herself in and out of the classroom.

Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) surveyed 293 freshmen entering college at a large university about how they would feel about athletes in different situations. They found

that, in some situations, students felt more uncomfortable with a student-athlete than with a non-athlete. For example, they had stronger feelings of disappointment, concern, worry, and annoyance when a student-athlete was assigned to be their lab partner. Based on four years of participant observation with a major college basketball team, Adler and Adler (1987) found that athletes encountered different expectations and treatment than the general student body. Whether they were given greater tolerance or less tolerance, they were treated as less than competent adults. This special treatment reinforced the differentiation between the athlete role and the academic role. Subsequently, they perceived themselves as athletes more than students.

Additional evidence of the existence of the "dumb jock" stereotype is the common practice of coaches and academic personnel who direct an athlete toward certain classes or degrees (Videon, 2002). Unfortunately, a large number of athletes are advised into less difficult, less time consuming classes or degree programs. These types of decisions are portrayed as being the best for the athlete to continue eligibility for sport participation. Yet, advisors or coaches who suggest the "easy major" are hindering the athlete's academic and career futures.

Professors' views of student athletes also reinforce the existence of the stereotype. Simons et al. (2007) completed a study in which they asked athletes how they were perceived and treated by faculty and non-athlete students. Their results showed that 92.1% of athletes reported they felt they were perceived negatively by professors and students, 61.5% of athletes reported they were refused or given a hard time when requesting accommodations for athletic competitions, and 62.1% of athletes reported a faculty member had made a negative remark in class that reflected the dumb jock

stereotype. Baucom and Lantz (2001) examined faculty attitudes toward male student athletes at a Division II university that does not give athletic scholarships. The lack of scholarship might lead one to expect that the athletic environment would be less problematic. However, they found similar negative faculty perceptions of athletes concerning academic preparation and special treatment. Tukey's post hoc comparisons showed that faculty perceived both revenue and non-revenue athletes in a significantly less positive light than non-athlete students. Likewise, Adler and Adler (1987) found that athletes thought that many professors labeled them as jocks. The athletes indicated that they were surrounded in their classes by other athletes because they had been placed there by coaches and identified to professors early in the semester as athletes.

A study by Wininger and White (2008) also examined the existence of the stereotype by looking at the degree to which student-athletes felt aspects of the stereotype were applied to them. Results of the study showed that student-athletes felt that professors had higher academic expectations for them because they were athletes and they felt that other students had lower academic expectations for them. They also found that athletes felt professors and other students were more willing to help them because they were athletes. When comparing athletes' perceptions of how professors versus other students view them academically, Wininger and White found that athletes felt other students had lower expectations for them compared to their professors.

The media also makes it difficult for an athlete to overcome the "dumb jock" stereotype. According to Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, and Sabo (2005), athletes and jocks are not the same. Athletes are valorized in popular culture; in contrast, the label *jock* is perceived by many as a derogatory term that connotes ignorance. Sailes (1993)

reported that the “dumb jock” stereotype is continually reinforced through media by their portrayal of athletes being less intelligent. Television shows and movies continuously portray the student-athlete as less intelligent and receiving more assistance than their peers. According to Kirk and Kirk (1993) the consistent media coverage of student-athletes who perform poorly academically plays a role in the continued use of the “dumb jock” label. Media coverage may lead many people to believe that athletes receive breaks on admission to college and many other aspects of the college experience. The NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) attempted to control for these types of exceptions by employing Proposition 48 in the early 1980s. Proposition 48 requires incoming freshmen student-athletes to have a minimum SAT score of 700, or an ACT score of 17, and a minimum GPA of 2.0 in at least 11 core classes (Lapchick, 1989).

Impact of Stereotypes

Ashmore and Del Boca (1981) conducted a review of conceptual approaches to stereotypes and came to three conclusions with regard to defining stereotype. First, a stereotype is a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group. The current study will examine the belief that athletes are less academically inclined than their non-athlete peers. Second, these personal attributes can be subdivided into ascribed and identifying classes. For this study, the ascribed belief is that athletes are dumb and the identifying characteristic is being an athlete. Physical stature alone identifies some persons as athletes. For others, team apparel and participation in athletics identifies them as athletes. The third conclusion is that there are differences of opinion about whether stereotypes are bad by definition and whether stereotypes are individual or consensual

sets of beliefs. In the current study, the stereotype being examined is considered bad and is focused on athletes' perceptions of how they are viewed by others.

Do athletes feel that others have different expectations of them academically? Why would this matter? According to Aronson and Steele (2005), research has demonstrated that stereotypes do affect behavior, sometimes leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. They also note that several studies have shown stereotypes can affect behavior even among those who consciously reject the stereotype. Aronson and Steele also noted previous research revealing how stereotypes in and of themselves negatively affect the student. The theory of stereotype threat suggests that when reminded of a negative stereotype related to one's identity, performance on a relevant task will be negatively impacted. This extra pressure can have a negative impact on the student's performance via increased anxiety, increased cognitive load, or an unconscious tendency to behave in line with a primed social stereotype.

A study by Adler and Adler (1987) examined the changing salience of athletes' athletic, social, and academic roles. They found that 45% of entering freshmen athletes, who viewed academics as a less salient role, were enrolled by coaches in more "manageable" majors. The players' athletic role often conflicted with their academic role (courses they wanted or needed were only offered during practice time, or road trips caused them to miss key lectures, exams, and reviews). Over the course of their athletic career, athletes' perception of their athletic-academic role conflict was influenced by their coaches. Coaches verbally stressed the importance of academics; however, they assigned athletic and team functions higher salience than school obligations (athletic time was strictly regulated, but their academic time was not). Adler and Adler discovered that the

athletes must strictly adhere to athletic commitments despite coaches verbally expressing concern about academics. By taking care of academic matters, coaches served as intermediaries between players and the academic realm. Consequently, most athletes failed to develop the knowledge, initiative, or the interest to handle academic matters themselves. This led to a diminished academic role identity salience.

A qualitative study by Lally and Kerr (2005) examined student athletes' change in role identity over the course of their collegiate career. Results of the study show that, as a result of investing so much of themselves in their athletic identities, athletes had been indifferent toward their academic performance and their grades during their first year of university. Only later did they realize their commitment to sport and their pursuit of athletic goals distracted them from significant investment in academics. Participants perceived that their investment in athletic goals came at the expense of exploring other role identities, most notably that of student. Although giving up their hopes of pursuing athletic careers beyond the university, the participants recognized that their athletic experiences influenced their nonsport career choices.

