PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ATHLETES AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIORS: HOW COMMUNICATION CAN CHANGE THE PATH OF A STUDENT ATHLETE'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS

by

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(Under the Direction of Jennifer Samp)

ABSTRACT

Research has focused on different aspects of a student-athlete's academic career, including their motivation, their successes and failures, and the different stereotypes placed on student athletes. This project addresses negative stereotypes and perceptions about student-athletes and argues that students place more internal attributions on student-athletes based on their communication behaviors in the classroom. The Situation Attitude Scale (SAS) surveyed students at a Southeastern University to indicate what communicative behaviors have an impact on perceptions and attributions. The results indicated that there was some significance between behaviors and attributions, such that students were more likely to make perceptions of student athletes when more passive behaviors were used. Results also indicated that there was significance between ethnicity and the type of attribution made. Clear results were limited due to the lack of specific

measurements identifying which communication behaviors had more influence on students when making an attribution about a student athlete.

INDEX WORDS: Attributions, Non-verbal communication, Verbal Communication, Student Athletes, Perceptions

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; 2016), student-athletes represent approximately 2% of the student population throughout all universities and colleges in the United States. Yet student athletes face great difficulty overcoming preconceived stereotypes and perceptions compared to other members of the University (Stone, 2012). Typically, the biggest stereotype student athletes have to overcome is the idea of being a "dumb jock" (McHugh-Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995). Another hindering stereotype stems from the perception that they are putting athletics over academics. Many believe university athletic associations push their student athletes to take easier classes and provide them with academic help to focus on the sport and assure athletic eligibility and eventually graduation (Adler & Adler, 1985). In some cases, athletic programs do whatever it takes to ensure athletic eligibility, which can include forging grades, using tutors to complete assignments, or choosing a major for an athlete that insures academic success, which compromises academic integrity. This information comes from headline news that discusses the major Division 1 programs violating academic standards. Not all major universities violate the academic standards, but the few that do, only increase the negative stereotypes that become generalizable to all student athletes.

Whatever the negative stereotype may be, like most stereotypes, they are often misguided about athletes. In reality, most student athletes start college with a positive

attitude, focusing on earning their degree (Martin, Harrison, Stone & Lawrence, 2010). While there are instances where some student athletes focus on the importance of perusing a professional career rather than their academics, most student-athletes are excited to be a part of the college culture and to further their education (Adler & Adler, 1985). Student athletes have some of the most time demanding schedules on a college campus (Jolly, 2008). They also have some of the highest expectations placed upon them. Not only are they required to do well in practice and games, but student-athletes also have to stay within a certain GPA. According to the NCAA, student athletes only need a 2.0 to be eligible to be considered for a Division 1 scholarship, and need to maintain that 2.0 to stay eligible for the university, but most schools require a higher GPA to be admitted and to compete. The minimum GPA to be accepted is overall very low. This does not help the argument that student-athletes care about their academics, but the GPA requirement is only part of many aspects that are expected from student-athlete.

The higher expectations start the minute student-athletes step on a college campus. Many students when they arrive at college do not know what they want to do and really take the next four years to figure out their life path. Student athletes do not get this option. When student-athletes arrive on campus, they are immediately thrown into practice and classes. Instead of being able to navigate campus, lost with other freshman, incoming freshman athletes have to learn and adapt to a new, more difficult athletic practice schedule and be able to adapt to new college classes.

Along with adjusting to a new life on a college campus, many student athletes are held to higher expectations from their family members. Some athletes come into college with the expectation of getting a degree; others see it as a means to become a provider for

their families. A family's economic background could be one explanation for why student athletes' focus on sport. Typically, because of family pressures, the athlete's goal is to make it to the next level. Unfortunately, with a limited number of opportunities to play a collegiate sport, the NCAA also reports that only about 1.3% of all college athlete are able to play their sport professionally.

Student athletes are under pressure to be students, athletes and sometimes providers, but what in lesser known, is that schools also expect student-athletes to become recruiters and revenue producers. Huffman and Cooper (2012) note "researchers have explained that the positive perception of an athletic department is instrumental to the overall enhancement of the academic institution for prospective students (p.226)." This shows that universities expect their student athletes to be the best at their sport to help increase revenue and overall school morale. These expectations of student athletes are much more than what the average student faces. Because of balancing multiple identities, student athletes often struggle finding what identity best suits them. It is because of the high expectations and multiple roles a student athlete has, this project is crucial to helping a student athlete alleviate the negative perceptions surrounding their academic behaviors. With all the demands student-athletes face, stereotypes should not be an additional hindrance to their academic success.

Prior research examining stereotypes about student athletes often focuses on a 'stereotype threat,' whereby a negative stereotype can drive and confirm certain behaviors from those in the stereotyped group to increase perceptions of the stereotype (Stone, 2008). This can be problematic for student-athletes' academic success because if they believe there is a negative stereotype about their academic performance, they may be

more likely to act in certain ways that enhance the stereotype, which is also known as the self-fulfilling prophecy (Stone, 2008).

Understanding the psychological impacts of the negative perceptions on student athletes is crucial to a student athlete's well-being. Research has continuously noted that student-athletes face a variety of negative perceptions from classmates to faculty members, but most research does not focus on how to fix the perceptions. The purpose of this study is to investigate the types of attributions students make about student athletes and how their communication behaviors impact their perceptions. The goal is to provide understanding to student athletes about how the implications of their behaviors are perceived by their peers and also to provide tools to professional staff members to teach student athletes ways to increase academic success.

Student athletes can be 'stars' on a college campus, but they are overall a very small group of students. The above discussion detailing the expectations of student-athletes is one of many reasons to highlight the need for understanding the negative perceptions of student-athletes, but is not the only one. Again, the statistic is very low for student-athletes to have the opportunity to play at the next level. Utilizing the results from this study, student-athletes can recognize that using these behaviors impact their lives after college as well. Many times, student-athletes' focus on what is happening at this moment in their lives and do not think into the future. Ultimately, this project will help highlight key factors to help them succeed academically and in professional situations when there is life without sport. While this project is not the only solution, it can be viewed as the beginning steps to helping student-athletes balance their multiple identities and helping to maintain academic integrity. Academic integrity can be

maintained through the accountability of student athlete behaviors. The argument this project establishes is that through the behaviors, the differences between students and student-athletes in the classroom can be minimized. If those differences are minimized, student-athletes can be a part of a classroom culture without the added pressures of their expectations leading to more academic involvement, success and maintaining integrity.

This project targets student athletes and their behaviors in the classroom, but the results are useful to a variety of academic support staff members in academic and student development programs. Academic Advisors and Student development teams can use these communication behaviors as part of their leadership curriculum and life skills program. Adding 'classroom etiquette' to their programs, they can continue to promote the importance of the student aspect in student-athlete. Ideally, coaches and support staff would buy into the idea of supporting the student identity, but it is important to begin the process of understanding and developing classroom behaviors with the staff that interacts with academics.

The goal of the project is to highlight the importance of student behaviors in a classroom. Student athletes and professional development staff can utilize the results to help student-athletes manage their multiple identities and the expectations of them. While the argument can be made that all students should care about perceptions in a classroom, student-athletes should especially consider using the results because they are on a platform where they are scrutinized even more. Whether they continue their sport or no longer participate in sport, there will always be people forming perceptions. Establishing and using behaviors to be a part of the academic culture, not only helps them succeed

now in the classroom, but it prepares them for a future when athletics are no longer main focal point of their life.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Attribution Theory

The attribution theory can be used to explain the perceptions surrounding student athletes. This theory is used as a key variable when determining perceptions. Kelly and Michela (1980) argue that attribution is the "perception or inference of cause" (p. 458). As part of determining cause, attribution theory explains that individuals view behavior in terms of internal versus external circumstances (Kelley & Michela, 1980). An internal attribution is often referred to as perception of a person based off of an individual's personality or characteristics, whereas an external attribution reflects judgments based on factors external to an individual's personality (Johansen, Little, & Akin-Little, 2011). For example, if an individual responds to a situation with a negative attitude (e.g., rude remarks, eye rolling, etc.), one might attribute the response to an internal, personality-based attribution, such that the individual is an inconsiderate person. If the recipient of the negative attitude responds by associating the behavior with bad news or a bad day, an external attribution could be utilized; if negative behavior is excused as exceptional or situational, the individual would no longer be assessing a person's characteristics; rather they would be assessing the circumstances of the situation.

