

PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS ON RACE AND STEREOTYPES IN
ATHLETICS

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By
Clinton Woods

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Perceptions of College Students on Race and Stereotypes in Athletics

Clinton Woods

Northwest Missouri State University

THESIS APPROVED

Thesis Advisor

Date

Dean of Graduate School

Date

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of college students on race and stereotypes in athletics. A total of 219 students participated in the study from a rural Midwestern college. Data was collected by asking students to complete an instrument that measures perceptions of race, athleticism, and stereotypes in athletics. Students completed the instrument through an on-line data collection system that tabulated results automatically. The instrument was adapted from two previous studies by Harrison and Lawrence (2004), and Hodge et al. (2008). The research findings indicate that the influences of race-based stereotypes of athletes still persist. Substantially large proportions of students provided agreement with various statements indicating race-based differences in both athletic and intellectual ability. The variation in responses across items pertaining to different race comparisons tends to support common stereotypes related to both athletics and intelligence. These findings are particularly concerning when considering that past research has suggested that such stereotypes can have profound effects on athletic performance, academics, and overall well-being. Study results and limitations warrant more research to accurately depict the way feelings, attitudes, and experiences affect this issue. Sports professionals, educators, and athletic administrators have the responsibility to stop the perpetuation of race-based stereotypic beliefs by creating a culture that not only celebrates athletic success, despite one's race, but equally promotes academic success. Moreover, it is the responsibility of coaches, educators, and athletic administrators to positively impact these perceptions.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The idea of African American athletes' superiority and dominance in sports is an unresolved issue that has been debated for generations (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004). This stereotypical observation is still prevalent in our society and its consequences necessitate attention. The fact that the debate continues today reflects society's inability to break free from the inclination to associate skin color with traits such as talent, intelligence, and character.

Just as in many other areas of our society, African Americans have faced obstacles in the realm of sports. From facing segregation entering the field of sports in the early 19th century, to being scrutinized for being mentally inferior to Whites; Black athletes continue to face stereotypical barriers that impact both sport and daily life (Wiggins, 1997).

Stereotype Threat

The stereotype threat of the Black athlete has intensified as African Americans have achieved success in the world of sports. A stereotype is often viewed as generalization of attitudes, ideas, and beliefs regarding an individual or a specific group of people. As a result, the idea of the *natural*, *elite*, or *gifted* athlete has emerged. Hodge, Kozub, Dixson, Moore, and Kambon (2008) described this stereotype with the statement that "Stereotype beliefs about Blacks have portrayed them as athletically superior while intellectually inferior to Whites. In contrast, Whites have been portrayed as athletically inferior but intellectually superior to Blacks" (p. 99). The idea of the elite or gifted athlete encompasses innate physiological advantages or natural physical ability. Regarding

dominance in sports, Baker and Horton (2003) indicated that “Researchers have long speculated on the factors that contribute to making an elite athlete. When a particular [ethnic] group *appears* to dominate a given domain, even more speculation and interest is generated” (paragraph 2). There are several studies that have signified that Black and White athletes have cultural beliefs that indicate Black athletes are naturally more dominant in sports. In a study by Harrison and Lawrence (2004), the researchers found that a high amount of participants characterize African American with *God-given* athleticism and muscular strength. It was further indicated that excellence found in basketball, football, and track and field by Black athletes led these participants to believe African Americans have a greater genetic advantage compared to other athletes.

Effects of Stereotypes

It is clear that stereotypes can impact the interpretation of athletic performance and an athlete’s ability to perform. “Society’s infatuation with Black athleticism perpetuates (this) negative stereotype” (Shakib et al., 2011, p. 308). Evidence has suggested that making stereotypes about Black and White athletes has the potential to have severe consequences in a number of areas. Findings by Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, and Darley (1999) help to understand stereotypes effect on psychological factors that influence athletic performance. In two experiments, the researchers found that making racial stereotypes about Black and White athletes had an adverse influence on the athlete’s performance in both groups. The participants perceived the "Black" target as more athletic and less intelligent, while the "White" target as less athletic but possessing more intelligence and hustle. Hodge et al. (2008) has also indicated that race-based stereotypic beliefs have major implications for today’s youth, such as imposing

sociological barriers on performance, and potentially affecting a student's ability to perform to their potential. Race-based stereotypes can create psychological barriers in areas outside of athletics such as self-doubt, and reduced expectations in academic contexts. Research has indicated that a large portion of Black students underachieve academically as a result of negative stereotypes directed toward intelligence (Hodge et al., 2008).

Purpose Statement

New research is now needed to examine the extent to which the stereotype threat regarding African American athletes still exists. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of college students on race and stereotypes in athletics. It has been a long-held belief that Black athletes have an edge when it comes to competition. The notion of *Black* dominance in sports has been researched through the years and this study seeks to investigate if these beliefs still exist among today's college students. Using recent literature, and replicating past studies, this study will examine perceptions of race and athleticism among college students on a rural Midwestern college campus.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sport in America

America is considered a premier sport country. Athletics serves as a way of life for many Americans and has an immense influence on social and cultural practices. Ethnicity and sport are extremely important and interrelated within the context of American sport history. To truly understand certain aspects of sport, it is first important to understand the history of sport, how it was developed, and the affects of historical, cultural and social traditions.

Sport did not exist as we know it in the early days of America. Sport of the 1600's was restricted by the work ethic of the Puritans. Cross (1990) documented that for the Puritans "the gospel of labor was not merely a way of earning time and money for pleasure; for them, work was an end in itself, almost a form of worship" (p. 25). The Puritans were of the mind set that every man, woman, and child was required to be productive every waking moment. This left no time for sport or leisure. The Puritans believed that unnecessary pleasures were opportunities for sin (Cross, 1990). At this time, the church had much of the control of leisure time, if any. As life became easier and values gradually changed, the people of the new country slowly found more time for games and amusement. The development of these simple amusements and spirited pastimes is what has formed the modern sport that America knows today.