The following studies are similar to the current study in that they examined athletes' perceptions of themselves. When comparing athletes and non-athletes on academic performance and personal development, Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, and Banaji, (2004) found that high commitment athletes rated themselves lower on academic skills than non-athletes. When athletes were compared to members of non-athletic extracurricular groups, high-commitment athletes experienced group membership as posing more obstacles to academic performance, specifically to being taken seriously by professors and to earning good grades. High-commitment athletes were distinguished

from non-athletes by their lower perception of themselves throughout college as smart, intellectual, and artistic/creative, and higher perception of themselves as socially skilled, outgoing, confident and good leaders.

It is possible that student-athletes will engage in self-handicapping behaviors in response to the “dumb jock” stereotype if they believe it to be true. The idea of self-handicapping behavior is based on the concept of stereotype threat. Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, and Darley (1999) examined the effect of framing an activity as a test of “sports intelligence” versus “natural athletic ability” on performance for golf putting. They found that White participants did worse when the task was framed as a test of natural athletic ability in contrast to sports intelligence; the results were the opposite for Black participants. Stone (2002) followed up this study with an examination on whether athletes would self-handicap their performances by engaging in less practice. Participants were assigned to either a “natural athletic ability” framed condition versus a control. Results revealed that participants in the “natural athletic ability” framed condition engaged in less practice for the golf putting task as compared to control groups. It is argued that the stereotype threat induced the self-handicapping behavior of engaging in less practice. Thus, the participant could attribute the poor performance to a lack of practice instead of lack of ability allowing for the ability to cope with the stereotype threat. Also, Simons et al. (2007) found one common negative coping mechanism of athletes is to accept explicitly or implicitly the validity of the stigma. They argue that athletes may believe at some level that they lack the intellectual ability to succeed academically. This belief then becomes a self fulfilling prophecy in which the athletes try

to avoid or resist academic situations where they feel inadequate by engaging in self handicapping behaviors.

Impact of NCAA regulations

It may also be possible that NCAA regulations designed to keep athletes on track to graduation are ultimately resulting in athletes being tailored into less difficult majors. The NCAA sets the following regulations:

(a) During the first two years of enrollment, a student-athlete may use credits acceptable toward any of the institution's degree programs;

(b) By the beginning of the third year of enrollment (fifth semester or seventh quarter), a student-athlete shall be required to have designated a program of studies leading toward a specific baccalaureate degree. From that point, the credits used to meet the progress-toward-degree requirements must be degree credit toward the student's designated degree program;

(c) A student-athlete who changes his or her designated degree program may comply with the progress-toward-degree requirement if:

    (1) The change in programs is documented appropriately by the institution's academic authorities;

    (2) The credits earned prior to the change are acceptable toward degree previously sought; and

    (3) The credits earned from the time of the change are acceptable toward the new desired degree.

(d) A student-athlete who has designated a specific degree program with an identified major may not use a course to fulfill the credit-hour requirement for

> meeting progress toward a degree even if the course fulfills an elective component of the student-athlete's degree program, if the student ultimately must repeat the course to fulfill the requirements of the student's major (The National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2009, p. 148).

These requirements are set by the NCAA to encourage academic progress and keep athletes on track for completing a degree on time. However, it may be possible that these requirements prevent student-athletes from changing majors and exploring other educational opportunities, because if they do not stay on track academically they may lose athletic eligibility. In an attempt to maintain eligibility, student-athletes may also choose a major simply because it does not interfere with their athletic schedule or because the classes in a particular major are more manageable than other majors.

Athletes and Academic Performance

There are studies that present evidence that athletes are not less academically successful than non-athletes. Curry, Rehm and Bernuth (1997) found that, when athletes were compared to non-athletes, there were no significant differences in intelligence or scholastic competence. However, they found a gender main effect difference, indicating that women have a higher mean score than men in school competence. Simons et al. (2007) asked athletes if they attended classes and turned in assignments on time. Results showed that 91.9% of the athletes reported they always or often attend classes and 98.3% always or often turn in their assignments on time. However, it should be noted that the Simons study is based on athlete reports of faculty and student attitudes without a non-athlete comparison group or an objective follow-up.

Personal/Group Discrimination Discrepancy

The personal/group discrimination discrepancy is a phenomenon that may be prevalent among student-athletes. According to Hodson and Esses (2002), the personal/group discrimination discrepancy refers to members of disadvantaged social categories reporting higher levels of discrimination for category members in general than for themselves as members of these categories. Hodson and Esses report that this discrimination often has an impact on an individual's self-concept by influencing the individual's commitment to a particular domain of achievement and performance. Results of their study indicated that participants reported significantly more discrimination at the category than the personal level. Negative attributes were more strongly attributed at the category level and positive attributes were more strongly attributed at the personal level. Similarly, a study by Taylor, Wright, & Moghaddam (1990) found that respondents perceived a higher level of discrimination directed at their group as a whole than at themselves as individual members of that group. The current study intends to examine if student-athletes employ similar thinking about academic performance. The study will address student-athletes' views of their personal academic ability and their views of the academic ability of other athletes.

Prior research provides evidence that the "dumb jock" stereotype is prevalent in society at large; however, it is also important to determine if athletes themselves feel the stereotype and potential prejudice. The "dumb jock" stereotype could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where an initially erroneous social belief leads to its own fulfillment (Jussim & Fleming, 1996). Jussim and Fleming note that, although the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy may not be as large as once claimed, the magnitude of the effects are

still important. They also note that virtually all major reviews on self-fulfilling prophecy agree that there are three main steps necessary for a self-fulfilling prophecy to occur: 1) perceivers develop erroneous expectations (i.e., stereotypes); 2) perceivers' expectations influence how they treat targets; 3) targets react to this treatment with behavior that confirms the expectation. One of the focuses of the current study is to examine the connecting link between step two and three, to what extent do athletes feel they are being treated as "dumb jocks."

The current study addressed prejudice of student-athletes' instructors and peers, the student athletes' freedom to make academic decisions, and student athletes' perception of the intelligence of other athletes. Specifically, three areas of student-athletes' perceptions of instructors and peers were addressed: 1) awareness that the student is a student-athlete, 2) academic expectations, and 3) willingness to offer help. Examination of student-athletes' perceptions with regard to the preceding areas will allow the researchers to assess the degree to which the "dumb jock" stereotype is perceived by student-athletes. The study also examined if the student-athletes utilize the stereotype themselves by applying the stereotype to fellow athletes. Finally, the study examined the student-athletes' perceptions of their freedom to make academic decisions.

Hypotheses

The results for the first two sets of questions were hypothesized to be consistent with the previous findings by Wininger and White (2008). They found that athletes perceive professors are aware that they are athletes, professors have higher academic expectations of them because they are athletes, professors are more willing to provide help because they are athletes, other students are aware that they are athletes, other

students have lower academic expectations of them because they are athletes, other students are more willing to provide help because they are athletes, professors are more likely to be aware that they are athletes as compared to other students, other students have lower expectations for them compared to their professors, and there is no difference in professor and other students' willingness to help.

