

Perceptions of Athletes vs Non-Athletes on the College Athlete Experience

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Non-athlete college students tend to view their student-athlete peers negatively because they believe athletes have undue privileges. Student-athletes are often aware of these negative perceptions (Stone, 2012). The goal of this preliminary and exploratory study is to determine whether there is a significant difference between non-athletes' and athletes' perceptions of athlete privilege. Data were collected via an online survey, in which participants answered demographic questions before selecting, from a list, the privileges they believe athletes at their university have. SPSS analysis found several significant differences between divisions and between athletic involvement and perceived privileges. More importantly, there were no significant differences between divisions and athletic involvement regarding the perceptions of stress or mental health struggles. This indicates that perceived perks in collegiate athletics do not necessarily translate into perceived improvements in psychological well-being. This could be beneficial to understanding how student-athlete stereotypes and perceived privilege relate to help-seeking behavior and mental health in collegiate athletes.

Keywords: collegiate student-athlete, perceptions, privileges

Bensimon (1989) defined culture as “the dominant values, norms, philosophy, rules, and climate that reflect basic, unquestioned assumptions that organizational participants have of themselves and of their environment” (p. 21). Researchers have argued that student-athletes should be considered non-traditional students, a term typically used to describe students outside the 18–24 age range, given athletic requirements and the unique challenges associated with participating in collegiate athletics (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Athlete culture refers to a unique set of stressors and experiences that collegiate athletes encounter (Despres et al., 2008; Reich et al., 2021). Despres et al. (2008) define this culture as a phenomenological environment in which college student-athletes live, in which athletes hold many roles and responsibilities that are assumed to positively affect their socialization and education. Despite the

forementioned assumed positive impacts, negative aspects of student-athlete culture indicate difficulties, such as conflict between student and athlete roles (Adler & Adler, 1991; Kegelaers et al., 2024). The pressures of one's role as an athlete take precedence over the student role, contributing to the stigma and stereotypes student-athletes face, including those related to their mental health (Kegelaers et al., 2024). Athletic privilege is defined as athletes receiving preferential or special treatment over students who do not participate in athletics (Coakley, 2015; Comeaux, 2012). Student-athletes are proven to receive privileges that their non-athlete peers do not (Greer & Robinson, 2006), however, these perceived privileges may not equate to psychological well-being.

Storch et al. (2005) describe two diverging schools of thought that have emerged from the literature regarding the impact of athletic participation. The first asserts that sports offer several benefits for the student-athlete, including improved self-esteem, body image, and overall mental health, as well as a reduced risk of depression, social anxiety, and diabetes. However, Storch et al. (2005) further posit that, through participation in sports,

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

This study received no funding.

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athletes face several stressors, including performance anxiety, decreased social interaction, increased expectations, greater time demands, and an overall emotional toll. For example, when comparing men and women college teams, women have higher graduation rates (95%) than men (80%) (Heath, 2024), women have higher overall GPAs than men (Johnson et al., 2010), male athletes are favored by professors over female athletes (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012), and male athletes have a higher rate of alcohol consumption and binge drinking than female athletes (Pritchard et al., 2007). Chen et al. (2010) compiled a list of negative consequences and psychosocial issues that are frequently identified and associated with college athletics, including violence (on and off the court, particularly males committing acts of violence against women), eating disorders, poor academic performance, lower graduation rates, alcohol and other substance abuse, depression, burnout, hazing, gambling, and a lack of social life and experiences (Flood & Dyson, 2007; Lipkens & Qeadan, 2025). Furthermore, there are several unique stressors that student-athletes experience, such as burnout, injuries, pressure from coaches, academic eligibility requirements, intense schedules, frequent performance evaluations, and the maintenance of top physical condition (Brown et al., 2014). More recently, changes in eligibility and transfer rules, along with the effects of COVID-19, have increased what is at stake for student-athletes beyond the introduction of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policies (Frans, 2023; Serazio, 2025). As a result, team chemistry and cohesion are in a continual state of flux, forcing athletes in major revenue-generating sports to decide whether to remain and complete their education or leave to pursue professional opportunities (McDaniel et al., 2024). Being involved in athletics does lead to additional pressure for the student-athlete that affects overall well-being (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020; Keriven et al., 2025). This is due to having to balance practices, games, team meetings, and a rigorous course load (Watson, 2006) with the more recent addition of social media representation (Sahin et al., 2024).