In the beginning of the 17th century, "a more relaxed leisure culture emerged among the elite and the common European settlers" (Cross, 1990, p. 40). Opportunities for sport among all classes grew at this time. Violent team and blood sports soon came to

be popular leisure customs among the working classes (Cross, 1990). Boxing and wrestling also grew at this time; as well as, festivals and fairs. Patterns of elite sport involved a great deal of hunting and racing. Expensive specially-trained horses and dogs made this sport socially exclusive (Cross, 1990). Horse racing was also pursued with a passion by the wealthy.

In the late 17th century and early 18th century, competitive gambling involving high stakes became a distinguishing characteristic of the culture (Cross, 1990).

Competitive activities such as horse racing served social functions as well as symbolic functions. Gambling reflected core elements of the culture in this time period. By gambling, people of this time openly expressed their extreme competitiveness, winning temporary victories over their rivals without threatening social serenity (Cross, 1990).

Participation in these contests publicly identified a person as a member of an elite group.

The institution of sport has served as a test of masculinity in western societies... According to researchers, it was produced both historically, and deliberately, as a political strategy to maintain masculine privilege and power. Where at once, sport, in Western culture, was reserved as a form of recreation for the elite, a historical analysis of sport reveals that during the past century ruling groups shaped and utilized sport to maintain social control. (Anderson, n.d., p. 2)

Organized sport in the United States originated in the late 18th century and early 19th century. With the outbreak of the Civil War, American masses were introduced to sport. Anderson (n.d.) recounted that troops of that time “found sport an enjoyable way to kill

time. After the war's conclusion, however, the soldiers returned to work their family farms where they were kept busy. The average farmer simply didn't have time to play sports" (p. 2).

The industrial revolution, however, brought people away from family farms and into the cities. It also forced a division of family roles. Many families responded by assuming that men should work outside the home, and women should not (Cross, 1990). This meant a redefinition of fatherhood, toward much less involvement with the household and children. The men of this time became more *time*-conscious in the work place (Cross, 1990). Many men in fact began to assume that they had no skills with children, because they were away so much. The standard definition of fatherhood at this time was emphasized as *breadwinner* roles, supporting the family, rather than interacting with it extensively or serving as a moral guide in the traditional manner. The percentage of women in the labor force dropped steadily. Women generally lost touch with the business world and workforce. This meant a redefinition of women's roles, toward more stress on housework and motherhood. Cross (1990) documented that women during this time were more "'task conscious'—organizing their day in accordance with the immediate demands of children, cleaning, and cooking" (p. 62). The women also directed any sort of leisure in the home at this time.

The absenteeism of the American father, and the increased time the male youths spent with their mothers, created widespread fears...In short, parents feared that the fathers' absenteeism would lead boys to grow to be "weak" or "soft"...Sporting programs became polarized after the turn of

the twentieth-century as methods for combating this softness. (Anderson, n.d., p. 2)

Many accounts of the historical development and significance of sports during this time period have suggested that sport acted as a key social basis whereby “manly” qualities and competencies could be displayed. Sports were a way of avoiding wider social processes of feminization (Cross, 1990). Sports programs established at this time created an atmosphere in which traditional American values were promoted. It was believed that sports could provide a vicarious means to implement those values in young boys. Team sports would promote high moral values and manly qualities. Organizations such as the YMCA were formed in this time period to advocate such behavior (Anderson, n.d.).

The sporting world in this time was dominated by participatory sport rather than spectator sports, but majority of organized opportunities for participation were restricted to the White population of America. Such factors as time, income, and availability of facilities came into play when considering participation. Sport in this era was dominated by sportsmen who participated for recreational pursuits, unlike those who played for financial gain.

African Americans in Sport

Despite the early ideals of organized sport, much of society, and particularly African Americans, were excluded entirely from participation.

There are good reasons to study the experiences of blacks in sport. Although there are many racial and ethnic minorities in America, blacks have been particularly oppressed in the United States. They have had to

struggle against centuries of slavery, and another century of legalized segregation...Therefore, the history of the black athlete in the institution of American sport does not begin until after slavery was abolished in 1863. (Anderson, n.d., p. 1-2)

African Americans first made their mark on individualized athletics in boxing (Anderson, n.d.). Only a small number of White colleges and universities in the North allowed Blacks to participate in their athletic programs. It was extremely rare for a Black athlete to compete at a White college. Moses Fleetwood Walker was the first Black collegiate baseball player, and was permitted on the Oberlin College team in 1881 (Anderson, n.d.). It is unknown when the first Black track athlete entered the field, but Blacks are believed to have competed collegiately around 1886. The first Black collegiate football player is also unknown, but W.T.S. Jackson and William Henry Lewis were allowed to play for Amherst College in 1889. Anderson (n.d.) documented that “Black athletic participation in White-run schools and leagues would remain very low until the end of the Second World War” (p. 3).

In the following years, segregation values were applied in nearly every aspect of American life. Blacks and other ethnic Americans were only allowed into a few places. These included hotels, churches, theatres, schools, and public transportation. Sports were not excluded from this. Segregation formed a palpable obstacle for athletes of color. In the early 1900's, “Jim Crow” laws and racism forced Black athletes out of professional baseball leagues (Negro League Baseball Museum, 2004).