There are three main antecedents of attributions: information presented (what the recipient can visibly see), the perceiver's beliefs, (the knowledge the recipient already has and with which has formed an opinion), and the motivation behind one's perception (why

the recipient wants to believe the information) (McClure & Jaspars, 1993). Past experiences impact how individuals perceive the information presented (Kelley & Michela, 1980), and a person's belief also derives from successes, failures, and expectations of the actor's behavior in specific situations. Regarding the perception of student athletes, a student's beliefs and previous knowledge about student athletes play a role in how perceptions are formed. Generally, students enter a class with assumptions about the type of student a student-athlete will be (McHugh-Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). Two concepts within attribution theory are the fundamental attribution error and the actor-observer effect. These two phenomena factor into how and why students and student athletes enter a classroom with assumptions. According to research, the fundamental attribution error is when a person focuses more on the internal characteristics of an actor rather than the setting within which the behavior is occurring in (Dieser, 2011). Swanson, Allen, and Mancabelli (2015) describe it simply as "the human tendency to fault people, not systems" (p.68). The actor-observer effect is when an individual attributes other people's actions to their characteristics, but their own behaviors on the environment or situation (Greene & McClearn, 2010). Applying these concepts to student athletes, I argue that the negative behaviors student-athletes (e.g. not caring about academic success or easily receiving a passing grade in order to stay eligible to play the sport) that were witnessed by peers along with the fundamental attribution error and the actor-observer effect are responsible for how student athletes are perceived today. Not all student-athletes exhibit these behaviors, but these perceptions continue to exist, regardless of how a student-athlete behaves in the classroom (McHugh-Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1999).

Sambo and Mohammed (2015) argue that successes and failures of both student athletes and students in classrooms are directly related to attributions. Each student upholds academic expectations for themselves. Johansen et al., (2011) argue student-athletes feel their academic expectations are not only assessed by themselves, but also by their peers, thereby impacting how they attribute academic successes or failures. This means that students may feel more or less competent based off of how they feel their classmates perceive their success or failure. Therefore, the perceptions and expectations of a student athlete's behavior in a classroom can result in the formation of an internal or external attribution (Linvill & Mazer, 2013; Shores, 2011).

For this project, a student-athlete is defined as a student who is a part of a Division 1 varsity athletic program. While most universities try not to have separate academic expectations for students and student- athletes, it is important to note that research has indicated that students separate themselves from student athletes and form some perception of student-athletes in their classes (Wininger & White, 2015). The separation can be both beneficial and detrimental to a student athlete's academic success, but the detrimental effects of this miscategorization often outweigh the beneficial effects (Stone, 2012). Three examples will highlight the forms of separation a student-athlete faces. The first example is that more student athletes are struggling to find academic success despite statistics showing high GPA and graduation rates (Purdy, Eitzen & Hufnagel, 1982). The impact of negative stereotypes, (i.e. lack of effort in classwork by student athletes) due to inaccurate beliefs from other students has been discussed thus far, but there are other effects of perceptions and attributions that influence a student athlete's academic success. For example, if the student-athlete is more aware of the negative

perception from their peers, then he/she will feel he or she is not competent enough to succeed in the classroom. The known perceptions result in a lack of effort put forth by student athletes, continuing the cycle of traditional students making negative attributions about the student athlete (Simons, Rheenen & Covington, 1999).

A second example of the separation is when student athletes fight an internal battle of deciding if academics or sport is more important. Purdy et al. (1982) note that coaches claim that student-athletes are students first, but many times the student-athlete is required to focus more on his or her sport. When a student-athlete puts more effort into his or her sport rather than academics, it confirms the perceptions that students already have of their student-athlete peers. For a student athlete, it then turns into deciding what identity (i.e. student or athlete) is most important.

The third and final example showcasing the separation between students and student-athletes is the inability to connect to peers. Student athletes feel an increase in isolation in a classroom because he or she feels there is no connection with classmates (Aries et al., 2004). One argument for why a student-athlete might not be able to relate to other students is because of the difference in their schedules. Student athletes have a list of time demands, from practice to work outs to mandatory team events that keep them continuously scheduled. For example, the University of Georgia Athletic Association provided students and teachers a pamphlet indicating what the average day of a student-athlete looks like. It began by describing the athlete's morning routine, which included waking up at 4:30 am to practice from 5:30-7 am and then going to weight training all before 8 am classes begin. The pamphlet then showcases the athlete's afternoon schedule, which includes afternoon practice from 2 pm until about 5 pm. After practice is over, the

athlete then has to go to meetings and tutoring sessions from 6 pm to 8 pm. With this busy schedule, student athletes are still encouraged to participate in student organizations, but with a strict schedule, a student-athlete is rarely able to do so. Time demands cause more separation and leave student athletes feeling like they cannot relate to what traditional students are experiencing (Aries et. al., 2004). Unintentionally, a student-athlete furthers the separation when he or she does not engage in discussion with other students it leads their peers to believe that student athletes are entitled or not interested in the class. The belief of entitlement or lack of interest leads students to make more assumptions and attributions about the type of student a student-athlete is.

These examples are three of many that exemplify the reasoning behind students forming perceptions of student-athletes. The various behaviors student-athletes display in a classroom setting help to enhance or minimize these perceptions. The behaviors can be viewed through a communicative lens.

Communication Behaviors

Students can easily view the communicative behaviors that student athletes portray leading to the creation of specific perceptions. Communication behaviors are the second variable that will be used to assess the goals of this project. As part of the perception process, both students and student-athletes react to what they believe to be true (e.g. student athletes believe that there are negative perceptions and stereotypes about them, students believe that student athletes only care about their sport). Assessing the communication behaviors portrayed by student athletes' helps determine what behaviors influence students to create more perceptions. Verbal and nonverbal communication (i.e. participating in class or sleeping in the back of the classroom) can

have the most effect in changing perceptions based off of how perceptions are formed. This research will seek to illuminate whether students form more internal or external attributions about student athletes based on how receptive traditional students are to verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors. This information can then be used to help student athletes understand how their communicative behaviors influence the attributions formed about them and what can be done to change these attributions to increase opportunities for academic success.

In recent research, perceptions and attributions have been studied through a cognitive behavioral approach (Mckinstry, Fleischer, Chen, Gall & Edelman, 2016). Understanding these concepts through the cognitive lens (i.e. how we think about the behavior) is important when looking at the formation of the perception and attribution, but research has yet to fully discover how these perceptions and attributions are supported or rejected once the attribution has been made (Rodell & Lynch, 2016). This research will investigate how verbal and nonverbal communication impact the preconceived perceptions and attributions traditional students have of student athletes. Rodell and Lynch (2016) argue that an individual's conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings play a larger role in the forming of perceptions than do the actual physical behaviors one is engaging in. With that, one important question to consider is how those physical behaviors can impact overall cognitive thought. With this project, the portrayal of verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors (i.e. asking questions during class or sitting in the front of the class) will be tested using a Situation Attitude Scale to understand further how perceptions can be formed (McHugh-Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). The physical behaviors will be used to determine if perceptions are only affirmed

through cognitive behaviors, or if physical communicative behaviors can change the cognitive perceptions students make of student athletes.