Within university and college culture, student-athletes are frequently judged from the get-go by their non-athlete classmates (Aries et al., 2004). Student-athletes receive labels such as privileged, pampered, lazy, and not smart, each of which affects one's view of self (Simons et al., 2007). Labels such as unmotivated, academically incapable, and less intelligent contribute to the proverbial dumb jock stereotype (Chen et al., 2013). Comeaux (2012) names these labels as "athlete microaggressions," or "subtle or overt, verbal or nonverbal exchanges (whether intentional or unintentional) which communicate negative and demeaning messages toward

college student-athletes, regardless of race, gender, or type of sport" (p. 191). These negative perceptions of student-athletes and their academic potential stem from professors, as noted by Engstrom et al. (1995), who found that professors hold negative attitudes toward athletes and their competence. This makes it harder for athletes to both be taken seriously and to earn top grades. Further, classmates of athletes in shared classes hold suspicions and lack trust in student-athletes when athletes obtain A grades, indicating that they believe athletes are given grades rather than that they have been earned (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). In fact, Miles (2015) documented differences in academic achievement between student-athletes and non-athletes at a Division III university. They discovered that student-athletes spent more time on coursework each week than non-athlete peers, and that there was no significant difference between the two groups in academic achievement and motivation. Division III athletes were found to have cumulative college GPAs similar to those of their non-athlete peers (Lemke, 2015). In sum, it appears many student-athletes are being inaccurately labeled.

To be sure, athletic involvement does have some positive effects on student-athletes. Many student-athletes develop work ethic, self-discipline, time management, coachability, and a deeper understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses, which may make them less likely to repeat mistakes (Lemke, 2015). Using the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, the Sport Commitment Model, the Life Roles Inventory-Values Scales, and Athletic Involvement on the Social Life, Chen et al. (2010) asked student-athletes and non-athlete participants to report on their views of athletic identity, sports commitment, and the effects of participation. They found that participants "somewhat agreed with the effects of sport involvement in developing health, work ethics, creativity, self-esteem, confidence, cultural acceptance, academic performance, and overall development, among other constructs" (Chen et al., 2010, p. 12).

There is a narrative that separates athletes and non-athletes, which may lead both groups to focus more on their differences, widening the gap between them. Aries et al. (2004) compared athletes and non-athletes with respect to academic performance, group membership, and alcohol-related tendencies at competitive and selective colleges. Despite the notion that student-athletes have a less strict admission process than non-athletes, they found no significant differences in academic underperformance between athletes and non-athletes who entered college with similar test scores and demographic profiles. However, athletes reported feeling at an academic disadvantage due to the time demands of their

sport, feeling less confident in their skills, and facing more challenges affecting their academic performance. In terms of group membership, athletes believe they were distinguished from their non-athlete peers “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” (2004, p. 582). Athletes believe there were greater difficulties in connecting with groups, attending non-athletic events, and making contacts for the future. Despite this, student-athletes were just as likely as non-athletes to report personal growth, develop new interests and activities, make new connections with people from different backgrounds, and find a place at college. Aries et al. (2004) data also show that, despite perceived differences between student-athletes and non-athletes, similarities may be overlooked due to a focus on between-group differences.

Athletes and Mental Health

Student-athletes face several culturally induced mental health challenges that contribute to discomfort when seeking help (Leimer et al., 2014; Sudano & Miles, 2017). Due to the stress and demands of athletics, student-athletes are at a greater risk than their non-athlete peers of developing certain mental health concerns, including substance use issues, depression, eating disorders (13 to 84%), and anxiety (Power et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2018). Given the privileges and resources student-athletes are provided, they are assumed to be healthy individuals who do not require additional support (Reich et al., 2021). While student-athletes may have a lot of physical health and academic resources, they often experience multiple mental health struggles, including isolation, fear of failure, conflicts in identity, and career issues (Gayles et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2018), as is especially true for female athletes. For example, Storch et al. (2005) and Zhou et al. (2022) found that female athletes scored higher than male athletes and all non-athletes on social anxiety, depressive symptoms, and lack of support. Proposed reasons for this difference include female athletes having more stressors than male athletes, being more likely to internalize stressors, and feeling less satisfied than non-athletes with their college experiences. These are differences frequently found in people with depressive symptoms and social anxiety. While female athletes are more likely to place value on their academics, they are also more likely than male athletes to be negatively affected by the “dumb jock” stereotype (Harrison et al., 2009).