Second, it was hypothesized that student athletes would report little control over choosing their major. Finally, it was expected that when comparing student-athlete's view of their personal academic ability versus the academic ability of other student athletes they would attribute the highest level of academic ability to themselves with declining ability being attributed to their team members followed by other athletes in general.

Method

Participants

All participants were student-athletes attending Western Kentucky University. Current enrollment at the university is approximately 20,000 students. The university is primarily a dormitory based campus. All sports compete at the NCAA Division I-A; 17 teams are funded (eight men's and nine women's). There are a total of 428 athletes (men = 268; women = 160). Participants included 180 athletes (105 male athletes, 74 female athletes) with ages ranging from 18 to 25 (M = 19.91, SD = 1.349). There were 40 African American, 1 Asian, 125 Caucasian, 5 Hispanic, and 8 other participants. In terms of class standing, participants included 63 freshmen, 45 sophomores, 41 juniors, 26 seniors, and 4 fifth year seniors. The break down of student-athlete participants are as follows: 12 softball, 10 volleyball, 85 football, 18 soccer, 3 women's golf, 2 men's golf, 4 women's basketball, 14 women's swimming, 8 men's swimming, 9 men's cross country/track, 11 women's cross country/track.

Materials

An electronic survey was created for this study using the Elisten software (Scantron Corporation, 2005). Questions addressed demographics, grade point average (GPA), perceptions of instructors' and peers' awareness of which students are athletes, expectations of student athletes, willingness to help athletes with academic endeavors, ability to choose their own major, importance of their athletic and academic career, and student athletes' view of the intelligence of other athletes (See Appendix A). Scaling for awareness was 1 = *Strongly Agree*, 2 = *Agree*, 3 = *Unsure*, 4 = *Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly*

Disagree. Scaling for expectations will be 1 = *lower*, 2 = *equal*, 3 = *higher* and scaling for willingness to help was 1 = *less*, 2 = *equally*, 3 = *more*.

Procedure

Athletes were solicited via coaches with no other incentives provided. Athletes completed the survey online. The purpose of the survey was twofold. The data collected was for this thesis and for Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS) / Life Skills data to be provided to the athletic department. The CHAMPS / Life Skills program was designed by the NCAA to enhance the quality of the student-athlete experience within the context of higher education. Supportive services are provided to those teams that are members of this program and this data was used to determine what services university athletes indicate they would like to see improved. Overall results with regards to which services are most desired by the student-athletes were reported to the athletic department.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

The preliminary question that was addressed for this study was, "Do athletes feel that others are aware of their status as an athlete"? Via a one-sample *t*-test, means were compared to the scaled midpoint of three (e.g., scaling was 1 = *Strongly Agree*, 2 = *Agree*, 3 = *Unsure*, 4 = *Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Disagree*). The question addressing professor awareness of student-athletes was thrown out due to incorrect scaling on the administered survey. It is likely that student-athletes feel that professors are aware that they are athletes because professors are asked to give grade progress reports three times per semester on each athlete. It was also found in a previous study by Wininger and White (2008) that student-athletes felt their professors were aware that they were athletes. The results of the one-sample *t*-test indicated that student-athletes feel that other students ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.12$, $t\ [176] = 10.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$) are aware that they are athletes.

Hypotheses Analyses

The two main questions were also addressed via one-sample *t*-tests with observed means compared to scale midpoints. These questions examined how athletes feel they are perceived in terms of academic expectations and others' willingness to provide academic help. As shown in Table 1, student-athletes felt that their professors had higher expectations for them because they were student-athletes, $M = 2.18$, $SD = .44$, $t\ (164) = 5.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$. However, they felt that other students had significantly lower academic expectations for them as student-athletes, $M = 1.56$, $SD = .54$, $t\ (146) = -9.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Scaling for the second question about willingness to help was 1 = *less*, 2 = *equally*, 3 = *more*. Student-athletes felt that professors ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .50$, $t\ [179] =$

4.91, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$) and other students ($M = 2.15$, $SD = .46$, t [177] = 4.19, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$) were more willing to help them because they were athletes (see Table 2).

Table 1

Student-athletes' perceived academic expectations from professors and other students

Question: …have ____academic expectations of athletes.

Academic Expectations	Professors		Students	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Lower	4	2.2	67	37.2
Equal	126	70.0	76	42.2
Higher	34	18.9	3	1.7
I don't know [a]	14	7.8	31	17.2
No Response	2	1.1	3	1.7
Total	180	100.0	180	100.0

[a] For the purpose of analysis, "I don't know" responses were recoded as missing data.

Table 2

Student-athletes' perceptions of help provided by professors and other students

Question: …are ____ likely to help me because I am an athlete.

Academic Expectations	Professors		Students	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Less	9	5.0	8	4.4
Equally	128	71.1	135	75.0
More	42	23.3	34	18.9
No Response	1	0.6	3	1.7
Total	180	100.0	180	100.0

The subsequent research question was, "Are there differences in athletes' perceptions of how professors versus other students view them academically?" Paired-samples *t*-tests were used to compare means between questions about professors' versus other students' perceptions for each question. There were significant differences among student-athletes' perceptions for their professors versus other students on the question addressing academic expectations. Student athletes felt that other students (M = 1.58, SD = .54) had lower expectations for them compared to their professors (M = 2.18, SD = .45), t (137) = 9.98, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$). There was no significant difference in student-athletes' perceptions of professors (M = 2.19, SD = .51) and other student's (M = 2.15, SD = .47) willingness to help them because they were athletes, t (177) = .881, p = .379.

Next, it was hypothesized that student-athletes would feel that they have little control over choosing their major. In an effort to determine if a large number of athletes were concentrated in a particular major, the student-athletes were asked to report their

major. The top five majors consisted of approximately half of all student-athletes surveyed (see Table 3). Contrary to the hypothesis, results of the survey indicated that the majority of student-athletes surveyed feel they are free to choose their major (see Table 4).

Table 3

Top 5 Majors Reported

Major	Frequency	Percent
Undecided	24	13.3
Exercise Science	20	11.1
Biology	18	10.0
Sport Management	18	10.0
Business Management	13	7.2
Total	93	51.6

Note. The majors included in this chart account for approximately half of the total respondents.

