

Sport Culture:  
Investigating Perceptions of Drinking and Academic Achievement  
of the Football Team at St. Olaf College

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*Abstract*

This study was conducted with an emphasis on ethnographic research processes, consisting of participant-observation, focus groups and personal interviews with athletes and non-athletes at St. Olaf College. The focus was to analyze the many generalizations concerning football players on campus, mainly covering drinking and academic-related stereotypes involving this specific group of student-athletes. This study was undertaken and completed in the spring of 2008. After analyzing data collected, stereotypes regarding football players on campus were found to be largely inaccurate, but as with many stereotypes, partly truthful. There were many contradictions evident throughout the data, showing that football players are a large, diverse group of individuals who are difficult to label.

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### Key Points

- St. Olaf is located in rural, southern Minnesota and is a liberal arts school with a diverse student population.
- Research has shown that athletes in college are at a higher risk for binge drinking, while non-athletes have been found to drink more often.
- Many claim that the social environment surrounding athletes and sport culture in general may be responsible for the increased drinking by athletes.
- Obviously, there are athletes that do not drink, and in fact, hockey, baseball and swim teams have been found to drink more than football

players on college campuses.

- Scholars note that the size of an institution is independent from the stereotypes associated with the athletes at that school.
- It is important to understand symbolic interactionism and Social Impact Theory when discussing how to gather data concerning athletes and stereotypes.
- Contradictions were evident within interviews which showed that respondents were uncomfortable expressing true feelings to the interviewers. Also, contradictions between interviews displayed the divide between athletes and non-athletes.
- Psychological bases are given for attributing stereotypical characteristics to particular groups.
- Stereotyping can be viewed in many lights at St. Olaf, including within the context of music students and faculty, being that St. Olaf is a prestigious school, renowned for its music programs.

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The important frameworks within the study focused on two main ideas. First, it was paramount to understand the sampled subjects' lifestyles; whether they were athletes, involved in the choir, were band members or basic "non-group affiliated" students. Thus, the preliminary collection of data was based off of sports-affiliation or the student's status within the St. Olaf population. Second, it was necessary to find students' general perspectives regarding football players and athletes on campus to determine if and why divisive stereotypes exist at St. Olaf. The information used from interviews was analyzed for trends and potential insights to the main project questions.

St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, is a small-town, liberal arts college tucked away in a rural part of southern Minnesota. Students of many different backgrounds bring much diversity, differing abilities, and considerable academic prestige to the school. Athletes, and the football team in particular, are simply another piece of this widely diverse institution.

Much like the college, the football team is an extremely varied group of young men. The types of student-athletes on the football team range from black, white, Native Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders; who are choir and band members, artists, and leaders on campus. Very basically, the diversity on the team matches that of the school. There are no athletic scholarships available for student-athletes at St. Olaf, as it is a Division III institution. The group can be, and is, viewed by many parties from different angles, including academic achievement, athletic ability, and social interactions.

### *Athletes and Drinking*

Alcohol consumption on college campuses has been closely examined over the last few decades, as institutions of higher learning are widely known to be venues of experimentation and excess. Some studies have found that the students themselves, in the midst of this "over-consumption," have trouble accurately describing, and in fact overestimate, how often their peers actually drink (Perkins et al. 1999 and Broadwater 2006). Pedersen et al. attribute this to what is known as Social Impact Theory, noting that students make judgments when "surrounded by members of one's salient reference group" (2008). It follows then that alcohol consumption among specific groups within the institution could possibly be misrepresented as well. Having said this, it has been documented that up to 88% of American intercollegiate athletes use alcohol, and it is by far the most commonly used drug among the athletic population (O'Brien and Lyons 2000).

Furthermore, it has been documented that student-athletes are more likely to engage in binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks in a row for men), while their non-athlete counterparts are more likely to drink during the week (Leichliter

1998). To put it another way, athletes have been found to drink more per sitting, while non-athletes were seen to drink more often. Moreover, the level of alcohol problems experienced by male athletes is not significantly different from those experienced by collegiate non-athletes (Storch et al. 2005).