Despite college athletes having a higher need for counseling to address their stress levels, burnout, fear of failure,

time management issues, anxious symptoms, depressive symptoms, and performance-related issues, student-athletes are more likely than their non-athlete peers to underutilize counseling resources (Murray, 1997). Explanations for this include athletic personnel being unable to recognize signs of emotional distress, psychological distress being considered a sign of weakness, time constraints, stigmas (internal and external), and the belief that counselors would not understand their needs (Leimer et al., 2014; Storch et al., 2005). Additionally, athletes worry about the risk of their images being jeopardized if they are seen entering or leaving a college counseling center (Watson, 2006).

Regarding external stigma, Leimer et al. (2014) identified three external barriers: the athletic department being viewed as separate from the university, concerns about the care a counselor can provide to a student-athlete, and scheduled team events that demand most of an athlete's time. Additionally, other factors contributing to student-athletes' avoidance of help included the perceived time and expense of seeking help, the belief that “problems should be kept within the family,” and the idea that staying busy is a good way to avoid problems, whereas talking with someone else is not.

Once more, research has shown that perceptions of student-athlete privilege begin in high school. In a qualitative study by Tipton (2021), high school students noted that athletes received more leniency regarding the quality and timing of submitted work, that athletes' excuses were easily accepted, and that athletes were allowed personal discretion in class attendance. One participant stated that “student-athletes should be held to the same standards as all of the other students in class” (p. 95).

High school athletes have been found to experience preferential treatment by college admission committees and financial aid offices (Fuller et al., 2019; Hextrum, 2023; New, 2016). Hextrum (2023) noted that a different application with lower academic standards is used for athletes. New (2016) found that Division III universities have developed ways around policies against athletically based scholarships, such as awarding more non-athletic-based scholarship dollars to student-athletes than to their non-athlete peers, and student-athletes being six times more likely than non-athlete students to receive special treatment in university admissions (Eitzen, 1997). Further, Hextrum (2023) found that some student-athletes believed they deserved preferential admission because of the time and effort devoted to a lifetime of training. There are discrepancies in what student-athletes themselves perceive regarding privileges. Chen et al. (2010) found that male and female student-athletes have similar

levels of commitment, perceived identity, and belief that sport does not encourage alcohol and other “delinquent” behaviors. However, Chen et al. (2010) also noted that male student-athletes believed they received more benefits from their athletic involvement than female athletes did. Simons et al. (2007) found that while 26.6% of athletes in a particular study reported “always,” “often,” or “sometimes” receiving special treatment, 73.4% reported “rarely” or “never” receiving preferential treatment, indicating that a majority of athletes did not perceive notable privilege.

Fuller et al. (2019) conducted a similar study in which they assessed college students’ perceptions of the preferential treatment college athletes receive. Participants were asked to complete three qualitative survey questions regarding student-athlete privileges. Fuller et al. (2019) found that 78% of the 313 participants believed collegiate athletes do receive some form of preferential treatment, particularly in the classroom. Participants believed that professors were lenient, had different standards, or gave “unearned” grades to athletes to maintain athlete eligibility. Participants also perceived athletes as more disruptive in class, with more class absences and more late assignments submitted without negative consequences. Outside the classroom, participants perceived student-athletes as receiving meals, gifts from boosters, and university merchandise for free. Participants identified student-athletes as having excessive social status and called athletes “demigods” with more “social pull” than their non-athlete peers.

Purpose of the Present Study

Comeaux (2012) noted that erroneous perceptions of privilege (special treatment) contribute to the microaggressions that student-athletes experience, making it more difficult for them to succeed in such a biased environment. Understanding perceptions of privilege held by non-athlete students may move universities closer to providing environments that promote well-being for all. Because the Fuller et al. (2019) study utilized participants from only one university, they recommended future research expand to include smaller universities as well as those with more “big-time” athletic programs. These are the challenges of the present study.