Table 4

Student-athlete's perceived freedom to choose their major

	Frequency	Percent
Free to choose	162	90.0
Free to choose if doesn't interfere with practice/games	6	3.3
Strongly advised to choose from a certain group of majors	9	5.0
Little control/assigned a major	2	1.1
No response	1	0.6
Total	180	100.0

The final hypothesis tested examined the personal/group discrimination discrepancy. When asked about their individual academic performance, student athletes indicated that they performed well. However, when asked about the academic performance of teammates and university athletes in general, student-athletes estimated worse academic performance than they assigned to themselves, $F(1,176) = 11.52$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .061$; see Table 5. Student-athletes were also asked to provide their own grade point average and to predict the grade point average for their team and for university athletes overall. Consistent with the previous finding, student-athletes assigned a significantly lower grade point average for teammates and university athletes than for themselves, $F(1, 177) = 29.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .143$; see Table 6.

Table 5

Scale frequency responses for athletes' reports of their individual, teammates, and university athletes' academic performance

	I perform well academically		Other athletes who play my sport perform well academically		Other athletes at my university perform well academically	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree (5)	37	20.6	33	18.3	15	8.3
Agree (4)	111	61.7	79	43.9	98	54.4
Unsure (3)	15	8.3	42	23.3	53	29.4
Disagree (2)	10	5.6	21	11.7	10	5.6
Strongly Disagree (1)	5	2.8	4	2.2	2	1.1
No Response	2	1.1	1	0.6	2	1.1
Mean	3.93		3.65		3.64	
SD[a]	.879		.989		.763	

[a] SD = Standard Deviation

Table 6

Comparison of individual, team, and university athletes' GPAs

	My GPA[a]		My Team GPA		Univ. Athlete GPA	
GPA	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. A (4.0)	15	8.3	-	-	1	0.6
2. A - (3.7)	25	13.9	4	2.2	1	0.6
3. B+ (3.3)	33	18.3	41	22.8	8	4.4
4. B (3.0)	41	22.8	42	23.3	56	31.1
5. B - (2.7)	22	12.2	21	11.7	57	31.7
6. C+ (2.3)	19	10.6	44	24.4	38	21.1
7. C (2.0)	20	11.1	26	14.4	17	9.4
8. C - (1.7)	2	1.1	-	-	2	1.1
9. D+ (1.3)	1	0.6	1	0.6	-	-
10. D (1.0)	-	-	1	0.6	-	-
Mean	2.99		2.72		2.67	
SD[b]	.619		.514		.389	

Note. Cells that have only a dash indicate that no respondent chose that category.

[a]Two respondents did not indicate their personal GPA.

[b] SD = Standard Deviation

Exploratory Analyses

Additional analyses were completed to examine the role of gender, athletic scholarship, academic scholarship, race, and the possible interactions of these variables. The initial exploratory analysis examined the effect of gender on the student-athletes perceptions of their academic performance compared to teammates and other university athletes. Student-athletes reported their personal GPA and their perception of the GPA for teammates and university athletes overall. Results indicated that female student-athletes perceive that their team as a whole performs well academically; however, they perceive that university athletes in general perform more poorly than either themselves or their team. In contrast, male student-athletes perceive their team as performing significantly worse academically than themselves, but perceive that university athletes in general perform approximately as well academically as they predicted for themselves, F (1,175) = 5.02, p = .026, η^2 = .028; see Figure 1. When examining GPA, female student athletes perceived that teammates would have a significantly lower grade point average than themselves, followed by athletes in general at the university being perceived as having even lower grade point averages than female student-athletes reported for themselves. Male student-athletes reported grade point averages for themselves and university athletes overall at approximately 3.5 followed by a significant decline in perceived grade point average for teammates, F (1, 176) = 45.31, $p < .001$, η^2 = .205; see Figure 2.

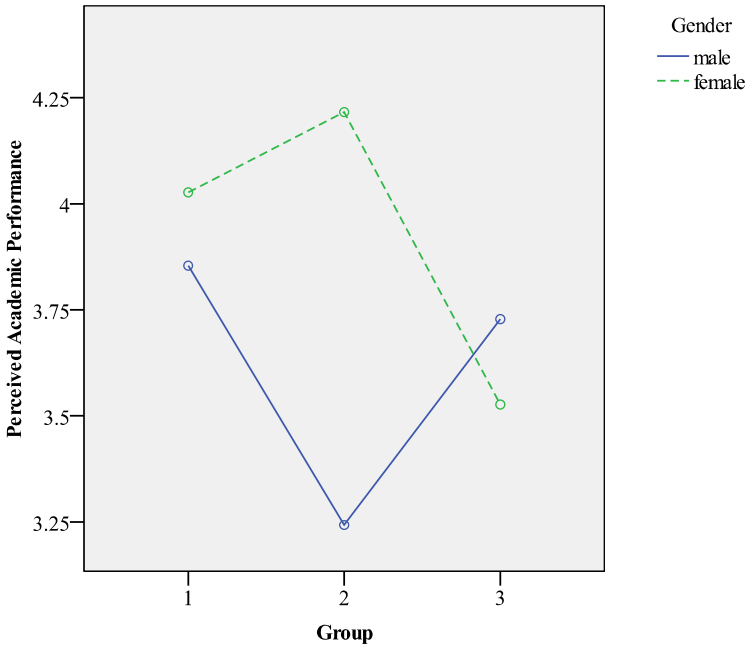

Figure 1. Gender differences in the perceived academic performance of the athlete compared to teammate and university athletes overall.

Note. a) Scaling for the Y axis was 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. b) Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

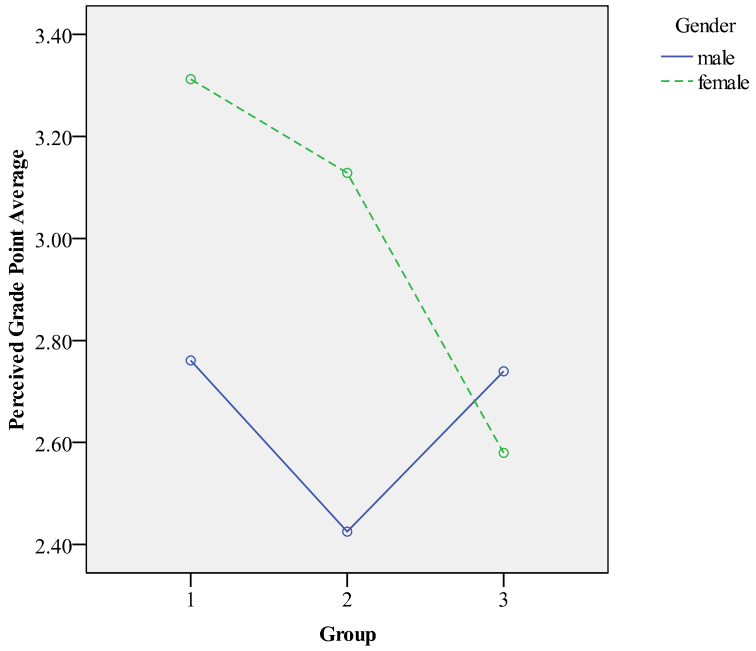

Figure 2. Gender differences in the perceived grade point average of the athlete compared to teammate and university athletes overall.