Nonverbal Communication

Almost 93% of communication is nonverbal (Jung & Yoon, 2010). Nonverbal communication is often defined as any non-spoken messages communicated through facial expressions, gestures, or tone of voice, which stand in place of or compliment verbal messages (Phutela, 2015). Research has also examined how body movements impact perceptions (Gelder, Borst & Watson, 2015). Gelder et al. (2015) state that body movements and expressions are recognized as easily as facial expressions that are used to express different thoughts and emotions and acknowledge that people can recognize identities, actions, and intentions through body movements. This evidence is crucial when determining if communicative behaviors will have an impact on perceptions. If body movements can represent actions and intentions, the argument can be made that student athletes should be able to change common perceptions through their nonverbal communication. Each movement a student-athlete makes, whether it is sitting in the back of the classroom or constantly nodding in agreement with a teacher's statements, can communicate some type of action and intention. Using this argument, if students witness a student athlete's positive nonverbal communication (i.e. sitting in the front of the classroom), the research should indicate that nonverbal communication could be used to positively change perceptions of student-athletes. The perceptions could be changed when students observe the efforts student-athletes are putting towards their academics.

Gheorghita (2012) and Phutela (2015) specified five main categories of nonverbal behavior: kinesics (communication through body movements), proxemics

(communication through physical distance), vocalics (communication through vocal characteristic), haptics, (communication through touch), and chronemics (communication through interpersonal time). Each category plays an important role in understanding nonverbal communication, but for this project, kinesics and proxemics will be the main focus when assessing nonverbal communicative behaviors.

Woolfolk and Brooks (1985) argue that body movement and spatial distances play the biggest role in classroom settings. Students have the most interaction with student-athletes during class periods. In that class session, students can observe the body movement and spatial distances of student athletes. Thus perceptions can be made quickly, sometimes developing within one class period. Students will often assess the student athlete's movements to determine the type of student a student-athlete will be (Preja, 2013,). For example, quick judgments can come from a student examining a student athlete's positive or negative attitude in the classroom. The nonverbal behaviors such as nodding to show understanding or eye rolling to show negative thoughts, can easily be interpreted from kinetic movements, such as posture, which indicates negatively valenced nonverbal such as slouching, keeping his or her head down or crossing his or her arms (Phutela, 2015). Expressing more open, positive body movements, like sitting straight up and nodding when understanding a concept can lead to more positive evaluations of a student-athlete (Fennis, & Stel, 2011). Woolfolk and Brooks (1985) also indicate that certain nonverbal behaviors (i.e. sitting closer to the front) can encourage more positive attitudes, but regarding changing an attribution or perceptions, few arguments have been made in this regard.

Kinesics and proxemics should be assessed due to how quickly perceptions are formed. This project will focus on specific nonverbal behaviors that are easy to study by students. If the research indicates that spatial distances matter or specific movements impact perceptions more so than others, then student-athletes can use this information to help develop and maintain a positive image in the classroom.

Assessing nonverbal communication is important to understanding what behaviors of which students have the strongest reaction. If specific behaviors can be determined as positive or negative, student-athletes can utilize the information to reduce the separation between students and student-athletes and the perceptions formed by peers. The possibility of student-athletes being able to change the attributions and perceptions about them is one of the most important reasons nonverbal communication is crucial to this research. Evaluating the behaviors is also important because it indicates that communication can be the differentiating factor when changing attributions. As discussed, student athletes often doubt their academic abilities or struggle to define their academic identity (Simons et. al, 1999). This project looks to provide student athletes with a few key factors, such as specific nonverbal communicative behaviors, that can help decrease academic doubt and help increase academic identity. I argue that without the negative perceptions or attributions student athletes believe others generate, they are more likely to feel confident in their academic abilities, therefore, leading to more academic success.

Verbal Communication

Jacob, Gueguen, and Boulbry (2014) argue that both verbal and nonverbal behaviors have a strong effect on the recipient of the behavioral messages. Regarding

athletics, verbal communication has been studied in ways that indicate how athletes respond to verbal messages from coaches. Preja (2013) suggests that through various forms of verbal communication (i.e., direct order and discussion-communication) athletes are more likely to improve athletic abilities in their specific sport. Thus this research shows that student-athletes can translate these skills and use verbal communication as a means for changing the perceptions and attributions previously made by other students.

Verbal communication can include behaviors like "asking questions, discussing, sharing information, agreeing, suggesting, getting and seeking feedback, answering questions and explaining" (Keyton, et. al, 2013 p.159). Often, asking questions, listening, and seeking feedback are encouraged in a classroom setting and are usually portrayed by most students regardless of if they are a traditional student or student athlete (Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987). Because these behaviors are encouraged, I argue that when student-athletes utilize verbal communicative behaviors, they will have more positive perceptions from classroom peers. As previously discussed, students do not often view student athletes as equal peers and feel there are differences (i.e., lack of interest in school or reasons for being in class) among them (Ingrell, Johnson &Ivarsson, 2016). Student-athletes can also feel separated from and unable to relate to traditional students. By engaging in verbal behaviors, it shows that student-athletes are participating in the same ways that are expected of the traditional students. This would begin to change perceptions because there would no longer be feelings or ideas that there are differences between students and student-athletes in the classroom.

Pfundmair, Lamprecht, von Wedemeyer, and Frey (2016) summarized that a communicator ultimately aspires to use communication as a means of accomplishing a

task, provoking change or maintaining some item (i.e. a memory) they once had. Relating this to the behaviors discussed above, it can be argued that a student-athlete can practice the behaviors to provoke change. Portraying negative behaviors such as not engaging in discussion, not asking questions to clarify or talking to other students while the instructor is speaking indicates a lack of interest to change the perceptions about student athletes. Perceptions that students have and the attributions they continue to make are due to the student-athlete not communicating in ways to show a difference in behaviors; therefore, for a student-athlete to provoke change, exercising positive verbal communicative behaviors can provide the desired outcome of changed perceptions. Student athletes should want to change their behaviors to decrease the negative perceptions and decrease the differences between students and student-athletes.

Hypotheses

Research has indicated that changing a perception can be very difficult even when positive behaviors are portrayed (Gaier, 2015). From the research discussed, the fundamental attribution error can be one of the reasons perceptions are difficult to change. It can be argued that non-student athletes will focus more on the characteristics of the student-athlete rather than the situation the student-athlete is in. Continuing that thought, the actor-observer effect discusses how the actor focuses more on the situation rather than their own behaviors. I argue student athletes will do something very similar when assessing their perceptions of their behaviors in a classroom setting. I argue this because they will have more understanding of their rigorous schedule and perceive certain behaviors through the lens of situations rather than their actions; therefore, hypothesis H1 is as follows:

H1: There is a difference between student athletes and non-student athlete's attributions of student athlete's behaviors, such that non-student athletes will make internal attributions more than student athletes and student athletes will make external attributions more than non-student athletes.

For this hypothesis, the dependent variable is the students, and the independent variable is the athlete's status. For specific measurement information, please refer to the methods section below.

Hypothesis two and hypothesis three are presented below:

H2: Nonverbal communication behaviors in the classroom by student-athletes will be associated with perceptions made by non-student athletes, such that positive nonverbal behaviors will be associated with positive perceptions and negative nonverbal behaviors will be associated with negative perceptions.

For hypothesis two, the independent variable is nonverbal communication, and the dependent variable is the perceptions. Please refer to the methods section for specific measurement information.

H3: Verbal communication behaviors in the classroom by student-athletes will be associated with perceptions made by non-student athletes, such that positive verbal behaviors will be associated with positive perceptions and negative verbal behaviors will be associated with negative perceptions.