One study has claimed that the excess amount of binge-drinking exhibited in male college athletes may be due to the fact that they are more likely to participate in the type of social environment conducive to this type of behavior than their non-athlete peers, and as such, reported a higher level of drinking for “social reasons” (Wilson 2004). This speaks to the idea that male athletes are more likely to have large groups of male friends – those that are on the team – and thereby participate in large social gatherings with these individuals.

Related to this, Brenner found that male athletes in team sports reported a higher rate of binge drinking than athletes who compete in individual sports (2007). For example, students on the basketball and football teams would be expected to binge drink more than golfers or students who play tennis. Again, it seems as though the social atmosphere that males in team sports are engaged in is dissimilar to that of the male individual-sport competitors.

Wilson (2004) notes that sports culture, in general, may contribute to an athlete’s drinking habits. One explanation is that athletes who are interested in sports are inundated with constant associations between alcohol and sports from a young age, which causes them to identify athletic participation with alcohol consumption. Also, and related to the research previously cited by Wilson (2004), athletes are often recognized and afforded elevated status on college campuses, which may allow them access to a greater number of social functions (Martens et al. 2006). Finally, alcohol has been claimed to now be viewed by American athletes as the only acceptable means of celebration and consolation (Madden and Grube 1994).

A phenomenon known as the Pygmalion Effect, or also the Rosenthal Effect, may provide insight as well. This effect is identified as being a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that our beliefs and expectations can create reality and influence ours and others’ behaviors. It has been observed that individuals will internalize the expectations of their peers or surroundings and act accordingly (Rosenthal and Snodgrass 1982; Gray 2006). If athletes involved in sports, particularly football, are constantly inundated with expectations to behave in a certain way (drink, underachieve academically), it would be possible, according to this effect, that they would display the fitting behaviors. Some may use this idea to explain characteristics regarding football players; yet, as is noted later, our data did not support these behaviors.

Lastly, there have been studies to show that there are, indeed, athletes who choose not to use alcohol. The most prevalent reasons cited for this choice were regarding health- and performance-related concerns (Nelson and Wechsler

2001). Indeed, it has been hypothesized that alcohol related problems might be more prevalent in the athletic population due to their risk taking mentality and the age profile of athletes (O'Brien and Lyons 2000). Obviously, St. Olaf College has athletes that drink, as well as those that make the decision to abstain from alcohol, on its football roster, and on the other twenty-four varsity athletic teams at the school. Interestingly, one study recently found that male hockey players were the most likely athletic team on a college campus to engage in binge drinking, with 75.4% of hockey players reporting this behavior in the last year, compared to 64.6% of baseball players and 58.4% of football players (Ford 2007).

### *Athletes and Academics*

As per the definition, a stereotype or generalization can, or is likely to be, largely unfounded and seeks to put a simple label on sometimes large groups or complex ideas. Many times perception and emotional feeling towards a group of people can cause the creation of stereotypes partly because of a lack of accurate knowledge. Predetermined descriptions of football players, or any group, can evolve into imprecise judgments about the party without considering the widely diverse collection of students within the group. While many examples can be cited to diminish the belief that football players, for example, are large, heavy-drinking, unintelligent individuals; these hegemonic stereotypes still dominate the discourse on many college campuses. Chris Baucom and Christopher D. Lantz of Truman State University approached this idea from another angle by focusing on the professors' perceptions of student-athletes; with regard to academic performance, admissions and tutoring policies. The study found a prevalence of prejudicial attitudes existing among the faculty that served to propagate negative stereotypes associated with athletes inside the college.

However, the authors make note that NCAA Division I athletics are revenue-based and student-athletes may not have great academic achievement. "As a result, many persons have formed negative attitudes toward all college student-athletes" (2001). Examples are given to describe a group, and subsequently taken into consideration by a broader group of people. There are individuals who have a more complete understanding of a particular group than most others, and there are the those who know very little and use the information available as reference to the entire group in question, despite the fact that most people know that large groups, especially football teams, are a collection of people with many different backgrounds and beliefs, they are still able to come to a broad-sweeping label.