Methods

Procedures

The Internal Review Board at Gonzaga University approved the present study on February 28, 2025 (Protocol # 2502_ROSEDU_Ross). Data were collected via a Google Forms survey that was shared on several social media platforms (Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook)

over a one-month period. Researchers initially shared the link to the study on their personal accounts, and participants were able to share it on their own accounts. Participants were restricted to current undergraduate and graduate students and were not offered incentives for participation. After reviewing the study information sheet and consenting to participation, subjects were asked to answer seven demographic questions including university descriptors. These included multiple-choice questions assessing participant’s college or university division (“Division I”; “Division II”; “Division III”; “Not in the NCAA”), public or private status (“Public”; “Private”), number of students attending university (“Less than 2,000”; “2,000–5,000”; “More than 5,000”), academic standing (“First-year”; “Sophomore”; “Junior”; “Senior”; “Graduate Student”), athletic involvement (“Current collegiate athlete”; “Former collegiate athlete”; “Never involved in collegiate athletics”), and gender assigned at birth (“Male”; “Female”; “Non-binary”; “Other” [Write-in option]). Participants then checked all boxes that applied to them for the question “What do you perceive that athletes at your university get that non-athletes do not?” Options of privileges included: “More financial aid”; “Easier time making friends”; “Easier grading from professors”; “More excused absences from classes”; “More time extensions for assignments”; “Less stress”; “Less mental health struggles”; “A better college experience”; “More opportunities”; “More tutoring opportunities”; “Better test taking strategies”; “More ideal living situations”; and “Other,” which was a write-in answer. Data were coded based on whether each privilege’s checkbox was checked.

Data were analyzed using SPSS software. After coding the data, one-way ANOVA and independent-samples t-tests were conducted.

Participants

One hundred ninety-two voluntary participants self-identified as coming from various institutions and with varying levels of collegiate athletic involvement. The number and percentage of participants from this study who reported attending universities across divisions are as follows: 97 (50.5%) Division I, 4 (2.7%) Division II, 69 (35.9%) Division III, and 22 (11.5%) schools outside of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). 129 (67.2%) participants reported attending public universities, and 63 (32.8%) private universities. Regarding university size, 31 (16.1%) of participants reported attending a school with less than 2,000 students, 80 (41.7%) a school with 2,000–5,000 students, and 81 (42.2%) a university with more than 5,000 students. Country-wide student-athlete distribution across divisions is shown in

Table 1 (NCAA, 2025).

Regarding academic standing, 27 participants (14.1%) were first-years, 37 (19.3%) were sophomores, 47 (24.5%) were juniors, 53 (27.6%) were seniors, and 28 (14.6%) were graduate students. 82 participants reported being current collegiate athletes (42.7%), former collegiate athletes (16.1%), or never having been college athletes (41.1%). Finally, 87 (45.3%) of participants identified as male, 103 (53.6%) as female, and 2 (1%) as non-binary.

Results

Division and Perceptions

An ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived privilege across divisions, as shown in Table 2. Significant differences were found between divisions and financial aid ($F(3, 188) = 23.162, p < .001$), divisions and easier time making friends ($F(3, 188) = 18.715, p < .001$), divisions and more excused absences from classes ($F(3, 188) = 5.160, p = .002$), divisions and easier grading from professors ($F(3, 188) = 9.486, p < .001$), divisions and more time extensions on assignments ($F(3, 188) = 7.935, p < .001$), divisions and better college experience ($F(3, 188) = 10.534, p < .001$), divisions and more tutoring opportunities ($F(3, 188) = 12.297, p < .001$), and divisions and more ideal living situations ($F(3, 188) = 4.075, p = .008$). No significant differences were found between divisions and less stress ($F(3, 188) = 1.516, p = .212$), divisions and less mental health struggles ($F(3, 188) = .250, p = .861$), divisions and more opportunities ($F(3, 188) = .336, p = .799$), and divisions and better test taking strategies ($F(3, 188) = .780, p = .507$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that Division I participants significantly differed from Division III participants in their perceptions of financial aid ($M = .533, SE = .067$), easier time making friends ($M = .435, SE = .060$), easier grading from professors ($M = .296, SE = .056$), more excused absences ($M = .272, SE = .069$), more time extensions ($M = .355, SE = .075$), better college experience ($M = .395, SE = .074$), more tutoring opportunities ($M = .406, SE = .067$), and better living situations ($M = .244, SE = .076$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction also indicated that Division I participants significantly differed from not-in-NCAA participants in their perceptions of more financial aid ($M = .330, SE = .104$), easier time making friends ($M = .371, SE = .093$), better college experience ($M = .361, SE = .114$), and more tutoring opportunities ($M = .278, SE = .104$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that Division II and Division III participants significantly differed in their perceptions of more finan-

cial aid ($M = .794, SE = .219$). Most notably, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that there were no significant differences between all divisions and participants' perceptions of less stress and less mental health struggles.