Similarly, the independent variable for this hypothesis is verbal communication and the dependent variable is again the perceptions. Please refer to the methods section for specific measurement information.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Participants

407 undergraduate students (243 females, 161 males, 3 choose not to disclose their gender) were recruited from communication studies courses at a Southeastern university via e-mail solicitations, course-based announcements, and a solicitation on a department-based website. Most of the participants reported being White/Caucasian (75.6%; Asian/ Pacific Islander = 11.2%, Black/African American =8.6%; Hispanic or Latino = 2.7%; Choose not to disclose =1.5%). Of the participants, the majority were not student-athletes at the university (*n* = 378 (92.4%). The other 29 (7.1%) participants reported being student athletes. 291 of the non-student athletes reported being White/Caucasian (75.5%). The rest of the participants reported the following ethnicities: Asian/ Pacific Islander = 45(11.2%); Black/ African American = 27 (8.6%); Hispanic/Latino = 10(2.7%) and 6 (1.5%) participants choose not to disclose. Of the 29 reported student athletes, 18 (62%) were White/Caucasian, 1(.03%) was Asian/ Pacific Islander, 8 (27.6%) were Black/African American, 1(.03%) was Hispanic/Latino, and 1(.03%) choose not to disclose. A comparison of ethnicity and student-athlete status indicated that the participants were mostly White/Caucasian student athletes ($\chi^2 = 16.47$, $p < .01$). There was no significant difference between gender and student-athlete status ($\chi^2=2.08$, $p <. 01$).

Procedures

Data was collected via an online survey. The questionnaire took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Interested participants were directed to sign up the survey to receive a link to complete the survey. After reviewing a consent screen, participants indicated whether they are a "student athlete" (i.e. current or former varsity level athlete, excluding club and recreational participants) or "non-student athlete' (i.e. does not play a sport). After indicating which group of which they are a part, the participants will then be directed to the questionnaire and answer questions based off of the situations provided. Participants will reflect on perceptions of certain situations that can occur in the classroom. Once the survey was completed, participants were guaranteed that their results remained anonymous and confidential.

Situation Attitude Scale

The measure for the current study is a modified Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) (McHugh- Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). Multiple studies have used the SAS in various situations, specifically in a classroom setting. The goal of the SAS is to measure attitudes towards certain groups of people (Engstrom et al., 1995). Since its original use, the SAS has been presented be very reliable. The reliability coefficients have ranged from .70 to .89 (Engstrom et al, 1995 & Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). Previous research has used this scale to identify specific attitudes in certain scenarios. The modified SAS scale used for this survey will provide participants with a scenario and then ask a series of questions relating to each scenario. The SAS is an important measure because it focuses realistic situations that allow participants to assess their attitudes on behaviors. For this project, the situations presented specifically measures the types of behaviors used in a classroom and how it impacts the type of perceptions made.

Attributions

The first and third question presented on the survey will be used to assess attributions. The survey will focus on the type of attribution non-student athletes make and how the behaviors affect certain attributions student and student athletes make (i.e. internal or external). Twelve scenarios were presented and participants indicated whether the action reflects the student athlete's personality/ characteristic or if the action is because of an outside source. Examples of each scenario are as follows: "A student walks into class late. Indicate if you believe this is because of the student athlete's personality or because something caused this action." This example is coded as an internal attribution and when analyzing the data, it will be used to indicate how other students perceive this behavior. An example of an external attribution question would be "Participation is a part of the course and the student-athlete is actively participating in classroom discussions," and again will be used to indicate how students perceive this behavior. Items one, two, five, six eight and eleven reflect behaviors that are considered internal attributions. Items three, four, seven, nine, ten and twelve reflect behaviors that are considered external attributions. For more specific details on each question, please refer to Appendix 1. Participants were directed to answer the items based on a 5-point Likert scale (1=personality/characteristic, 5=outside source caused behavior).

Because the measure was modified, a principal components Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation was conducted (Gorsuch, 1983). Applying the "60-40 rule", an examination of the factors indicated two components, in which one component (active external) was reliable ($\propto >.81$) and the other component (passive internal) was close to reliable ($\propto <.70$) (Yong & Pearce, 2013). The results of EFA are in

Table 1. As indicated, the factor ‘Active External’ was highly reliable. The items in Active External include item 3 (A student-athlete introduces themselves the first day of class), item 6 (A student-athlete does not participate in discussion), item 9 (A student-athlete asks questions throughout a class period), item 10 (A student-athlete leads a group project or discussion), and item 11 (A student-athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful) (M=2.27, SD=. 90, ∝ =. 81). The items in the “Active External” variable indicate behaviors that student athletes actively partake in during classroom sessions, but do not necessarily behave in these ways because they choose too. For example, item number 6 (A student-athlete does not participate in the discussion) does not seem like an active behavior, but one speculation as to why it is grouped in this category is because in a student’s mind, being in class is an active behavior. Regarding a student-athlete, the act of going to class could be considered active and the external aspect in relevant because they could only be in class because someone (coach/advisor) required them to go. Due to the lack of reliability, the Passive internal factor will not be analyzed.

Table 1.

Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of Attribution.

Scale Items	Active External	Passive Internal
A student athlete walks into class late.	-.211	.536
A student athlete sits in the back of the class.	.016	.**706**

A student athlete introduces themselves the first day of class.	**.619**	-.065
A student athlete is 'dressed up' (meaning not in gym or workout clothes for class).	.457	-.198
Every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student.	.273	**.631**
A student athlete leads a group project or discussion.	**.792**	-.048
A student athlete does not participate in discussion.	.274	.**688**
Participation is part of the course and a student athlete actively participates in classroom discussion.	.493	.000
A student athlete ignores disruptive teammates.	**.698**	.193
A student athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful.	**.772**	.018
A student athlete asks questions throughout a class period.	**.771**	.227

A student over hears a student athlete asking to turn in an assignment late.	-.184	.575

Note. Factor loadings > .60 are in bold face.

Determining Positive and Negative Behaviors

Reading the same scenarios, students answered question number two by indicating whether they perceive the behavior to be positive or negative in a classroom setting. Question two of each scenario in the survey measures the independent variable for this hypothesis. Question two will explore how whether students view behaviors positively or negatively. To measure the dependent variable, question 3 of each scenario in the survey will indicate how the behavior can change the perception. Precisely, items one (A student-athlete walks into class late), two (A student-athlete sits in the back of the class), four (A student-athlete is 'dressed up' (meaning not in gym or workout clothes for class), five (Every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student-athlete), six (A student-athlete does not participate in discussion) and eight (A student-athlete ignores disruptive teammates) will measure the non-verbal behaviors. The positive behaviors are reflected in items three (A student-athlete introduces themselves the first day of class), four (A student-athlete is 'dressed up' (meaning not in gym or workout clothes for class), seven (Participation is part of the course and a student-athlete actively participates in classroom discussion), eight (A student-athlete ignores disruptive teammates.), nine (A student-athlete asks questions throughout a class period), ten (A student-athlete leads a group project or discussion) and eleven (A student-athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful), and the negative behaviors are reflected in one (A student-athlete walks into class late), two (A student-

athlete sits in the back of the class),, five(Every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student-athlete), six (A student-athlete does not participate in discussion) and twelve (A student over hears a student-athlete asking to turn in an assignment late). By assessing how students perceive the behaviors, I was then able to assess which behaviors would have a positive or negative outcome in changing overall perceptions. For more specific details on each question, please refer to Appendix 1. Participants were directed to answer the items based on a 5-point Likert scale (1=negative behavior, 5=positive behavior). An Exploratory Factor Analysis with a varimax rotation was conducted once again. Applying the "60-40 rule," an examination of the factors indicated 4 factors. Of those, only two are used to assess the data. The EFA can be examined further in Table 2. Again, there was reliability for one of the two components. The factor "Disengaged" was showed to be reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of ($\propto$ >.82). The factor disengaged included items 6 (A student-athlete does not participate in discussion), 8 (A student-athlete ignores disruptive teammates), 10 (A student-athlete leads a group project or discussion) and 11 (A student-athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful) (M=4.37, SD=. 68,$\propto$ =. 82). These items are labeled disengaged due to the behaviors that are occurring. They seem mostly active and positive behaviors, but they were labeled 'disengaged' to indicate that the student is only doing what is expected. A student-athlete might not need to participate or does participate because of classroom rules. They are just doing what is required of them and not being fully engaged in the classroom. The second factor did not prove to be reliable, therefore will not be used to analyze the data.

Table 2.

Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of Behaviors.