The 1920's was labeled the “Golden Age of Sport” because of the increased recognition of financial gain to be made by sports, and the

swarm of organized sporting programs to be found in America. However, the “Golden Age of Sport” really refers to “the golden age of sport for the white man,” as sport, during this time, was primarily recognized as an economic possibility for the white male, as blacks were systematically kept from most sporting opportunity during the 1920’s. (Anderson, n.d., p. 3)

In reflecting on the experience of Black athletes, the movement of sport has gradually expanded opportunities for these competitors. Black athletes were eventually permitted to participate in sports on their own organized teams. The Negro National League was formed in 1920, which allowed Black baseball players to compete in their own leagues. The Negro League Baseball Museum (2004) documented that the league maintained a high level of competition and was a foundation for economic growth in many Black communities. This paved the way for future competition in football, basketball, and several other leagues. Barbalis (2002) noted that “several events in society and sports influenced a dramatic shift towards desegregation in...sports” (paragraph 4). With the expansion of professional and collegiate sports, there were a few Black pioneers that paved the way to the desegregation of sport. A focal figure in this movement was sports legend Jackie Robinson. “Robinson was known to be a symbol of the struggles of Blacks in achievement to basic civil rights. Due to the help of...Robinson, segregation in professional sports came to an end in the 1950’s” (Robinson, 2003, p. 2).

Stereotype Threat

Despite expanded opportunities and efforts towards desegregation, Black athletes still faced major threats as athletic competitors. Although segregation was in a decline following the 1950's, athletic segregation was firmly rooted in the minds of many Americans. Prior to African American success in sports, the mindset of many Whites indicated that Blacks were assumed to be vastly inferior to their White counterparts. The scrutiny of ethnic athletes was rationalized by the supposition that they were inherently physiologically and mentally inferior to Whites. Robinson (2003) has indicated that "race and ethnicity has been used to shape and mold the way an individual thinks, speaks, and performs...These terms have effectively kept up racial barriers in organized sports as well as in developmental growth in different racial groups" (p. 1).

Regardless of this perception of Black athletes, Blacks were seemingly successful in sports. Consequently, anxiety developed among Whites who felt serious doubt about their highly reserved ideas of White superiority. The stereotype belief of the Black athlete soon shifted in another direction when their success began to increase. Soon the idea of an elite or gifted athlete emerged. Regarding elitism and dominance in sports, Baker and Horton (2003) indicated that "Researchers have long speculated on the factors that contribute to making an elite athlete. When a particular [ethnic] group *appears* to dominate a given domain, even more speculation and interest is generated" (paragraph 2). The idea of the elite or gifted athlete encompasses innate physiological advantages or natural physical ability. The Black male athlete has long been associated with being: 'the natural,' lazy, intellectually deficient, and athletic (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004).

These circumstances have developed largely because of long-standing and ill-informed presumptions. Such perceptions can be referred to as myths or stereotypes, and include the concept of innate, race-linked Black athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency. Misconceptions affirm that “the simplest explanation for Black dominance in...sports is innate talent” (La Griffe du Lion, 2000, paragraph 4).

It is also argued that the black (male) body has come to occupy a central metonymic site through which notions of ‘athleticism’ and ‘animalism’ operate, and that the athletic black body in particular remains deeply inscribed into the psychic imaginary of the West. These tropes of blackness provide the discursive boundaries within which the black subject is still framed. (Carrington, 2002, p. 4)

Effects of Stereotypes

Research has shown that race based stereotypes are still prevalent in sport. A compilation of work from the Department of Psychology at the University of Arizona has researched several causes and consequences on stereotyping amongst athletics. The University of Arizona (n.d.) documented the beliefs people have about the relationship between race, gender and performance in sports. The study had 1500 Black, White, Hispanic and Asian students rate the natural athletic ability, intelligence, emotionality, and work ethic of Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian male and female athletes. The data revealed that:

Black athletes were rated higher in natural athletic ability and work ethic than sports intelligence or emotionality. This pattern did not depend on

the race or gender of the perceiver—everyone, including Black perceivers, rated Black athletes this way.

White athletes were rated higher in sports intelligence and work ethic than natural ability and emotionality. This pattern also did not depend on the race or gender of the perceiver—White perceivers agreed.

Hispanic athletes were rated lower than Blacks and Whites in natural ability and intelligence, but higher in emotionality and work ethic.

Asian athletes were rated high in intelligence, but very low in natural ability, emotionality, and work ethic. (University of Arizona, n.d., paragraph 2)

The observed perceptions can be contributed to several different factors. Personal beliefs, prejudices, lack of knowledge of and outlook toward sports, are all variables that can affect these stereotypes (University of Arizona, n.d.).

Regardless of the aforementioned factors, the stereotype threat is real. Several researchers have considered what this could mean to athletic competitors. The stereotype threat not only represents a falsified representation of athletes, it is said to have an immense impact on people's interpretation of athletic performance. In an investigation on the perceptual confirmation of racial stereotypes about athletes; Stone, Perry, and Darley (1997) had participants evaluate a collegiate basketball player while listening to a radio broadcast of a game. A portion of the participants were led to believe the target player was a Black male, and the other portion was led to believe the target was a White male. Post-game ratings of the targets showed that when participants thought that the target player was Black, he was rated high in athletic ability, but he was rated low in

intelligence and hustle. However, when participants thought the target was a White male, the target player was rated as highly intelligent, but as having low natural ability and possessed less skill in basketball (Stone et al., 1997). This is alarming evidence considering that all participants listened to the same radio broadcast. This data suggests that people let their beliefs about race guide their judgments of athletes' abilities and characteristics.

Actual performance is also affected by stereotypes of athleticism. Evidence has suggested that making stereotypes about Black and White athletes has the potential to cause poor athletic performance. Findings by Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, and Darley (1999) help to understand stereotypes effect on psychological factors that influence athletic performance. In one experiment, the researchers found that making racial stereotypes about Black and White athletes had an adverse influence on the athlete's performance in both groups. Black participants performed significantly worse on tasks framed as pinpointing "sports intelligence," whereas White participants performed worse on tasks framed to pinpoint "natural ability" (Stone et al., 1999).