Note. Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

Further analyses were completed examining the effect of gender on athletes' perceptions of academic performance for themselves, teammates, and university athletes as a whole. Football players made up 81 percent of the male participants for this survey. Because football players perceptions were so heavily weighted it was decided that an examination of the football players vs. other male athletes was warranted. Results indicated that there was a difference in perceptions of football players as compared to other male athletes. Football players perceived approximately equal GPA for themselves and university athletes as a whole, but perceived a significantly lower GPA for their teammates. In contrast, all other male athletes perceived the highest GPA for themselves followed by lower GPAs for their teammates and significantly lower GPAs for university athletes as a whole, F (1,173) = 58.58, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .169$; see Figure 3. Finally, a

comparison of the perceptions of academic performance was completed using female athletes and male athletes excluding football players. Results show a similar trend of both groups reporting the highest GPA to themselves followed by a significant decline in the perceived GPA for teammates and an even further decline in the perceived GPA for university athletes as a whole, F (1, 89) = 2.06, p = .15 (see Figure 4).

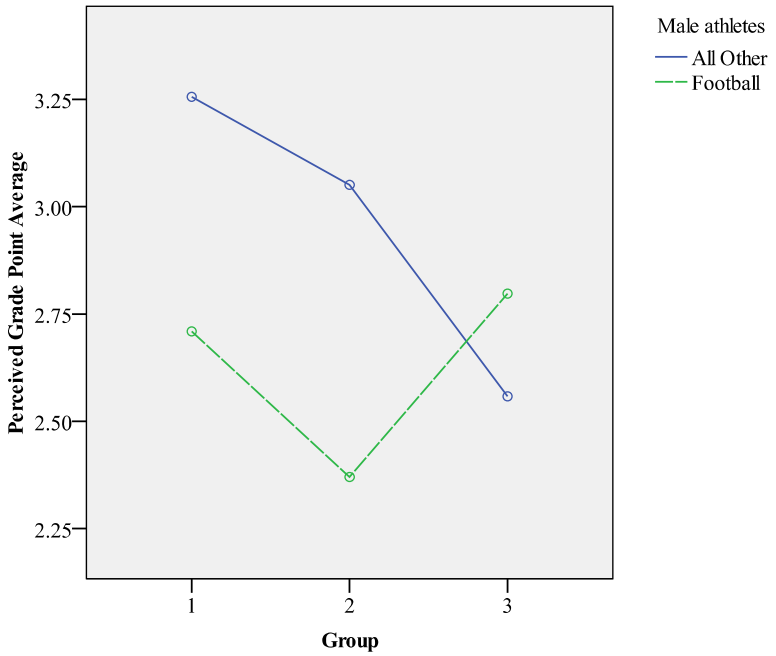

Figure 3. A comparison of the perceptions of football players and all other male athletes on the grade point averages for themselves, teammates, and university athletes.

Note. Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

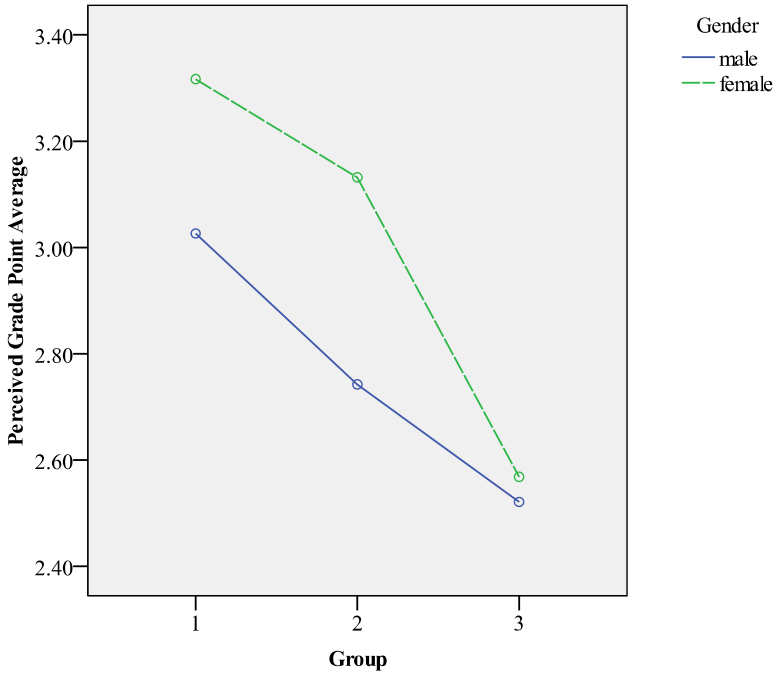

Figure 4. Male and female athletes' (excluding football players) perceptions of grade point averages for themselves, teammates, and university athletes.

Note. Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

The effect of receiving an athletic or academic scholarship on the student-athletes' perceptions of the academic performance of athletes was also examined. Results indicated that receiving an athletic scholarship versus not receiving an athletic scholarship did not result in a significant difference in student-athletes' perceptions of academic performance of athletes, F (1, 175) = 1.31, $p > .254$. Conversely, for athletes receiving an academic scholarship, significant differences were found in their perceptions of academic performance by athletes. Athletes receiving an academic scholarship indicated that they perform well academically; however, they reported being Unsure (i.e., an average of approximately 3 on the 1 to 5 scale; see note on Figure 5) of the academic ability of teammates and university athletes overall, F (1, 176) = 11.07, $p = .001$, η^2 =

.059; see Figure 5. Athletes not receiving an academic scholarship reported no significant difference between their own grade point average and that of teammates or university athletes in general. However, athletes receiving academic scholarships assigned the highest grade point average to themselves, followed by a significant decline in their perception of the grade point average of their teammates and even greater decline in their perception of the grade point average of university athletes in general, F (1, 176) = 56.99, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .245$; see Figure 6. Possible interaction between athletic scholarship and academic scholarship was examined and no significant interaction emerged.