Public vs Private and Perceptions

An independent samples *t* test revealed significant differences in perceived privilege between public and private universities, as shown in Table 2. Levene's test for equality of variances showed significant differences between public versus private status and easier time making friends ($F = 65.047, p < .001$), easier grading from professors ($F = 69.736, p < .001$), more excused absences ($F = 30.873, p < .001$), less stress ($F = 14.542, p < .001$), more tutoring opportunities ($F = 17.062, p < .001$), and a better college experience ($F = 4.089, p = .045$). Levene's test for equality of variances showed no significant differences between public versus private status and more financial aid ($F = .058, p = .811$), more time extensions ($F = .646, p = .423$), less mental health struggles ($F = .653, p = .420$), more opportunities ($F = .113, p = .737$), better test taking strategies ($F = .792, p = .375$), and more ideal living situations ($F = 2.959, p = .087$).

Number of Students and Perceptions

An ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived privilege across university sizes, as shown in Table 2. Significant differences were found between university size and financial aid ($F(2, 189) = 11.782, p < .001$), easier time making friends ($F(2, 189) = 16.086, p < .001$), more excused absences ($F(2, 189) = 10.141, p < .001$), easier grading from professors ($F(2, 189) = 8.567, p < .001$), more time extensions ($F(2, 189) = 8.384, p < .001$), better college experience ($F(2, 189) = 9.208, p < .001$), more tutoring opportunities ($F(2, 189) = 8.261, p < .001$), and more ideal living situations ($F(2, 189) = 3.707, p = .026$). No significant differences were found between university size and less stress ($F(2, 189) = 1.688, p = .188$), less mental health struggles ($F(2, 189) = .212, p = .809$), more opportunities ($F(2, 189) = .629, p = .534$), and better test taking strategies ($F(2, 189) = 1.005, p = .368$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that participants who attended universities with less than 2,000 students significantly differed from participants who attended universities with more than 5,000 students in their perceptions of financial aid ($M = .372, SE = .100$), easier time making friends ($M = .400, SE = .085$), easier grading from professors ($M = .264, SE = .077$), and a better college experience

Table 1: *NCAA Division Breakdown*

	Division I	Division II	Division III
Number of Schools	361	292	422
Median Undergraduate Enrollment	8,800	2,100	1,700
Students that are Athletes	1 in 22	1 in 7	1 in 5
Average Teams per School	19	17	19
Percentage of NCAA Athletes	37%	24%	38%

Note. Statistics gathered from NCAA (2025).

($M = .364$, $SE = .102$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that participants who attended universities with less than 2,000 students significantly differed from participants who attended universities with 2,000–5,000 students in their perceptions of more excused absences ($M = .224$, $SE = .092$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that participants who attended universities with 2,000–5,000 students significantly differed from participants who attended universities with more than 5,000 students in their perceptions of financial aid ($M = .317$, $SE = .074$), easier time making friends ($M = .295$, $SE = .063$), easier grading from professors ($M = .196$, $SE = .057$), more excused absences ($M = .302$, $SE = .068$), more time extensions ($M = .304$, $SE = .076$), a better college experience ($M = .267$, $SE = .076$), more tutoring opportunities ($M = .282$, $SE = .070$), and more ideal living situations ($M = .206$, $SE = .077$). Most notably, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that there were no significant differences between all university sizes and participants' perceptions of less stress and less mental health struggles.

Academic Standing and Perceptions

An ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived privilege across academic standings, as shown in Table 2. Significant differences were found between academic standing and financial aid ($F(4, 187) = 2.588$, $p = .038$) and a better college experience ($F(4, 187) = 2.573$, $p = .039$). No significant differences were found between academic standing and easier time making friends ($F(4, 187) = .542$, $p = .705$), more excused absences ($F(4, 187) = .683$, $p = .605$), easier grading from professors ($F(4, 187) = .296$, $p = .880$), more time extensions ($F(4, 187) = .627$, $p = .644$), less stress ($F(4, 187) = 2.048$, $p = .089$), less mental health struggles ($F(4, 187) = 1.283$, $p = .278$), more opportunities ($F(4, 187) = 1.040$, $p = .388$), more tutoring opportunities ($F(4, 187) = 1.804$, $p = .130$), more ideal living situation ($F(4, 187) = .169$, $p = .954$), and better test taking strategies ($F(4, 187) = .594$, $p = .668$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that freshman participants significantly differed from graduate student participants in their perceptions

of a better college experience ($M = .380$, $SE = .133$). Most notably, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that there were no significant differences between all academic standings and participants' perceptions of less stress and less mental health struggles.