In similar research, Harrison and Lawrence (2004) conducted a qualitative investigation into college students' perceptions, myths, and stereotypes, about African-American athleticism. Seven major themes emerged as a result of their study: Black physical advantage, Black work ethic, Black cultural factors, race disregard, societal factors, Black limited opportunity, and unawareness. Harrison and Lawrence went on to conclude, "The myth of the 'natural' athlete, Black athletic superiority, or White athletic inferiority still exists today, the irony being that African Americans have been

historically excluded from competing in sport due to beliefs of their athletic inferiority” (p. 48). Furthermore,

The current study addresses whether college students believe in Black athletic superiority. Some college students do buy into the notion of the ‘natural’ Black athlete. This is evident in the theme of Black physical advantage and in the subtheme of Black physical attributes...these participants attribute excellent athletic performance to race and they strongly believe that African Americans have an advantage over White athletes in certain sports. (Harrison and Lawrence, 2004, p. 48)

Hodge, Kozub, Dixson, Moore, and Kambon (2008) have also indicated that race-based stereotypic beliefs have major implications for today’s youth; such as imposing sociological barriers on performance and potentially affecting a student’s ability to perform to their potential. Hodge et al. (2008) researched stereotypic beliefs in a high school setting by creating the *Beliefs about Intelligence and Athleticism Scale (BIAS)* to investigate the beliefs about athletic and intellectual abilities in a large urban school district. In this study, it was evident that high school students’ beliefs and impressions were highly affected by stereotypes. Black males tended to hold strong beliefs on perceived athletic superiority and sports dominance, but were unsure on questions of intelligence. More than any other ethnic group, Black males were more influenced by stereotypic beliefs regarding their perceived athletic superiority and sport dominance. As a result of negative stereotypes directed toward intelligence, Hodge et al. indicated that a large portion of Black students underachieve academically.

The psychological influences of stereotypes were shown to have a negative effect in many different areas. This leads many researchers to assume that stereotyping within athletic competition plays a harmful role on and off the court. Stereotypes have been shown to raise self-doubt regarding an athlete's ability to perform, and create anxiety about one's capacity to perform effectively. Given the relationship between performance and the stereotype beliefs shown in this research, more research is needed to better understand this correlation.

Summary of Literature

Past and present research has shown that the stereotypic beliefs of African-American superiority, or dominance in sports, is an issue worth investigating. Historically, society's outlook has made it difficult for the African-American athlete; consequently, affecting athletes from all different backgrounds. Researchers believe that there are several factors that have contributed to this issue (e.g. racism, cultural differences, media, and lack of knowledge). In addition, many researchers have indicated that implications of these stereotypes can negatively affect all aspects of athletic competition. Education is another area where race-based stereotypes are found to have severe consequences.

As society works towards achieving equal opportunity and political correctness, new research is now needed to examine the extent to which stereotype beliefs regarding African American athletes still exist. Based on the presented information, the following research question will be addressed:

Q1: To what extent do racial stereotypes regarding athletic ability exist among college students from the central part of the United States?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Sample

Participants include 219 students from a rural Midwestern college. Participants were provided with the opportunity to participate in the study through their school email accounts. Nearly 1400 students received an invitation to participate in the survey resulting in 219 usable responses. A large majority of respondents were Caucasian (92.7%), with 63.8% being female (see Table 1). The other portion of respondents were made up of .9% African American, .9% Asian, .5% American Indian, and 5% reported that they were from multiple races. Data were utilized in this research project to examine the perceptions of students on race and stereotypes regarding sport. The collection of data took participants approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Setting

The sample was gathered from students that were enrolled at a small liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 1400 students and has a strong religious affiliation. The college is known as a “work-college,” which means every student works on campus to pay for 100% of their tuition.

Instrumentation

Data was collected by asking students to complete an instrument that measures perceptions of race, athleticism, and stereotypes in athletics. Students completed the instrument through an on-line data collection system that tabulated results automatically. The instrument was adapted from two previous studies by Harrison and Lawrence

Table 1
Descriptive Data (n=219)

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	139	63.8
Male	79	36.2
Level of Education		
Freshman	46	21
Sophomore	53	24.2
Junior	52	23.7
Senior	68	31.1
Ethnicity		
White	203	92.7
African American	2	.9
American Indian	1	.5
Asian	2	.9
Multiple races	11	5

(2004), and Hodge et al. (2008). The instrument is broken into three different sections: demographic information, perceptions of athleticism, and stereotype beliefs.

Demographic information. The first section of the survey instrument obtained demographic information from respondents. Questions were asked regarding the respondents level of education, gender, and ethnicity.

Perceptions of athleticism. In the second section, perceptions of athleticism were measured by adapting Harrison and Lawrence's (2004) research inventories. These inventories have been used to describe individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings regarding the examination of African American athleticism (e.g., physical advantage, work ethic, cultural factors, societal factors, and limited opportunity). Researchers utilized the Athletic Ability and Achievement Attitudes and Beliefs (AAAAB) instrument, "which was developed in collaboration with experts in the fields of sport sociology, sport psychology, sport history, and sport management, as well as logical content from related literature" (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004, p. 36). The study contained several items that were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The items measured students' perceptions of athletes, as it related to race, on four different levels: "(a) athletes achieve at sports because of hard work, (b) athletes achieve at sports because of natural ability, (c) athletes achieve at sports because they are physically better than others, and (d) athletes achieve at sports because they are mentally better than others" (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004, p. 37).

For the purpose of the current study, participants were asked to respond to the aforementioned statements based on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses were coded: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree.