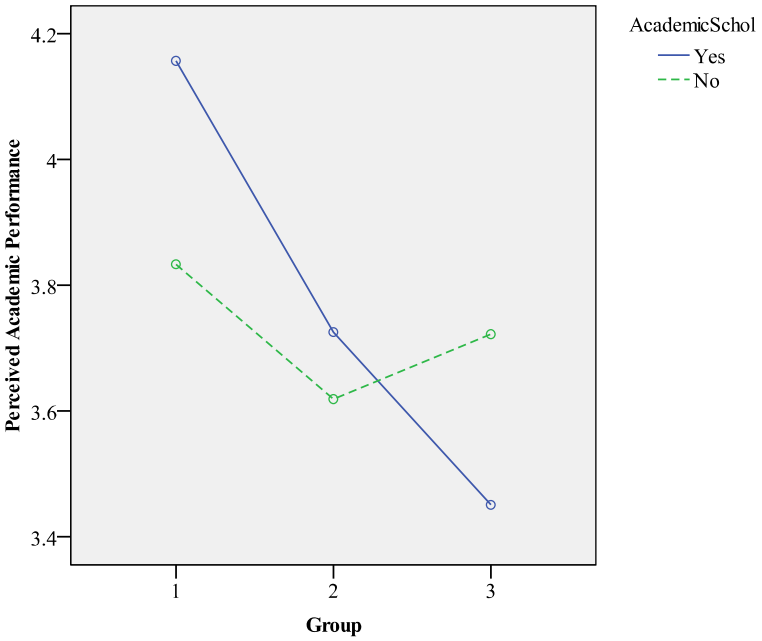

Figure 5. The impact of receiving an academic scholarship on the perception of academic performance of teammates and university athletes overall.

Note. a) Scaling for the Y axis was 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. b) Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

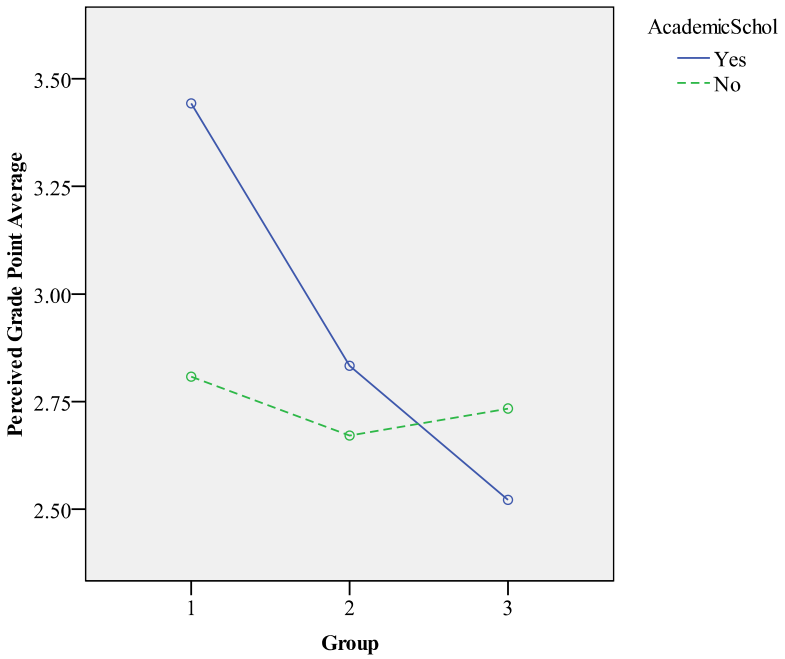

Figure 6. The impact of receiving an academic scholarship on the perception of grade point average of teammates and university athletes overall.

Note. Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

The interaction between race and student-athletes' perception of academic performance was examined. The comparison included only African American and Caucasian participants due to insufficient sample size for other racial categories. Results indicated that African-American student athletes indicated that they were Unsure of their own and teammates' academic performance, but perceived that university athletes overall performed significantly better than themselves. Caucasian student athletes indicated that they performed well academically, but were Unsure of the academic performance of their teammates and university athletes overall, F (1, 161) = 15.83, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .090$; see Figure 7. African-American student-athletes reported significantly lower grade point averages for themselves than what they perceived the grade point averages for teammates

and university athletes as a group. However, Caucasian student-athletes reported significantly higher grade point averages for themselves followed by lower grade point averages for teammates and even lower grade point averages for university athletes as a whole, F (1, 162) = 65.63, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .288$; see Figure 8.

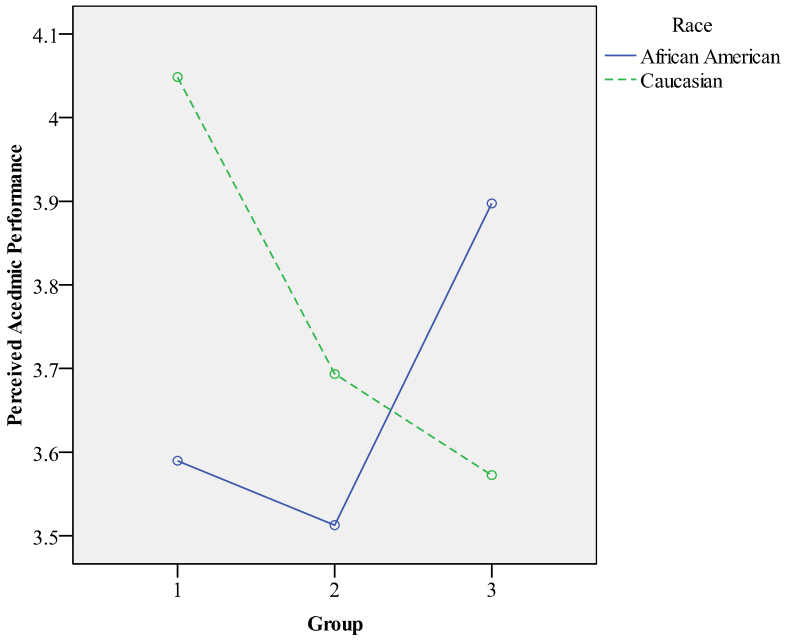

Figure 7. The impact of Race on the perception of academic performance of teammates and university athletes overall.

Note. a) Scaling for the Y axis was 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. b) Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

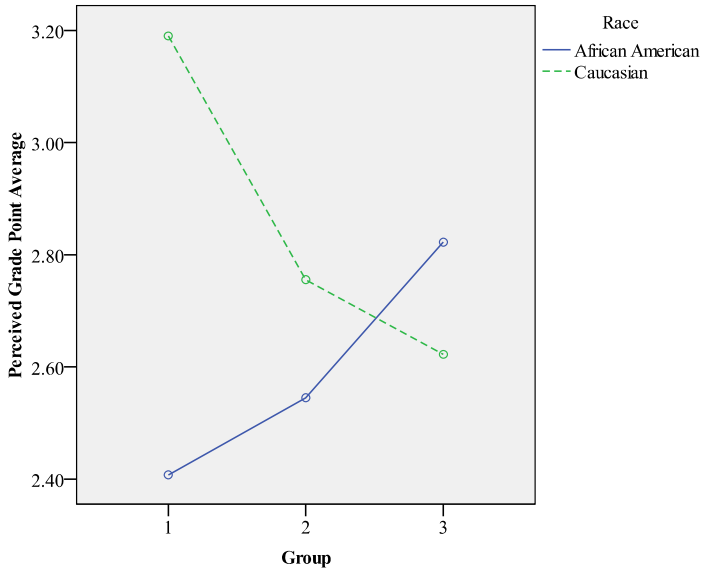

Figure 8. The impact of receiving Race on the perception of grade point average of teammates and university athletes overall.