Scale Items	Disengaged	Minimal Effort	Dressed Up	Has Cell Phone
A student-athlete walks into class late.	-.091	**.675**	-.199	.334
A student-athlete sits in the back of the class.	.167	**.708**	-.394	-.154
A student-athlete introduces themselves the first day of class.	.448	.064	.529	-.107
A student-athlete is 'dressed up' (meaning not in gym or workout clothes for class).	.124	-.074	**.815**	-.015
Every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student.	-.117	.088	-.074	**.873**
A student-athlete leads a group project or discussion.	**.756**	-.141	.220	-.058

A student-athlete does not participate in discussion.	-.298	**.681**	.085	.044
Participation is part of the course and a student-athlete actively participates in classroom discussion.	**.741**	-.112	.024	-.172
A student-athlete ignores disruptive teammates.	.484	-.131	.142	.345
A student-athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful.	**.807**	-.128	.068	-.018
A student-athlete asks questions throughout a class period.	**.765**	-.132	.061	-.008
A student over hears a student-athlete asking to turn in an assignment late.	-.243	.574	.161	-.048

Note. Factor loadings > .60 are bolded. Only items disengaged and minimal efforts were used, since there were more than 3 items loading together.

Changing Perception through Verbal and Non-verbal Behaviors

The final question of the survey reflected the possibility of changing attitudes based off of the communication behaviors presented in a classroom setting. Each scenario presented represents a verbal or non-verbal communicative behavior. After assessing the type of attribution made and how the behavior is viewed, this final question will ask students to reflect how whether or not the behavior will change their perceptions of student-athletes. The question did not ask the participant to reflect on the type of behavior; rather it asked the participant the *effects* of the behavior. To measure this, question 3 of each scenario in the survey will indicate how the behavior can change the perception. Items three, seven, eight, nine, ten eleven and twelve (see above) will be used to measure verbal behaviors, and one, two, four, five, six, and eight are coded as non-verbal behaviors (see above). For more specific details on each question, please refer to Appendix 1. Participants will be directed to answer the items based on a 5-point Likert scale (1= behavior not likely to change perception, 5= behavior likely to change perception). An Exploratory Factor Analysis with a varimax rotation was also conducted for this measurement. Applying the "60-40 rule," the results indicated three components. The EFA can be examined further in Figure 3. Of the three components, two were proven to be reliable. The first factor is labeled as "Passive Behaviors" and was proven to be reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha ($\propto = .81$)." This factor consisted of items 1 (A student-athlete walks into class late), 2 (A student-athlete sits in the back of the class), 5 (Every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student-athlete), 7 (Participation is part of the course and a student-athlete actively participates in classroom discussion) and 12 (A student over hears a student-athlete asking to turn in an assignment late)

(M=2.52, SD=. 95 (∝ = .81). These items were labeled as passive behaviors because these behaviors do not indicate full attention to the class. Similar to the 'disengaged' items, these behaviors do not indicate any extra activity besides what is required. For example, the student-athlete may have walked into class late, but they are still attending class. It can be assumed that they did not make extra effort to attend class on time. The second factor that proved to be reliable was labeled "Active Behaviors (∝ = .72)." This factor consisted of items 8 (A student-athlete ignores disruptive teammates), 9 (A student-athlete asks questions throughout a class period), 10 (A student-athlete leads a group project or discussion) and 11 (A student-athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful) (M=3.65, SD=. 81,∝ = .72). Contrary to "Passive Behaviors," these items indicate the student-athlete actively trying to better him or herself in the classroom. The student-athlete is engaging in behaviors that show they are interested and care about the overall class.

Table 3.

Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of Change.

Scale Items	Passive Behaviors Change	Active Behaviors Change	Introduce/Dressed
A student-athlete walks into class late.	**.854**	-.058	.043
A student-athlete sits in the back of the class.	.**795**	-.033	0.43

A student-athlete introduces themselves the first day of class.	.107	.018	**.835**
A student-athlete is ‘dressed up’ (meaning not in gym or workout clothes for class).	-.012	.196	**.688**
Every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student.	**.745**	.057	-.027
A student-athlete leads a group project or discussion.	-.125	.418	**.674**
A student-athlete does not participate in discussion.	**.723**	-.023	.003
Participation is part of the course and a student-athlete actively participates in classroom discussion.	-.014	**.624**	.434
A student-athlete ignores disruptive teammates.	.118	**.798**	-.148
A student-athlete tells disruptive student athletes	-.005	**.703**	.265

to pay attention and be more respectful.			
A student-athlete asks questions throughout a class period.	-.095	**.689**	.337
A student over hears a student-athlete asking to turn in an assignment late.	**.684**	.045	-.061

Note. Factor loadings > .60 are in bold face. Only Passive Behaviors Change and Active Behaviors Change were used.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

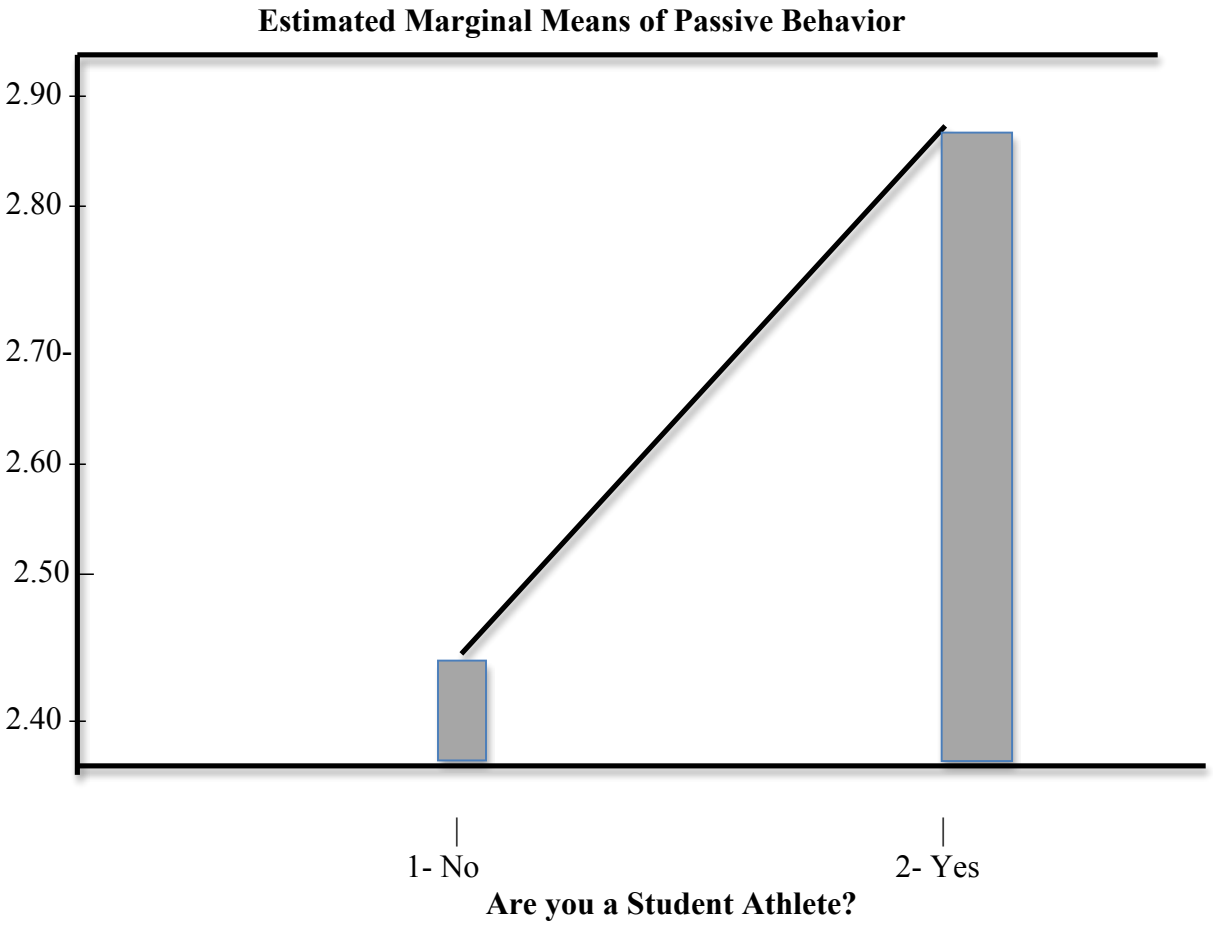
To assess H1, a series of independent-samples t-test compared the perceptions of behaviors and athlete status in which equal variances were not assumed. Of the six variables, only two indicated significance regarding behaviors impacting perception based on athlete status. There was a significant difference between the passive behaviors that caused changed, which included: A student walks into class late, a student-athlete sits in the back of the class, every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student-athlete, participation is part of the course and the student-athlete actively participates in classroom discussion, a student overhears a student-athlete ask to turn in an assignment late; and athlete status; t (35.31) = -2.64, p=. 01. There was not a significance between minimal effort behaviors, which included: A student walks into class late, a student-athlete sits in the back of the class, and participation is part of the course and the student-athlete actively participates in classroom discussion and athlete status; t (32.31) = -1.78, p =. 08.The lack of significance of the variables indicates that the type of behavior portrayed by students in the classroom is not likely to have an effect on the perceptions being made. Particularly, more passive behaviors and only using minimal effort is likely to indicate more negative perceptions. Therefore, H1 was not supported.