Stereotype beliefs. In the third portion of the survey instrument, the Beliefs about Intelligence and Athleticism Scale (BIAS), created by Hodge et al. (2008) was utilized to collect data. Preliminary measures were taken by the researchers to confirm validity and reliability. Content validity was established through a panel of sport psychologists and physical education teachers. Following these procedures, the instrument was distributed to a sample of high school students resulting in positive reliability estimates that demonstrated internal consistency to all six items (Hodge et al., 2008). Researchers in the study used the BIAS instrument to assess student's beliefs on a 5-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to indicate their level of disagreement, uncertainty, or agreement to the following stereotypic statements:

1. Ethnic minorities (African Americans/Hispanics) are naturally better athletes compared to White/European American athletes.
2. White/European Americans are naturally better athletes compared to ethnic minorities (African American/Hispanic).
3. Ethnic minorities (African Americans /Hispanics) dominate most sports.
4. White/European Americans dominate most sports.
5. Ethnic minorities (African Americans /Hispanics) are naturally more intelligent compared to White/European Americans.
6. White/European Americans are naturally more intelligent compared to ethnic minorities (African Americans/Hispanics). (Hodge et al., 2008, p. 105)

For the purpose of the current study, the statements were altered to better suit the study's research focus. The phrase *Ethnic minorities* was changed to address multiple races (e.g.

African, Hispanic, and Asian Americans), and *White/European Americans* was changed to White Americans. This change was made, in part, to specifically address stereotypes affecting multiple races. Additionally, the statements were modified as a result of the recommendations of Hodge et al. (2008). Researchers commented that the “instrument should be revised to represent Black and Hispanic groups separately rather than as ethnic minorities, which may have confounded the results” (Hodge et al., 2008, p. 111). Hodge et al. (2008) also went on to explain “the intent in using the description *ethnic minorities*, was to assess stereotypic beliefs common to both Black and Hispanic...but, surely these groups have different sport participation patterns, as well as uniqueness in their cultures” (p. 112).

With the goal of specifically addressing the stereotype beliefs regarding particular races within athletics, the current study’s statements consisted of the following 16 items:

1. African Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes.
2. Hispanic Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes.
3. Asian Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes.
4. White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to African Americans.
5. White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to Hispanic Americans.

6. White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to Asian Americans.
7. African Americans dominate most sports.
8. Hispanic Americans dominate most sports.
9. Asian Americans dominate most sports.
10. White Americans dominate most sports.
11. African Americans athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.
12. Hispanic Americans athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.
13. Asian American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.
14. White American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to African American athletes.
15. White American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to Hispanic American athletes.
16. White American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to Asian American athletes.

Participants were asked to respond to the aforementioned statements based on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses were coded: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree.

Procedures

This study was conducted on a private college campus, and underwent approval from the Dean of the College; since the college does not have a formal IRB committee. The Northwest Missouri State University IRB committee reviewed and approved the study as required. Data was collected by asking students to complete an instrument that measures perceptions of race and stereotypes in athletics in the form of a survey. Students completed the instrument through an on-line data collection system that tabulated results automatically and in an anonymous manner. No identifying information was gathered. An invitation for participation was sent to student email accounts via the Dean of Students Office. Upon receiving the survey, students had the opportunity to voluntarily participate in the study with the understanding that their responses would remain anonymous. Once the link was opened, students were presented with an informed consent statement, followed by the option to select the appropriate “button” to proceed to the actual survey. Data was then utilized to examine the perceptions of students regarding race-related stereotypes in sport.

Design and Analysis

The descriptive nature of this study utilized survey research to examine perception of athleticism and stereotype beliefs. Participants used a self-reporting survey to convey their perceptions to a series of statements. Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine response patterns among the study sample. Questions were examined individually and resulting data were analyzed as nominal categories.

Internal Validity

The following section summarizes the extent to which threats to internal validity were addressed in the study. Threats associated with instrumentation were minimized by insuring the survey instrument was standardized and delivered in the same manner across the study group. The duration of the study was limited to one week to insure every student had equal opportunity to respond, and eliminated the threat more time may have had on the results. The delivery of the survey instrument, via student email accounts, was directed through the Dean of Students Office to minimize the threat of bias if delivered by the researcher. Participant's attitudes toward the survey topic may also create threats to internal validity in that responses may be guarded as students hesitate to express views that oppose equality. Likewise, mortality is also an issue in that those whose beliefs reflect a controversial perspective may avoid participation altogether.

External Validity

There are limitations in generalizing that the sample represents the view of all races; considering the location and demographic of those surveyed. The study was not a true random sample, but was convenient to the researcher. Still, results are likely to reflect the opinions of college students meeting the demographic profile of those included here, within the context of the mortality concerns expressed earlier. The findings of this study should be applied to other populations with caution.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Demographic Information

In regard to demographic information, there was a high number of White participants ($n=203$), which made up 92.7% of the responses. Responses also included 5% from multiple races, .9% African American, .9% Asian, and .5% American Indian. In gender proportions, female responses outnumbered males' responses 63.8% to 36.2%. Distribution across classes remained fairly balanced, with 31.1% of participants being seniors, 24.2% juniors, 23.7% sophomores, and 21% freshman.

Perceptions of Athleticism

In responses to the perceptions of athleticism research inventory, participants ($n=208$) indicated perceptions, thoughts, and feelings concerning four major themes of athletic achievement: hard work, natural ability, physical ability, and intellect. Ninety-six percent ($n=200$) of participants agreed, or strongly agreed that athletes achieve in sports because of hard work. Participants also showed a high level of agreement that athletes achieve in sport because of natural ability, with 89.9% of participants ($n=187$) responding that they agree, or strongly agree to that statement. Sixty-three percent ($n=131$) of participants signified that they agree or strongly agree that athletes achieve in sports because they are physically better than others. Conversely, 49.7% of participants indicated that they disagree, or strongly disagree that athletes achieve in sports because they are mentally better than others (see Table 2).