Note. Scaling for the X axis was 1 = my academic performance, 2 = teammates academic performance, 3 = university athletes' overall academic performance.

The interaction between race and gender for GPA was examined and there was no significant interaction (F (1, 155) = .08, p > .78). The interaction between gender and academic scholarship was also examined. No interaction was found between gender and academic scholarship when examining perceived GPA (F (1, 155) = .19, p = .66). An interaction was found between gender and academic scholarship when examining perceived grade point average; however, the effect size was minimal in comparison to other findings (η^2 = .025). The interaction between race and academic scholarship was not examined because the sample size was not adequate as only four African Americans reported receiving an academic scholarship.

Discussion

Many studies to date (Adler & Adler, 1987; Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Sailes, 1993) have found support for the existence of the "dumb jock" stereotype among non-athletes. However, the current study focuses on student-athletes' perceptions of the existence of the stereotype. The initial hypotheses of this study examined student-athletes perceptions of professors and other students' academic expectations of athletes and willingness to provide academic help to athletes. It was hypothesized that athletes would perceive that professors would have higher academic expectations and be more willing to provide academic help. It was also predicted that athletes would perceive other students as having lower academic expectations for athletes, but be more willing to provide academic help. Next, it was hypothesized that athletes would perceive that other students have lower expectations for them compared to professors; however, there would be no difference in professors and other students' willingness to help them because they are athletes. Results of the current study support the primary hypotheses.

It is very concerning that athletes perceive their fellow students as having lower academic expectations of athletes because this style of thinking could lead to self-fulfilling prophecy. As noted by Simons et al. (2007), this perceived expectation may result in athletes believing that they lack the intelligence to succeed academically and ultimately engage in self handicapping behaviors in an attempt to avoid academic situations where the stereotype threat is activated.

The finding that professors and other students are more willing to provide academic help could be viewed as positive or negative. One interpretation is that it is

preferential treatment or sympathy because student-athletes are viewed as less capable academically. Graham (1990) suggests that unsolicited help is an attribution cue indicating low ability expectations. In turn, the athletes' academic self-efficacy may be lowered, leading to decreases in future academic achievement.

Student-athletes' perceptions of their ability to choose their academic major was also examined. Student-athletes are required to meet certain academic regulations set forth by the NCAA to remain eligible to compete in college sports. It was hypothesized that student-athletes would report having lower feelings of control over choosing their major due to an effort to meet NCAA academic regulations. Results did not support this hypothesis as the majority of participants reported that they feel free to choose their major. The final hypothesis examined the personal/group discrimination discrepancy among student-athletes. It was expected that, when comparing student-athlete's views of their personal academic ability versus the academic ability of other student athletes, student-athletes would attribute the highest level of academic ability to themselves with declining ability being attributed to their team members followed by other athletes in general. Results indicate that, when asked about the academic performance of teammates and university athletes in general, student-athletes estimated worse academic performance and significantly lower grade point averages than they assigned to themselves. This finding indicates that some student-athletes do endorse the "dumb jock" stereotype for other athletes, but do not necessarily believe that it applies to them individually.

The personal/group discrimination discrepancy did emerge as expected in this study. This finding is significant because this study not only shows that athletes perceive

the stereotype as existing, but that athletes themselves employ these opinions about other athletes. It has already been discussed previously that the perceived views and treatment from professors and other athletes may lead to self-handicapping behaviors and a lowered academic self-efficacy for athletes. On the other hand, the personal/group discrimination discrepancy may become a buffer for athletes in that they can feel better about themselves if they believe that the stereotype applies to their group but not to themselves.

Exploratory analyses were completed to follow up on the previous findings and examined the role of gender, athletic scholarship, academic scholarship, race, and the possible interactions of these variables. Results of the role of gender indicated that female student-athletes perceive that their team as a whole performs well academically; however, they perceive that university athletes in general perform more poorly than either themselves or their team. Female student athletes also perceived that teammates would have a significantly lower grade point average than themselves, followed by athletes in general at the university being perceived as having even lower grade point averages than female student-athletes reported for themselves. In contrast, male student-athletes perceive their team as performing significantly worse academically than themselves, but perceive that university athletes in general perform approximately as well academically as they predicted for themselves. Male student-athletes reported grade point averages for themselves and university athletes overall at approximately 3.5 followed by a significant decline in perceived grade point average for teammates.

Further examination of the role of gender was completed for perceptions of male student athletes due to the large sample of football players that completed the survey. Results indicated a perceptual difference between football players and other male athletes

when examining views of the academic ability of themselves, their teammates, and university athletes as a whole. Football players perceived approximately equal GPAs for themselves and university athletes as a whole, but perceived a significantly lower GPA for their teammates. In contrast, all other male and female athletes perceived the highest GPA for themselves followed by lower GPAs for their teammates and significantly lower GPAs for university athletes as a whole. This finding could suggest that football players are more susceptible to the "dumb jock" stereotype. Future research to examine differences among sports with regard to susceptibility to the stereotype is warranted.

Based on examining the impact of receiving an athletic or academic scholarship, results indicated that receiving an athletic scholarship versus not receiving an athletic scholarship did not result in a significant difference in student-athletes' perceptions of academic performance of athletes. However, athletes receiving academic scholarships assigned the highest grade point average to themselves, followed by a significant decline in their perception of the grade point average of their teammates and even greater decline in their perception of the grade point average of university athletes in general.

The influence of race (including only African American and Caucasian) was also examined. African-American student athletes indicated that they were "Unsure" of their own and teammates' academic performance, but perceived that university athletes overall performed significantly better than themselves. African-American student-athletes also reported significantly lower grade point averages for themselves than what they perceived the grade point averages for teammates and university athletes as a group. Caucasian student athletes indicated that they performed well academically, but were "Unsure" of the academic performance of their teammates and university athletes overall.

However, they reported significantly higher grade point averages for themselves followed by lower grade point averages for teammates and even lower grade point averages for university athletes as a whole.

An interesting difference emerged when looking at athletes' perceptions of academic ability and race. The finding that African American student-athletes indicated that they perceived athletes overall performing better academically than them is reflective of their academic self concept. A study by Sailes (1993) also shows a racial discrepancy when African American and Caucasian college students were asked to rate the intelligence and academic preparation of African American and Caucasian college athletes. Results of the study indicate that Caucasian participants rated African American athletes as significantly less intelligent and less academically prepared. According to Simmons et al. (2007), this perception may be explained by a double stigma that African American athletes face. Simmons et al. indicate that lack of intellectual ability is part of both the athletic stigma and the African American stigma.