Furthermore, within the findings there is much discussion concerning the size of the athletic program at the institution. Most collegiate athletic programs range in descending size from Division IA, to IAA, to II and finally Division III. Although

Division III schools are the smallest, “information suggests that it may not be program size or divisional level that precipitates negative attitudes toward student-athletes, but that being a student-athlete alone is sufficient to produce such prejudicial attitudes” (Baucom and Lantz 2001). These beliefs could help explain the typical assumptions people have about the football team at St. Olaf College. Despite the academic rigor and social atmosphere shared by all St. Olaf students, athletes, and particularly those on the football team, faces stereotyping on a daily basis.

### *Theoretical Framework*

As has been noted, generalized information can cause certain characteristics of a group to be skewed in various ways. After interviewing a wide variety of subjects for this study, it was noticed that many seemed timid or unwilling to give their true feelings towards the questions posed. Being questioned by athletes *about* athletes may cause the individual or focus group to restrain true responses simply because most would not want to offend someone in a “front stage” manner.

The belief that this occurred within our data collection lends credence to the theoretical idea known as “back stage” presentation, a term originally used by Erving Goffman, a Canadian sociologist. Goffman contributed much to symbolic interactionism, especially in terms of his concept of “dramaturgy,” which helps shed some light on the findings of this study. The term refers to human actions that depend solely on the time, place and audience to which one is presenting his beliefs (Ritzer 2004). Goffman strongly believed that the individual realizes who he is within a setting and understands how certain beliefs on particular topics can be perceived by another individual. The feeling of knowing who you are creates a dramatic effect on the situation taking place at that moment in time. When comparing an “actor” and interview subject, the students did not have complete awareness of what was going to happen during the interview. Within our focus groups, subjects arrived and knew nothing about the fellow participants, and possibly little about the interviewers. The goal of this presentation of self is acceptance from the audience through manipulation. If the actor succeeds, the audience will view the actor as he or she wants to be viewed. The subjects within the process manipulated themselves and their environment based off of where they were seated, how they acted, and their responses to our questions.

With this theoretical idea in mind and considering the information obtained from the subjects, it was sometimes impossible to determine the accuracy or truthfulness of the interviewees’ responses. Attempting to fit the typical image of an athlete among the student body at St. Olaf may have caused the subject to answer with incomplete honesty. Yet, why did it appear that multiple subjects did not tell the truth?

As mentioned, St. Olaf is a rather small school which gives individuals the opportunity to know most faces on campus. The upside of being on a small campus is it allows the students an easy means of identifying people within the student body. Athletes are, for many reasons, one of the easier groups to spot among students. Backstage/front stage theory states that beliefs are rehearsed one way and can then be presented in that same manner face-to-face, but only within certain topic parameters. In particular, when discussing the football team the actual beliefs of the respondent can become hidden when confronted with a person who is on the football team or closely identifies with this group. Stories change, beliefs are altered and people adjust their attitudes as a result of the situation in which they find themselves.

Additionally, researchers Pedersen and Labrie state within their investigation that:

Social Impact Theory (SIT) suggests that an individual's feelings, attitudes, and behavior can be influenced by the presence of others. Closeness to the group (in proximity), how important the group is to oneself (connectedness), and size of the group all combine to influence individuals" (2008:553).

The preceding statements are an example of how being exposed to a small portion of a group can affect one's overall perspective. The authors also speak to the idea that people will answer particular questions in a certain manner. Pederson's research helps give insight on how certain questions may affect the subject's response. "The potential for assessment location to also influence responses is an issue as well. Although students were assured confidentiality, participants may have been influenced by the belief that their responses were less anonymous in the group setting" (2008:562). Within our focus groups there were football players present among other students who were sports affiliated and also those of non-athlete status. The assured confidentiality seemed to give little comfort to interviewees, as the exposure to the football players and other athletes is strongly believed to have affected subjects' responses to some of the questioning. Keeping these findings in mind, as well as taking into account the "dramaturgy" framework created by Goffman and the Social Impact Theory suggested by Pedersen, allowed the inference that the place, setting and especially the audience may have influenced subjects.