Table 2
 Perceptions of athleticism ($n=208$)

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Hard work	.5%	1.4%	1.9%	50%	46.2%
<i>n</i>	1	3	4	104	96
Natural ability	.5%	3.8%	5.8%	79.8%	10.1%
<i>n</i>	1	8	12	166	21
Physically better	2.4%	22.6%	12%	55.3%	7.7%
<i>n</i>	5	47	25	115	16
Mentally better	10.6%	39.1%	11.6%	28%	10.6%
<i>n</i>	22	81	24	58	22

Stereotype Beliefs

With the goal of specifically addressing the stereotype beliefs regarding particular races within athletics, the participants ($n=195$) gave responses to 16 items (see Table 3).

Item 1. On natural ability, 45.6% of participants ($n=89$) showed agreement with the statement that “African Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes.” The remaining 54.4% responded as uncertain ($n=33$) or with disagreement ($n=73$).

Item 2. When responding to the statement that “Hispanic Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes,” nearly 59% of participants ($n=114$) showed disagreement, while 36.4% indicated an unsure or a neutral response to the statement. The remaining 5% responded in agreement ($n=10$).

Item 3. There was substantial disagreement or uncertainty when participants responded to the statement that “Asian Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes.” Sixty-eight percent ($n=132$) of participants showed disagreement, while 28.9% indicated an unsure or a neutral response to the statement. The remaining 3% responded with agreement ($n=6$).

Item 4. The majority of participants responded with disagreement to the statement that “White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to African Americans,” with 74% ($n=144$), and 24.5% of participants indicated an unsure or a neutral response to the statement. Only 1.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Item 5. The question stem “White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to Hispanic Americans” resulted in 43.8% of participants ($n=85$) indicating a

disagree, or strongly disagree response. Whereas, 35% of respondents indicated uncertainty ($n=68$), and 21% ($n=41$) agree or strongly agree.

Item 6. When responding to the statement “White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to Asian Americans,” 39% of participants ($n=77$) showed disagreement; compared to responses of uncertainty ($n=61$), or agreement ($n=47$).

Item 7. On dominance in sport, 52% of participants ($n=101$) showed agreement to the statement that “African Americans dominate most sports,” compared to responses of disagreement ($n=64$), or uncertainty ($n=29$).

Item 8. The majority of participants responded with disagreement regarding responses to the statement that “Hispanic Americans dominate most sports.” Seventy-four percent ($n=143$) of participants indicated that they disagreed, or strongly disagreed with this statement, while 22.3% of participants indicated an unsure response. Only 3.6% of responses were in agreement to the statement.

Item 9. The majority of participants responded with disagreement regarding responses to the statement that “Asian Americans dominate most sports.” Seventy-six percent ($n=147$) of participants indicated that they disagreed, or strongly disagreed with this statement, while 21.4% of participants indicated an unsure response. Only 2.1% of responses were in agreement to the statement.

Item 10. When presented with the statement that “White Americans dominate most sports,” 46.2% of participants ($n=90$) indicated that they disagreed with the statement. Whereas, 30.3% of participants ($n=59$) favored the statement, and 23.6% of responses were unsure.

Item 11. On intelligence, the majority of participants responded with disagreement to the statement that “African Americans athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.” Seventy-one percent (n=137) of participants showed disagreement, and 28.6% indicated an unsure or a neutral response to the statement. There were no responses that indicated agreement to the statement.

Item 12. Comparable to the previous statement, the majority of participants responded with disagreement to the statement that “Hispanic American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.” Seventy-two percent (n=139) of participants showed disagreement, and 28% indicated an unsure or a neutral response to the statement. There were no responses that indicated agreement to this statement as well.

Item 13. There were fewer certainties when it came to responses regarding the statement that “Asian American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.” Participants still highly reported disagreement, with 55% reflecting disagreement, 27.2% unsure, and 17.8% of responses indicated that they agreed with the statement.

Item 14. When presented with the statement that “White Americans athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to African American athletes,” the majority of participants reported disagreement, with 52.6% reflecting disagreement, 27.6% unsure, and 19.8% of responses indicated that they agreed with the statement.

Item 15. Regarding the statement that “White Americans athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to Hispanic American athletes,” participants still highly

reported disagreement, with 52.3% reflecting disagreement, 28.3% unsure, and 19.3% of responses indicated that they agreed with the statement.

Item 16. When presented with the statement that “White American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to Asian American athletes,” 63% of participants (n=122) showed disagreement, and 32% indicated an unsure or a neutral response to the statement. Only 5.1% of responses indicated agreement to this statement.

Table 3

Stereotype beliefs regarding race and athletics ($n=195$)

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Item 1	5.1%	32.3%	16.9%	37.9%	7.7%
<i>n</i>	10	63	33	74	15
Item 2	7.7%	50.8%	36.4%	4.6%	.5%
<i>n</i>	15	99	71	9	1
Item 3	10.3%	57.7%	28.9%	2.9%	.5%
<i>n</i>	20	112	56	5	1
Item 4	9.2%	64.6%	24.6%	1.5%	0%
<i>n</i>	18	126	48	3	0
Item 5	5.7%	38.1%	35.1%	18%	3.1%
<i>n</i>	11	74	68	35	6
Item 6	5.6%	33.8%	31.3%	24.6%	4.6%
<i>n</i>	11	66	61	48	9
Item 7	3.6%	29.4%	14.9%	41.2%	10.8%
<i>n</i>	7	57	29	80	21
Item 8	10.4%	63.7%	22.3%	3.1%	.5%
<i>n</i>	20	123	43	6	1
Item 9	19.8%	56.8%	21.4%	1.6%	.5%
<i>n</i>	38	109	41	3	1
Item 10	3.1%	43.1%	23.6%	28.2%	2.1%
<i>n</i>	6	84	46	55	4
Item 11	16.7%	54.7%	28.6%	0%	0%
<i>n</i>	32	105	55	0	0
Item 12	16.6%	55.4%	28%	0%	0%
<i>n</i>	32	107	54	0	0
Item 13	12.6%	42.4%	27.2%	15.2%	2.6%
<i>n</i>	24	81	52	29	5
Item 14	12%	40.6%	27.6%	17.2%	2.6%
<i>n</i>	23	78	53	33	5
Item 15	12%	40.3%	28.3%	16.2%	3.1%
<i>n</i>	23	77	54	31	6
Item 16	12.9%	50%	32%	4.6%	.5%
<i>n</i>	25	97	62	9	1