Athletic Involvement and Perceptions

An ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived privilege across athletic involvement, as shown in Table 2. Significant differences were found between athletic involvement and financial aid ($F(2, 189) = 51.096$, $p < .001$), easier time making friends ($F(2, 189) = 18.295$, $p < .001$), more excused absences ($F(2, 189) = 11.062$, $p < .001$), easier grading from professors ($F(2, 189) = 18.584$, $p < .001$), more time extensions ($F(2, 189) = 11.116$, $p < .001$), a better college experience ($F(2, 189) = 13.859$, $p < .001$), more tutoring opportunities ($F(2, 189) = 3.945$, $p = .021$), and more ideal living situations ($F(2, 189) = 4.897$, $p = .008$). No significant differences were found between athletic involvement and less stress ($F(2, 189) = 1.314$, $p = .271$), less mental health struggles ($F(2, 189) = 1.359$, $p = .259$), more opportunities ($F(2, 189) = .324$, $p = .724$), and better test taking strategies ($F(2, 189) = 1.243$, $p = .291$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that participants who were current collegiate athletes significantly differed from participants who were never involved in collegiate athletics in their perceptions of financial aid ($M = .626$, $SE = .064$), easier time making friends ($M = .297$, $SE = .063$), easier grading from professors ($M = .318$, $SE = .055$), more excused absences ($M = .313$, $SE = .068$), more time extensions ($M = .330$, $SE = .075$), a better college experience ($M = .389$, $SE = .074$), more tutoring opportunities ($M = .186$, $SE = .072$), and more ideal living situations ($M = .240$, $SE = .077$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that participants who were former collegiate athletes significantly differed from participants who were never involved in collegiate athletics in their perceptions of financial aid ($M = .494$, $SE = .085$), easier time making friends ($M = .443$, $SE = .084$), easier grading from professors ($M = .280$, $SE = .074$), more excused absences ($M = .241$, $SE = .091$), more time extensions ($M = .329$, $SE = .101$), and a better

college experience ($M = .309$, $SE = .100$). Most notably, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that there were no significant differences between all athletic involvement statuses and participants' perceptions of less stress and less mental health struggles.

Gender Assigned at Birth and Perceptions

An ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived privilege across gender, as shown in Table 2. Significant differences were found between gender and financial aid ($F(2, 189) = 3.202$, $p = .043$), less stress ($F(2, 189) = 6.173$, $p = .003$), less mental health struggles ($F(2, 189) = 4.993$, $p = .008$), more opportunities ($F(2, 189) = 3.115$, $p = .047$), and better test taking strategies ($F(2, 189) = 3.085$, $p = .048$). No significant differences were found between gender and easier time making friends ($F(2, 189) = .845$, $p = .431$), more excused absences ($F(2, 189) = .571$, $p = .566$), easier grading from professors ($F(2, 189) = 1.763$, $p = .174$), more time extensions ($F(2, 189) = 1.103$, $p = .334$), a better college experience ($F(2, 189) = 1.112$, $p = .331$), better tutoring opportunities ($F(2, 189) = .293$, $p = .746$), and more ideal living situations ($F(2, 189) = .031$, $p = .969$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that participants who self-identified as male significantly differed from participants who self-identified as nonbinary in their perceptions of less stress ($M = .420$, $SE = .155$), less mental health struggles ($M = .420$, $SE = .163$), and better test taking strategies ($M = .431$, $SE = .178$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that participants who self-identified as female significantly differed from participants who self-identified as nonbinary in their perceptions of less stress ($M = .480$, $SE = .155$), less mental health struggles ($M = .471$, $SE = .163$), and better test taking strategies ($M = .442$, $SE = .178$).