Next, a multivariate ANOVA was conducted using three demographic variables as the independent variables and active and passive behaviors as the dependent variables.

The three independent variables included gender, ethnicity and athlete status where the between-subject independent factor was athlete status and the covariates were gender and ethnicity. Gender (Wilk's Lambda =. 99, F=(1,407) =. 98, p > .05) and athlete status (Wilk's Lambda=. 98, F=(1,407) = 1.34, p> .05) indicated no significance, but significance was indicated in terms of ethnicity (Wilk's Lambda =. 96 F (1,407), p <. 05). Specifically, tests of between-subjects effects indicated that ethnicity and minimal effort were significant (F (1, 407) =12.16, p<. 01) as well as athlete status and passive behaviors F (1,407), p <. 01).

Due to the mixed results, further investigation was conducted to examine the significance between ethnicity and minimal effort. This was conducted with probed effects of significant covariates using a post hoc Bonferroni analysis. The analysis indicated significance between Asian/ Pacific Islander (M= 2.34, SD= .64) and White/Caucasian (M=2.02, SD=. 57) students regarding the perceptions of minimal efforts in the classroom (F (4,407) =4.96, p <. 01). It is also important to note that there was no significance between African Americans and White/Caucasian students (p > .05).

Figure 1.



H2 and H3 were analyzed via a series of zero-order correlations. Recall that the items did not factor as anticipated. For example, there was no specific classification of positive or negative behaviors; therefore the items are mixed with both types of behaviors. As indicated in Table 4, there was a negative correlation between passive behaviors and actively changing perceptions. Significance was also indicated between disengaged behaviors and actively changing perception, but a negative correlation was

shown between disengaged behaviors and active external attributions. The analysis also indicated a negative correlation between minimal effort and actively changing perceptions. Passive internal behaviors were also significantly correlated with minimal effort behaviors. No other significant relationships were indicated. Above, Figure 1 indicates the trend towards significance regarding athlete status and passive behaviors. Non-student athletes viewed the passive behaviors more negatively than student athletes did. The mean for passive behaviors in terms of non-student athletes was closer to 2, indicating that the overall view of passive behaviors was negative. But, student-athletes did not view the passive behaviors in a negative lens. From these results, H2 and H3 were not supported.

Table 4.
Summary of Correlations Scores of Study Variables

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
1. Passive Behavior Change	-					
2. Active Participation Change	-.00	-				
3. Active External	-.86	.01	-			
4. Passive Internal	.03	-.17*	.28**	-		
5. Disengaged	-.06	.31**	-.26**	-.19**	-	
6. Minimal Effort	.06	-.25**	-.07	.33**	-.28**	-

*Note. Correlations presented above are based off of behaviors and attributions made. *p<.05 and **p<.01.*

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The goal of the project was to indicate which behaviors had the strongest impact on the types of attributions students made about student athletes. As stated, the data analysis indicated mixed results and did not support all three hypotheses. While there is no specific result linking attributions and behaviors, there are many speculations that can account for the results. After creating new items using the EFA, each hypothesis was tested using the new variables. The most reliable items that were tested and discussed were "Active External," "Passive Behaviors," "Minimal Effort" and "Disengaged." Each of these were categorized and labeled based off of the EFA grouping. In these groupings, there were some items that seemed to conflict the grouping. These items were included when assessing the data because they could be justified as to why they were grouped with the rest of the items. The independent-sample t-test used to test H1 indicated significance for passive behaviors indicating change and minimal effort behaviors. These results indicate that the lack of active behaviors (participating, discussing, taking leadership in the classroom) is what stands out to students who are assessing the behaviors. This result can relate back to the separation in the classroom felt by both student-athletes and students. If students feel that student athletes are 'getting away with' things in the classroom that students felt they could not do, they may view those passive behaviors more negatively, continuing to build the negative perceptions. Regarding passive behaviors, this could indicate that student athletes and non-student athletes view passive

behaviors differently regarding how it affects perception change. This was also indicated in Figure 1. This significance allows for the potential to narrow down what behaviors cause negative perceptions from both sides. Previous research has indicated that there are conflicting results to whether or not negative perceptions exist (Parsons, 2013). This aligns with the results of this study. There is not a clear distinction as to whether or not the behavior is negative or if it will effect the perception made. But, if both students and student athletes are disagreeing that passive behaviors are not helping perceptions, we can then direct research to focus on the behaviors that are viewed negatively by both groups of participants. Results did not indicate significance between minimal efforts and athlete status, but this continues the argument that student-athletes and students perceive the behaviors differently. It could be speculated that student athletes are not viewing the behaviors that are categorized as 'minimal effort' in a negative fashion. Again, referring to Parson's research (2013) the conflicting descriptive narrative of student athletes could perceive their behaviors as something that everyone does, whereas students view these behaviors in a negative fashion. Because the equal variance was not assumed, we cannot rely on these significant results, but we can speculate what they mean. Further analysis also needed to be conducted because of the high amount of mixed results.

The mixed results lead to completing the MANCOVA with gender and ethnicity as covariates. As reported, ethnicity had the strongest significance when compared to athlete status and gender. This could indicate that ethnicity is affecting how students perceive certain behaviors. When using the test between-subjects effects, ethnicity and minimal effects had the high significance. This could indicate that comparing the behaviors and the ethnicity; students had more negative perceptions of student-athletes

because of their ethnicity. This significance aligns with current research. Comeaux (2010) reported that black, male student-athletes received more negative stereotypes about their academic abilities just because of their ethnicity and gender. Seeing the significant results for ethnicity and behaviors is not surprising, but what is surprising is the results from the post-hoc Bonferroni test. The breakdown of ethnicity and perceptions found significance in how students perceived Asian/Pacific Islander and white student-athletes. This result could be strongly correlated with the lack of diversity in the participation pool. There were higher numbers of Asian/ Pacific Islanders and white participants than any other ethnicity, which could have led to the significance of the two groups. This speculation is considered even further because results indicated no significance between African-American and white student-athletes regarding perception. This contradicts what previous research indicates, but previous research was able to collect data from a larger participant pool, and have a more in-depth comparison of ethnicity and athlete perception. Another speculation for this result could be due to racial socialization especially with Asian/Pacific Islanders and African Americans. Research has indicated racial socialization has happened within minority groups (Hughes, Smith, Stevenson, Rodriguez, Johnson & Spicer, 2006). This result could be because racial socialization is occurring and students do not even realize they are making these perceptions. Racial socialization is something that should be taken into consideration when further investigating differences in ethnicities and perception of athletes.