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of college students on race and stereotypes in athletics. The research question sought to address the extent in which racial stereotypes regarding athletic ability exist among college students from the central part of the United States. Similar to other studies (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Hodge et al., 2008), these research findings indicate that the influence of race-based stereotypes of athletes still persist. Substantially large proportions of students provided agreement with various statements indicating race-based differences in both athletic and intellectual ability. Furthermore, presented question stems repeatedly resulted in a substantial number of unsure responses. An unsure response to statements such as “African Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes,” or “Asian American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes” is of concern in that such responses indicate a potential acceptance of beliefs regarding racial superiority. In addition, the variation in responses across items pertaining to different race comparisons tends to support common stereotypes related to both athletics and intelligence.

The first research component of the study addressed perceptions of athleticism. Through this component, college students indicated factors that contribute to athletic performance. Few participants attributed only one factor to the success of an athlete. Many of the participants attributed a combination of factors that contribute to athleticism. ‘Hard work’ was the highest attributing factor when it came to perceived success in athletics. Ninety-six percent of participants shared this viewpoint. In a close second,

participants attributed perceived success of athletes to natural ability. Nearly 90% of responses indicated this perception. The idea of an elite or gifted athlete encompasses physiological advantages or natural physical ability. It is probable to note that by attributing success of an athlete to *natural ability*, participants are attaching genetics, evolution, and muscle structure to athleticism; however, this response does not determine if these responses are associated with specific racial tendencies.

The second research component addressed stereotype beliefs regarding athletes. It was clear that race did play a part in the perceptions of those surveyed. For example, responses to the statement that “White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to African American athletes,” reflected that 74% of responses disagreed. At the same time, when asked if “African American athletes are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes,” only 37% disagreed. The participants surveyed were also disposed to express higher rates of disagreement with the assertion that Hispanic, Asian, and White American athletes dominate sports when compared to the same question regarding African American Athletes. Participants had a greater tendency to indicate that African-Americans dominated most sports.

On intelligence of athletes, a large proportion of the respondents demonstrated a tendency toward race-based stereotypes. As evidence of this fact, consider items 11, 12, and 13. The first two items asked if African Americans (item 11) and Hispanic Americans (Item 12) were “naturally more intelligent than White American athletes.” For both items, there were no responses indicating agreement or strong agreement. In contrast, item 13 asked if “Asian American athletes were naturally more intelligent than White American athletes,” resulting in 18% of the sample either agreeing or strongly

agreeing. When these questions were flipped, approximately 20% agreed at some level that White athletes were naturally more intelligent than Blacks and Hispanics, but only 5% believed White athletes were naturally more intelligent than Asian athletes. While the theory that race-based stereotypes toward athletics are directly associated with assumptions about intelligence cannot be directly examined from this data, the presence of both stereotypes in sport is apparent.

Overall, these findings support the idea that race-based stereotypes continue to influence people's perceptions of athletes, particularly in regard to the athletic superiority of Black athletes and the intellectual superiority of White and Asian athletes. It is evident that the examined stereotypes are prevalent among this particular sample of college students. These findings are particularly concerning when considering that past research has suggested that such stereotypes can have profound effects on athletic performance, academics, and overall well-being.

This study's results do not differ from previous research. Harrison and Lawrence (2004) recognized that stereotypes of racial myths, and assumed racial differences, have immense influences on people's opinions, expectations, and perceptions. In their findings, Harrison and Lawrence (2004) cited that "Both White Americans and African Americans are discouraged from challenging fundamental assumptions about racial difference, thus both tend to accept the idea of Black athletic superiority" (p. 47).

Research on this subject has consistently found race to be a contributing factor to the perception of athleticism. In a study by Hodge et al. (2008), it was apparent that high school students' beliefs and impressions were highly affected by stereotypes. Black males tended to hold strong beliefs on perceived athletic superiority and sports dominance, but

were unsure on questions of intelligence. Hodge et al. (2008) asserted that “whenever teachers, coaches, and other school professionals accept and articulate, knowingly or unknowingly, prevailing theories of athletic superiority and intellectual inferiority of Black and Hispanic youth, they do psychological harm to these impressionable youth” (p. 112).

In this day and age, it is astonishing that stereotypic beliefs of African-American superiority, or dominance in sports, are still present. Although this view is found to be widely prevalent, stereotypes do not only affect, or pertain to, African-American athletes. Racial stereotypes adversely affect athletes from many different backgrounds. There are several remaining factors that have contributed to race-based stereotypes (e.g. racism, cultural differences, media, and lack of knowledge). Harrison and Lawrence (2004) documented that,

Research consistently infers that media still portray African Americans inaccurately and stereotypically...As participants have demonstrated, culturally-based ideas about skin color influence perceptions in the debate of athleticism. Individuals gain these ideas not only from their cultural group but also from their exposure to the media. (p. 47)

There remains a growing concern for implications of race-based stereotypes of athletes in a number of areas such as: imposing psychological barriers, affecting athletic performance, creating self-doubt, and lowering expectations in academic contexts.

Limitations

The demographics of this study reflected a high population of White respondents and the study had significantly more women than men. Ethnic minorities were also

minimized in the participant sample. Although ethnic groups were underrepresented, the current study does reflect ethnic representations of many small, private Midwestern colleges. While the research suggests that all races hold such stereotypes, the study should not be generalized beyond the Midwestern, White, college-aged student.

The survey instruments only examine the general nature of beliefs and do not explore the context of such beliefs, why they exist, or what factors might influence such beliefs.