Discussion

This study revealed the perceived privileges of the student-athlete experience and highlighted how specific demographic and university descriptors can impact participant responses. Significant differences were found across most perceived privileges and all demographic identifiers. Of the twelve privileges, eight significant differences were found between divisions (financial aid, $p < .001$; easier time making friends, $p < .001$; more excused absences from classes, $p = .002$; easier grading from professors, $p < .001$; more time extensions on assignments, $p < .001$; better college experience, $p < .001$; more tutoring opportunities, $p < .001$; and more ideal living situations, $p = .008$), the number of students (financial aid, $p < .001$; easier time making friends, $p < .001$; more excused absences, $p < .001$; easier grading from professors, $p < .001$; more time extensions, $p < .001$; a better college experience, $p < .001$; more tutoring opportunities, $p = .021$; and more ideal living situations, $p = .008$). Additionally, six significant differences were found between public and private universities (easier time making friends, $p < .001$; easier grading from professors, $p < .001$; more excused absences, $p < .001$; less stress, $p < .001$; more tutoring opportunities, $p < .001$; and a better college experience, $p = .045$), five significant differences were found between gender assigned at birth and perceptions of privilege (financial aid, $p = .043$; less stress, $p = .003$; less mental health struggles, $p = .008$; more opportunities, $p = .047$; and better test taking strategies, $p = .048$), and two significant differences were found between academic standing and perceptions of privilege (financial aid, $p = .038$; and a better college experience, $p = .039$).

Of the twelve privileges, four (better test-taking strategies, $p = .291$; more opportunities, $p = .724$; less stress, $p = .271$; and less mental health struggles, $p = .259$) did not yield statistically significant differences when compared to athletic involvement. The lack of statistically significant differences in athletic involvement could indicate that student-athletes have historically experienced high levels of stress and mental health struggles, that all students must take tests, and that there may not be a major difference in the opportunities provided to student-athletes. Analysis showed no significant differences between stress and the demographic identifiers of divisions ($p = .212$), the number of students ($p = .188$), academic standing ($p = .089$), and athletic involvement ($p = .271$). Additionally, analysis showed that there were no significant differences found between mental health and the demographic identifiers of divisions ($p = .861$), private versus public ($p = .420$), number of students ($p = .809$), academic standing ($p = .278$), and athletic involvement ($p = .259$). Combined, this could indicate that regardless of demographic and university identifiers, there is a consensus that student-athletes do not have less stress or mental health struggles. Due to significant differences being found only between private versus public and stress ($p < .001$), gender assigned at birth and stress ($p = .003$), and gender assigned at birth and mental health ($p = .008$), this could indicate that across demographic identifiers there was a consensus that privileges do not necessarily equate to less stress or less mental health struggles in student-athletes.

Table 2: *Statistically Significant Differences Between Demographic Identifiers and Perceptions*

Demographic Identifier	Perceived Privilege	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Division	Financial Aid	23.162	3	<.001
	Friends	18.715	3	<.001
	Excused Absences	5.160	3	.002
	Grading	9.486	3	<.001
	Time Extensions	7.935	3	<.001
	Better College	10.534	3	<.001
	Tutoring	12.297	3	<.001
	Living Situation	4.075	3	.008
Private vs Public	Friends	65.047	190	<.001
	Grading	69.736	190	<.001
	Excused Absences	30.873	190	<.001
	Stress	14.542	190	<.001
	Better College	4.089	190	.045
	Tutoring	17.062	190	<.001
University Size	Financial Aid	11.782	2	<.001
	Friends	16.086	2	<.001
	Excused Absences	10.141	2	<.001
	Grading	8.567	2	<.001
	Time Extensions	8.384	2	<.001
	Better College	9.208	2	<.001
	Tutoring	8.261	2	<.001
	Living Situation	3.707	2	.026
Academic Standing	Financial Aid	2.588	4	.038
	Better College	2.573	4	.039
Athletic Involvement	Financial Aid	51.096	2	<.001
	Friends	18.295	2	<.001
	Excused Absences	11.062	2	<.001
	Grading	18.584	2	<.001
	Time Extensions	11.116	2	<.001
	Better College	13.859	2	<.001
	Tutoring	3.945	2	.021
	Living Situation	4.897	2	.008
Gender Assigned at Birth	Financial Aid	3.202	2	.043
	Stress	6.173	2	.003
	Mental Health	4.993	2	.008
	Opportunities	3.115	2	.047
	Test Taking	3.085	2	.048

Note. SPSS one-way ANOVAs were run between perceptions and divisions, university size, academic standing, athletic involvement, and gender assigned at birth; an SPSS independent-samples test was run between perceptions and public versus private status. Only statistically significant differences are shown.