Although the current study yielded some significant findings, there are a few limitations that should be considered when evaluating the results. First, student-athletes responses may be biased when asked if they feel they are free to choose their major as they may not be aware that their options are being limited. For example, athletes may be told that they are free to choose any major yet have restrictions placed on the times that they can take classes. In addition, the sample for the current study consisted of athletes from only one university and this may not be representative of athletes at other universities. Furthermore, the gender by race interaction was not evenly distributed. African American males (36 participants) were over represented, whereas African

American females (4 participants) were under represented. Finally, this study was limited by being unable to compare race and academic scholarship due to an inadequate sample of African American student-athletes on academic scholarship.

An important follow-up to this study will be to follow student-athletes over time, repeatedly sampling perceptions of peer expectations, in order to ascertain how much the student-athletes' motivation and achievement are affected. For instance, it may be the case that student-athletes will begin their college career with the majority of their motivation focused on athletics in an attempt to reach their goal of moving on to the professional level; however, as the student-athlete progresses through their college career he or she may begin to be more motivated to focus academics as they realize a small percentage of athletes go to the professional level. Another approach would be to ask student-athletes how much they are affected by differential treatment with regards to academic capabilities. Future research should also examine the attributions of student-athletes with regard to academic achievement and academic self-efficacy. In this case it would be beneficial to survey student-athletes about how confident they feel in performing academically and comparing this with the actual academic records for each participant. Additionally, a similar study should be completed to compare student-athletes from different divisions (e.g., NCAA Division I, II, III) and at more high profile schools where athletes move on to the professional level.

The results of this study create significant concern for how athletes perceive they are being viewed in the academic realm and the subsequent effects it has on their academic performance. These results would be particularly helpful for athletic directors when planning for training and services to be offered to student-athletes. It may help

athletic directors meet academic and psychological needs of their student-athletes while at the same time promoting adherence to NCAA regulations for academic eligibility. Services to athletes should include positive reinforcement of their academic abilities. In the academic realm, information should be provided to the student body regarding the academic successes of athletes.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Gender: Male Female

Age: _____

Race: African American Asian Caucasian Hispanic Native American Other

Major: _____

Class Standing: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior 5th year Senior

Current Cumulative College GPA: A (4.0) A- (3.75)

B+ (3.5) B (3.0) B- (2.75)

C+ (2.5) C (2.0) C- (1.75)

D+ (1.5) D (1.0) D- (.75)

F+ (.50) F (0.0)

Which sports do you participate in? _____

Are you currently receiving an athletic scholarship? Yes No

Are you currently receiving an academic scholarship? Yes No

Which is currently more important to you?
___athletics
___academics

Which is more important for your future?
___athletics
___academics

When it comes to choosing my major
A. I feel free to choose among all majors
B. I feel free to choose any major that does not interfere with practice/games.
C. I am strongly advised to choose from a certain group of majors
D. I have little control over what I want to major in. (I was basically assigned a major)

My professors are aware that I am an athlete at my university.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

My professors have _____ academic expectations for athletes.

Lower	Equal	Higher	I don't know
1	2	3	4

My professors are _____ likely to help me because I am an athlete.

Less	Equally	More
1	2	3

Other students in my classes are aware that I am an athlete at my university.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Other students have _____ academic expectations of athletes.

Lower	Equal	Higher	I don't know
1	2	3	4

Other students are _____ likely to help me because I am an athlete.

Less	Equally	More
1	2	3

Think about the university sport/team of which you are a member when indicating the degree to which you agree with the following statements:

I perform well academically

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

People who play my sport perform well academically

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Athletes at my university perform well academically

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the following 2 questions to the best of your ability

The overall GPA for my sports team is: A (4.0) A- (3.75)

B+ (3.5) B (3.0) B- (2.75)

C+ (2.5) C (2.0) C- (1.75)

D+ (1.5) D (1.0) D- (.75)

F+ (.50) F (0.0)

The overall GPA for athletes at my university is: A (4.0) A- (3.75)

B+ (3.5) B (3.0) B- (2.75)

C+ (2.5) C (2.0) C- (1.75)

D+ (1.5) D (1.0) D- (.75)

F+ (.50) F (0.0)

Listed below are elements of what the NCAA calls Life Skills. Please indicate for each element your perception of how well this element has been provided to you as an athlete at your university.

	Not provided at all	Provided with minimum exposure	Provided, but could use some improvement	Provided completely, no improvement needed
Study Skills				
Goal Setting and Time Management				
Tutoring and Structured Study Sessions				
Academic Counseling and Advising				
Registration in a Meaningful Curriculum				
Nutrition				
Disordered Eating Prevention Education				
Establishing Relationships and Developing Sexual Responsibility				
Developing Self-Esteem				
Stress Management				
Alcohol Choices and Addictive Behavior				
Dealing with Depression and Grief				
Interpersonal Communications				
Media Relations				
Personal and Social Development				
Manners and Etiquette				
Dealing with Authority				
Understanding and Celebrating Diversity				
Fiscal Responsibility (e.g., money)				
Violence Prevention				
Leadership				
Evaluation of Coaching				
Job Search Process (e.g., resume writing, career services)				
Agents				
Life After Sports Seminar				
Service Commitment (e.g., volunteer work)				
Speakers (opportunities to speak in local schools or for local organizations)				
Mentoring				
Sport Psychology Training (e.g., affect regulation, imagery)				

Please choose 5 elements from the Life Skills programming listed below that you would like to see WKU improve or make available to WKU athletes.

- Study skills
- Goal setting and Time management
- Tutoring and structured study sessions
- Academic Counseling and Advising
- Registration in a Meaningful Curriculum
- Nutrition
- Disordered Eating Prevention Education
- Establishing Relationships and Developing Sexual Responsibility
- Developing Self-Esteem
- Stress Management
- Alcohol Choices and Addictive Behavior
- Dealing with Depression and Grief
- Interpersonal Communications
- Media Relations
- Personal and Social Development
- Manners and Etiquette
- Dealing with authority
- Understanding and Celebrating Diversity
- Fiscal Responsibility (e.g., money)
- Violence Prevention
- Leadership
- Evaluation of coaching
- Job Search Process (e.g., resumes writing, career services)
- Agents
- Life After Sports Seminar
- Service Commitment (e.g., volunteer work)
- Speakers Bureau (opportunities to speak in local schools or for local organizations)
- Mentoring
- Sport Psychology training (e.g., imagery, affect regulation)