The test between-subjects events also showed significant results between athlete status and passive behaviors changing perceptions. This indicates that there are likely differences between athlete status and how the passive behaviors can change perceptions.

There is no clear distinction in which behaviors cause the most perception change for each group, but similar to other results; we can speculate that non-student athletes will view that passive behavior in a negative lens and not change their perceptions of student-athletes. The mixed results and speculations for H1 begin to assess the differences between athlete status and perceptions, but further research is needed to have more conclusive results.

The correlation table presented above also presents the possibility of more conclusive results in future research. As discussed, specific behaviors could not be tested because the items did not factor as anticipated, so there is no significant research on behaviors, but the correlations did provide insight to how behaviors interact with attributions. A significant correlation between the factors of active external and passive internal indicate that when assessing behaviors, there, is a high possibility of some attribution being made. There is also a negative correlation between passive internal behaviors and active participation changing perceptions. This correlation could indicate that the passive behaviors are less likely to impact the probability of changing the perceptions. Minimal efforts in a classroom setting also had a negative correlation with active participation changing behaviors. These results could indicate similar reactions to the behaviors presented. If student athletes are limiting their efforts in the classroom, students are less likely to change their perception of student athletes. Another significant correlation was between disengaged behaviors and active participation changing perceptions. Future research can benefit from this significance because it could indicate that students are more likely to form a perception when student athletes disengage from the classroom participation. It cannot be determined whether this perception would be

positive or negative, but we can speculate that students are more likely to form a negative perception based off of disengaged behaviors. Continuing with significant correlations, minimal effort significantly correlated with passive internal behaviors. While there is no clear distinction between positive and negative behaviors, it can be speculated that student-athletes who put in minimal effort will more likely have internal attributions made about them. Likewise, the negative correlation between disengaged behaviors and active external attributions indicates that students are less likely to attribute behaviors to external factors, but rather attribute the behaviors internally.

Implications

The discussion of these results focuses primarily on speculation of what future research could use from the data in this project. It does not show conclusive evidence for the hypotheses, but it allows for growth and development to help student athletes. Analysis indicated significance with passive behaviors. While there was not specific information on which behaviors were better, the results did show that more participants had stronger opinions towards passive behaviors. Observing the stronger opinions towards passive behaviors meant that students were more likely to form perceptions based off of what student athletes were not doing in the classroom. The research did not indicate a strong significance with active behaviors such as participating in class or the student-athlete introducing him or herself. Many student athletes do not understand the effects of their behaviors in the classroom. Research continues to point out that there is a negative perception of student-athletes and it is not changing any time soon (Feltz, Schneider, Hwang & Skogsberg, 2013). Even though research suggests that the perceptions will not change, student-athletes can begin taking steps to work towards

reducing the negative perceptions. Student athletes learn behaviors from teammates, coaches, and advisors (Levine, Etchison & Oppenheimer, 2014). Knowing this, professional staff members can utilize the results to help student athletes reduce the negative perceptions. It seems simple, but based off of the results, professional staff members should encourage student athletes to participate and be active in the classroom.

There are many ways to encourage students to be active in the classroom, especially through verbal and non-verbal communication. Regarding verbal communication, student-athletes can show willingness and interest in participating. They can do this by asking questions, engaging in discussion with other students and the professor, and discussing topics with other classmates. These behaviors seemed to be closely related to what students did not form perceptions from. Encouraging engagement in these behaviors can help minimize the differences between students and student-athletes.

The differences can also be minimized through nonverbal communication behaviors. Basic nonverbal communication behaviors like head nods or actively taking notes is an example of showing active engagement, but the most important one to consider is how an athlete dresses. At many Division 1 institutes, athletes are rewarded with athletic gear. To many non-athletes, this seems like a benefit to being a student athlete. It also separates the non-athletes from the student athletes. Students may perceive this as a benefit because it is ‘cool’ or ‘nice’ gear, but athletes view it as a part of their lifestyle. While this makes up a big portion of their wardrobe, it also makes them stand out when in class with other students. Most students today tend to dress very casual, which would make the argument difficult for athletes to change their style. I argue that

they do no need to change their style, but it would be more beneficial to student-athletes if they did not wear their athletic gear as often. An athlete's wardrobe communicates more than they intend and if they want to reduce their differences, evaluating how they dress for class is one of many ways to begin that process.

These examples will not guarantee that negative perception will disappear, but it may decrease the possibility of students forming perceptions, and the separation between students and student-athletes will therefore be reduced. As it was previously discussed, it seems that students form a perception when the student-athlete is doing something other than what is 'normal' in a classroom. If professional staff can encourage athletes to participate and be 'present' (asking questions, putting their phone away, engaging in discussion), it seems that students are more likely to ignore the different labels separating students and student athletes. The perceptions and attributions made may cause change when there is a sense of equality amongst peers due to the similarity of verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors practiced. While most research focuses on the negative perceptions and stereotypes of student-athletes, the current study focused on how initial perceptions of student-athletes impacts the internal and external attributions made specifically assessing when a student-athlete portrays a different communicative behaviors.

This project highlighted the types of behaviors that impact those perceptions and begin the discussion of how student athletes should behave to negate perceptions. Since there were a high number of mixed results, limitations and directions for future research should be considered.

CHAPTER 6

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Before future research can be discussed, the limitations of this current project need to be addressed. One limitation is the lack of diversity throughout the participation pool. The majority of the participants were white (N= 309, 75.6%) and female (N=243, 59.4%). This is problematic for the research because it did not allow for generalizability. Future research should consider opening the participation pool to a larger audience to allow results to be more generalizable.

Another limitation of this study was the measurement used to assess the perceptions and behaviors. Using the SAS was beneficial for preliminary research. It allowed some behaviors to show significance but did not provide a lot of insight to how the behaviors affected the perceptions students had and what specific behaviors could be seen as positive or negative. One speculation is that some of the behaviors discussed in the scenario were not specific to student-athletes. Some of the scenarios were behaviors any student in a classroom could engage in. For example, any student could sit in the back of the classroom and not form a negative perception of the person. This did not allow for a distinction between what could be considered positive or negative behaviors. On the Likert scale, participants were able to select ‘neutral,’ which meant that it did not effect their perception one way or another. The scenarios were relatable to any student and participants may have responded neutrally because it could be relevant to the participant as a student and student athletes. Future research should continue to use the

SAS, but the situations should be focused more directly on specific student athlete behaviors. Additionally, I argue the Likert scale gave the participants too many options. To get a clear and direct answer, future research should continue to modify the SAS and allow for a two-option response. A two-answer response forces participants to reflect on the type of attribution they make about student athletes and provides a stronger link between attributions and behaviors.

The examination of specific communication behaviors examined here is another limitation that needs to be addressed. The current study assessed communication behaviors based on the scenarios specified in the SAS (McHugh-Engstrom, Sedlacek, 1991). The SAS has demonstrated reliability and therefore was an appropriate choice for this investigation. The SAS allowed for insight on which behaviors students formed perceptions of, but the research was not specific enough on which behaviors made a larger impact. Based off of the data, some behaviors warranted a stronger perception, but it did not fully separate the communication verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Along with more athlete-specific scenarios, future research should separate the verbal and non-verbal behaviors into two parts. One set of questions should reflect strictly verbal behaviors and another set of questions should reflect non-verbal behaviors. By having the separation, researchers can then present student-athletes with specific verbal and non-verbal behaviors that form negative perceptions.

The limitations discussed provide different ways to improve the current study, but the overall concept of researching the perception of student athletes has even more potential for growth. There are five different directions future research can explore. Future research can focus on the faculty member's perceptions, how race and gender

impacts perception, whether specific sport plays an impact on perceptions and how family support impacts an athlete's behaviors in the classroom. The following will continue the discussion of the different directions future research can take.