Of the results of the present study, it is unsurprising that several significant differences were found between participants who were never involved in athletics and those who were current or former collegiate athletes, including more financial aid, an easier time making friends, easier grading from professors, more excused absences, more time extensions, a better college experience, more tutoring opportunities, and more ideal living situations. Additionally, several significant differences were found between Division I and Division III or non-NCAA universities, including more financial aid, an easier time making friends, easier grading from professors, more excused absences, more time extensions, a better college experience, more tutoring opportunities, and better living situations. An individual's experience varies greatly depending on their athletic involvement and their university's division, thereby affecting their perceptions of student-athletes.

Despite potential variability, these results could help universities better understand how they allocate resources and the impact this may have on students' views of one another.

Limitations

The limitations identified include breakdowns in divisions and sampling methods. Division II comprises 24% of all universities within the NCAA, yet our Division II subjects accounted for only 2.7% of our study. Division I comprises 37% of NCAA schools and 50.5% in our study. Division III comprises 38% of NCAA schools and 35.9% in our study. The number of subjects for this study is not proportional across teams, given the representation of Division II schools in the NCAA. Due to oversampling of Division I schools and under-sampling of Division II (an outcome of the social media snowball sampling

approach), these findings may not be generalizable. In future studies, collecting more Division II and fewer Division I perspectives might alter outcomes. Data were not collected regarding specific regions, thus limiting insight regarding how athletes from different parts of the country may perceive benefits. The current study did not consider the potential effect on perceptions of privilege given the religious affiliation of some private schools. It may be that the common value base across many religions differs from that of students attending non-religious institutions. This difference may affect the perceptions of what constitutes privilege. Additionally, there was no differentiation between sports in the current study, which may affect subject responses. The present study did not account for subjects' ages, geographical location, or the name of the university or college attended, all of which could affect participants' experiences and perceptions. Finally, participants were able to share the survey with others and post it on their personal accounts, which means multiple perspectives may have come from the same team or university. This sampling method may increase the risk of sampling bias.

Future Directions

Collecting participant opinions in a more expansive manner than multiple-choice and checkbox questions, such as interviews or write-in responses, would be informative to understanding how universities allocate their resources to college students, both athletes and non-athletes, and if resources equate to privilege. The checkbox method provided us with analyzable data; however, it did not allow participants to explain their reasoning or experiences. Allowing subjects to explain their thought process, either verbally or in writing, enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding. This would allow for clarification regarding participants' understandings of privilege, which may lead to additional or alternative conclusions. This could also include looking further into whether the sport in which one participates affects the privileges participants perceive athletes to have. Additional research should focus on participants' opinions on whether collegiate athletes' perceived privileges affect an individual's likelihood of seeking counseling. Due to the potential of sampling bias, the results of this study are preliminary and exploratory only, not generalizable. Future studies should be conducted with a more representative sample of the current NCAA divisional breakdown and account for potential differences by age and by the university's regional location. This may include proportionate random sampling of universities, their teams, and men versus women. Within athletic programs of the same division, public or private status, and size, there is much variability. Future studies should

request the name of the university or college attended, as this would provide both the geographical location and a better understanding of the campus culture.

Conclusion

This preliminary study revealed significant differences found between divisions and the privileges participants believe athletes at their university had in most areas. This trend was consistent between participants' athletic involvement and their perceptions of privileges. Finally, there were no significant differences in perceptions of collegiate athletes' stress and mental health across most demographic identifiers, though not all. Combined, this data indicates that while the group one is part of may alter the privileges one perceives student-athletes to hold, there seems to be an overwhelming consensus that privileges do not necessarily equate to less stress or fewer mental health issues for collegiate athletes. This is an important consideration when conceptualizing the student-athlete experience, and it may relate to the commonly known phrase of "money cannot buy happiness."

This study sought to build on the work of Fuller et al. (2019), which proposed that future research include a comparison of perceived privileges at smaller universities and larger athletic programs. Results of the current study were consistent with those of previous research (Aries et al., 2004) in that student-athletes and non-athletes held differing opinions about the privileges athletes may have. More information is needed to better serve athletes and non-athletes alike regarding privileges, perceived privileges, and students' well-being.

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