Considering the nature of the survey, it seems likely that any misrepresentation or deception would be in a manner that minimizes true stereotypes, so, while this is a limitation, the existence of the problem is likely a reality that is worse than it appears.

Despite these limitations, there is still valuable information to be gathered from the study's findings as it relates to athletics.

Recommendations for Practice

Despite the fact that race-based stereotypes, regarding athletics, remains firmly rooted in the minds of many Americans, there are things that can be done to tackle this issue. Sports professionals, educators, and athletic administrators have the responsibility to stop the perpetuation of race-based stereotypic beliefs. This can be done by creating a culture that not only celebrates athletic success, despite one's race, but equally promotes academic success. Harrison and Lawrence (2004) reported that due to race based stereotypes White students are often turned away from certain sports and instead encouraged to spend their energy on academic pursuits. In contrast, ethnic minority students are often pushed toward athletic pursuits and given little encouragement towards academics. To counter such beliefs, the ultimate challenge is to lead today's youth in a different direction to avoid stereotypic beliefs about one's self and others. Educators and

coaches have the opportunity to help ethnic minority students increase their value in academic achievement by being more culturally relevant, and openly engaging in dialog that refutes such stereotypes. Working to highlight the success of intelligent African American, or ethnic minority, athletes is another way to discredit race-based stereotypic beliefs. Highlighting the achievements of these athletes can help to improve the aspirations of young minority students.

Because of the way the American sport culture is shaped by television and ads, media is a mechanism that can drastically change the way people view athletes of color. Organizations must continually reevaluate how their advertisements and promotions may adversely affect racial stereotypic beliefs. Collegiate and professional organizations must actively work to deny our cultures push to support such stereotypes.

Recommendations for Research

More research is needed to accurately depict the way feelings, attitudes, and experiences affect this issue. Additional research on the motives behind these stereotypes would also be beneficial on the subject. Do factors such as socioeconomic status, popularity, gender, or age affect these stereotypes? In regard to age, does society's improvement lessen the impact of these stereotypes? Valuable insight could be gained by researching if stereotypes dissipate as students are exposed to college and adulthood.

Sport specific research is also lacking on the subject. Are athletes not given opportunities in certain areas because of a sport specific stereotype, or are they pushed in a certain direction because of these stereotypes. This information could differentiate between the types of sports athletes participate in as a result of such stereotypes. Specific research regarding the perception of coaches and sport professionals would also be

valuable. Does race have an influence on recruiting strategies and program development? If so, this may be a source into the perpetuation of many of these racial stereotypes. Research could also be used to investigate the value of cultural traditions, and not confusing those traditions with stereotypes. How can our society seek to honor cultural traditions without forcing people into stereotypical roles?

Future research could also investigate if this issue is only limited to athletics, or is it prevalent in other realms of our society? Harrison and Lawrence (2004) suggested an investigation on the *genetic theories* regarding the overrepresentation of Whites in the corporate world paralleling the overrepresentation of African Americans in athletics. Do race-based stereotypes affect perceived success in work environments? To move the debate further, are the aforementioned race-based stereotypes only limited to the United States, or is this an international concern?

Conclusion

In studying the perceptions of college students on race and stereotypes in athletics, it is clear the debate regarding African-American athlete's superiority and dominance in sports is far from over. Therefore, the consequences of such a debate will remain. As long as society continues to portray athletes in this manner, the color on one's skin will remain a determining factor in assessing talent, intelligence, and success.

In the short term, race-based stereotypes of athletes will result in poor performance associated with anxiety and self-doubt. Consequently, athletic competition and academics will continue to be negatively impacted. In the long term, such stereotypes have the potential to bring about wide-spread dissatisfaction with athletics, and could lead to dropout of sport and education. All attempts must be made to combat

such stereotypic beliefs. Moreover, it is the responsibility of coaches, educators, and athletic administrators to positively impact these perceptions.

APPENDIX

Dear C of O Students,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study!

Before participating it is important that you read the following statements:

- Your participation in this study is totally voluntary.
- If there are questions you don't want to answer, feel free to leave them blank.
- You may stop participation at any time by simply exiting out of your web browser.
- Your responses are considered confidential and your responses will remain anonymous.
- Please be completely honest with your responses.

If you have questions regarding the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Terry Long at TLONG@nwmissouri.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Dr. Rebecca Hendrix at HENDRIX@nwmissouri.edu.

By clicking below, you are indicating that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in this study.

Thank you.
Clint Woods

C of O Student Survey

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What grade are you in?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

3. Are you White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander, or some other race?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
- From multiple races

C of O Student Survey

1. Athletes achieve at sports because of hard work

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

2. Athletes achieve at sports because of natural ability

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

3. Athletes achieve at sports because they are physically better than others

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

4. Athletes achieve at sports because they are mentally better than others

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

C of O Student Survey

1. African Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

2. Hispanic Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

3. Asian Americans are naturally better athletes compared to White American athletes

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

4. White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to African Americans.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

5. White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to Hispanic Americans.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

6. White Americans are naturally better athletes compared to Asian Americans.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

7. African Americans dominate most sports.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

8. Hispanic Americans dominate most sports.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

9. Asian Americans dominate most sports.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

10. White Americans dominate most sports.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

11. African Americans athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

C of O Student Survey

12. Hispanic Americans athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

13. Asian American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to White American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

14. White American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to African American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

15. White American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to Hispanic American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

16. White American athletes are naturally more intelligent compared to Asian American athletes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

C of O Student Survey

The purpose of this study is to investigate college student's perceptions of race and stereotypes in athletics. This study is by no means meant to polarize White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian athletes; but to investigate if stereotypic beliefs regarding athletes exist. All responses are considered confidential and your identity is protected from disclosure. Thank you for your participation in this study.

If you have any additional comments, feel free to leave them here...

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