Faculty Perceptions

As research continues to progress, faculty member's perceptions should also be considered. This study focused a lot on the perceptions of non-athletes, but professors are also in the classroom at the same time. Research has indicated that faculty members make more negative perceptions about student athletes than any other student in the classroom (Comeaux, 2011). Because previous research has indicated that there is a negative perception, future research can use the results from the current project to assess further what behaviors cause this perception. The future research could be conducted similarly to the current project; instead, faculty would be the target participation group. After the preliminary research is conducted, the research could build upon the significant behaviors and attributions that are made. Having a clear understanding of faculty perceptions can help student athletes understand why negative perceptions are made about them and how they can fix them to be successful in their academics.

Race and Gender

Race and gender are two factors that can have an impact on the perceptions that are being made about student athletes. Griffin (2016) states "Research has demonstrated the presence of negative stereotypes exclusively aimed at college athletes, specifically regarding their lack of intelligence and rigor of coursework, especially male student-athletes in the revenue-generating sports of football and basketball…evidence has revealed that there are stereotypes within institutions reflecting Black students'

insufficient academic and intellectual capabilities at PWIs (p. 355).” This statement showcases the high amount of negative perceptions student-athletes, specifically male, African American student athletes face. Future research should focus on how the race and gender of an athlete impact the type of perceptions being made. It should also focus on how those factors impact how the behaviors are perceived. Analyzing race and gender could provide more insight into how we can reduce the negative perceptions of stereotyped student athletes.

Specific Sport

There are a lot of different sports on college campuses. Some sports are viewed higher than other, especially at different collegiate levels. As stated above, the impact of the sport a student athlete plays is highly effecting perceptions (Griffin, 2016). For example, football players may receive different perceptions compared to an Equestrian team or a Golf team. The demands of each player are also different both physically and academically. Conducting a study that focused on how people viewed behaviors from athletes participating in a specific sport (e.g. football vs. basketball, baseball vs. gymnastics) allows for a more direct discussion of how non-athletes or faculty members form perceptions. The current study asked participants to reflect on the type of student-athlete they though of when taking the survey. Preliminary analysis showed that there were many different types of athletes considered. This is beneficial to future research because it indicates that perceptions are formed about all student athletes and not just athletes from specific sports. By analyzing specific sports, coaches or academic counselors can utilize the information that correlates with their sport to address issues that student-athletes face.

Family Support

Future research could also expand upon the impacts of family support and the student athlete's academics. Some families focus on the importance of sport while other families focus on the importance of academics for their student athlete. Whatever the focus, research indicates that student-athletes rely on family support to help balance the many different aspects they face (Thompson, 2010). Future research could investigate how the family's support impacts how a student views their academics. It could shift focus to understanding how student athletes prioritize academics and athletics and the effects it has on their behavior. Family support can also play a big role in a student athlete's post-grad life. If the family is focused on having the athlete reach the next level, the communication between family members may not prioritize academics. But, if the family is realistic about the possibility of this being the highest level the athlete can reach, communication may focus more on the importance of academics leading to the need of understanding which behaviors cause less of a negative perception. This future project moves the research in a different direction but opens a lot of opportunity for the impacts of communication behavior.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to assess students and student athletes to determine whether certain behaviors can change perceptions of student-athletes. While there were no conclusive results, it allowed for research to explore whether or not behaviors impacted perceptions. The goal was to begin the discussion of what can be done to change the negative perceptions surrounding student athletes in classrooms. The results indicated the most significance between passive behaviors and athlete status, meaning that the use of passive behaviors was more likely to cause perceptions made by students. There was also significance between attributions, behaviors, and ethnicity. This result began to align with previous research that indicated that students were more likely to form perceptions based off of ethnicity. This project provided enough results and direction to continue to analyze the effects of behaviors on perception. Research should continue to explore this area and help student athletes prioritize their ‘student’ identity when in the classroom.

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APPENDIX

Consent Form
Project Title: Perceptions of Student Athletes
Principal Investigator: Jennifer Samp
Co-Investigator: Debra Gerrits

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Samp in the Department of Communication at the University of Georgia. You are being invited to take part in a research study titled "Perceptions of Student Athletes" that is currently being conducted. The purpose of this research study is to gather information to help understand certain perceptions of student athletes in a classroom setting.

If you agree to participate, you will complete an online questionnaire that involves answering questions about your perceptions of student athletes and how communicative behaviors impacts those perceptions. The survey will be conducted entirely online and will take about 15-30 minutes to complete, but could take longer or shorter depending on personal preference on time spent answering each question.

Your involvement is voluntary and you may choose to no longer participate at any time without any penalty or benefits loss. You may also simply skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. Your decision to participate or not will have no bearing on your grades or class standing if you are completing this for a class requirement. It you do not want to participate in this research study, you may contact your instructor for a non-research alternative of commensurate duration and effort. Should you choose to withdraw from the study for any reason, your information will not be used in data analysis and any identifying information will be removed. There are no other anticipated risks for participating, however benefits of your participation include helping researchers gain insight into how communication can impact certain perceptions.

You will be asked for your name only for the purpose of data management. Your name will be removed before data analysis to assure confidentiality. Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed once researchers receive materials. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. In addition, all names will be removed from the data as soon as data collection is finished. Once this has occurred identifying information will be destroyed and only questionnaire answers retained. If there are any reports about this study, your name will not be in them. Your data will be stored in password protected data files.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Debra

Gerrits at debragerrits@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 212 Tucker Hall, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By participating in the survey, you are giving permission for the investigator to use your information for research purposes.

Sincerely,

Debra Gerrits, M.A. Student
debragerrits@uga.edu

Dr. Jennifer Samp, Professor
jasamp@uga.edu

Survey:

1. Please indicate whether you are a non-student athlete or a student athlete (i.e. participating in a varsity level sport for the University of Georgia).

A. I am a non-student athlete
B. I am a student athlete (i.e. participating in a varsity level sport for the University of Georgia, currently or former student athlete)

2. Please indicate your gender.

A. Female
B. Male
C. I choose not to disclose

3. Please indicate your ethnicity.

A. White
B. Hispanic or Latino
C. Black or African American
D. Native American or American Indian
E. Asian / Pacific Islander
F. Other
G. I choose to not disclose

4. Please indicate your age in the box below.

_____

5. Read each scenario and answer the following questions.

1.Please indicate if you feel this type of behavior would relate to a person's personality or characteristic (i.e. student does not care about school) or if the behavior is caused by an outside source (i.e. alarm clock was not working, busses were running late). Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how you would perceive each behavior (1=personality/characteristic,

5= outside source caused behavior).

Scenario 1: A student athlete walks into class late.

Scenario 2: A student athlete sits in the back of the class.

Scenario 3: A student athlete introduces themselves the first day of class.

Scenario 4: A student athlete is ‘dressed up’ (meaning not in gym or workout clothes for class).

Scenario 5: Every student in the class has their cell phones away except the student athlete. Scenario 6: A student athlete leads a group project or discussion.

Scenario 7: A student athlete does not participate in discussion.
Scenario 8: Participation is part of the course and a student athlete actively participates in classroom discussion.
Scenario 9: A student athlete ignores disruptive teammates.
Scenario 10: A student athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful.
Scenario 11: A student athlete asks questions throughout a class period.
Scenario 12: A student over hears a student athlete asking to turn in an assignment late.

2. If this were to happen in a classroom setting, indicate if you would view this as a positive behavior or a negative behavior. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how positively or negatively you view the behavior (1=negative, 5=positive).

Scenario 1: A student athlete walks into class late.
Scenario 2: A student athlete sits in the back of the class.

Scenario 3: A student athlete introduces themselves the first day of class.

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Scenario 10: A student athlete tells disruptive student athletes to pay attention and be more respectful.
Scenario 11: A student athlete asks questions throughout a class period.
Scenario 12: A student over hears a student athlete asking to turn in an assignment late.

3.Indicate how likely each behavior is to change your perceptions of student athletes. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how likely the behavior is to change your opinion (1=

behavior not likely to change perception, 5= behavior likely to change perception).

Scenario 1: A student athlete walks into class late.
Scenario 2: A student athlete sits in the back of the class.

Scenario 3: A student athlete introduces themselves the first day of class.

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