Comparatively analyzing other research findings with our own, revealed very similar trends in the data. Reading individuals' body language during focus groups before responses were given to some of the questions showed participants catching themselves before answering, or even laughing in a nervous manner prior to a response. For example, one question asked, "If you

were asked to put students into different categories among the student body – such as the studious group, partiers, quiet, academic high-achievers, etc. – what category would you put football players in? How come?” This question caused some interesting responses and actions. During one interview, the question was posed to a female. The subject took a rather long time contemplating a response and initially laughed before mumbling, “stacked-food beer lovers.” The subject then quickly responded with her supposed real answer, which was “Everyone is smart, no classification I would say. They seem to be more study hall oriented.” This example shows a radical change in the use of vocabulary and general belief.

Having noted this, Goffman’s theory about audience influence within the framework of “dramaturgy” seems to gain more evidence for its existence in the data collection process. Understanding this, subjects’ actions made their recorded responses seem “fake,” and said in more of a prepared, “front stage” manner. What they actually thought/perceived might not have been said. Again, the potential generalizations rehearsed among our subjects may not have been presented in the same manner as they would have been in a “back stage” environment. The audience was a factor because the topic put subjects in direct contact with football players.

*Contradiction: “I said what? They said that?!”*

Over the course of collecting data for this study, it became clear that there was a certain degree of contradiction among the students’ interviews, not only between subjects, but also within individual interviews as well. It became more and more obvious that participants were struggling with the idea of what message they wanted to convey.

Each respondent was asked the question, “What are some things that athletes provide the school that non-athletes do not, and vice versa?” Almost every person responded, in some fashion, that athletes provide the school with some sort of social component. Responses such as, “athletes give the school a unified college atmosphere,” “I think they give school pride,” and “athletes provide social events (games),” were common among interviewees. Similarly, almost across the board, students said that non-athletes provided the school a “reputation,” “diversity,” and even “higher academic standards.” It was clear from this question, that in the students’ minds, athletes were not to be associated with the academics of the institution.

Furthermore, all of the subjects who were interviewed were asked, “Do you believe that the academic ranking at St. Olaf would drop if more athletes were accepted?” This was done as a way of getting at this point in another, less direct manner. Though nearly all of the students mentioned not five minutes prior that athletes were “social” and, in their minds, separate from the academic side of the school, the responses were a resounding, “no.” How can that be?

It was obvious that the students were uncomfortable when providing responses to this question in particular. Some would smile as they thought of an answer that they believed would “please” the interviewer. Others would take an inordinately lengthy amount of time while they wrestled with the cognitive dissonance they were experiencing. A heightened amount of shifting in chairs was also observed. It appeared that the students felt more comfortable providing true answers to the first question because they were able to respond in a manner that attributed positive characteristics to athletes, such as the beneficial things that they provided the college. When confronted with the second question, it was obvious that they were trying to develop a response in the same way. When they could not, they simply went against their previous statement and replied “athletes are smart.” It seemed as though there was some sort of an ethnographic Hawthorne Effect, meaning that the respondents knew the reason they were being interviewed, and responded according to what they believed were the “correct” responses.

Here, we bring Goffman back into the fray. What the students may have said under normal circumstances, or in a “back stage” environment – being with their friends, and away from the public or “in-group” individuals (football players) – would most likely have been the opposite of what they stated in their interviews, or in a “front stage” context. Being that St. Olaf College is such a small institution, and in some cases, smaller than public high schools, it is easy to identify and recognize people, as has been mentioned. Therefore, though it was not explicitly stated, the students were most likely aware that the researchers were connected with and/or were current members of the football team at St. Olaf. Cognizant of this, the students were wary to provide true feelings regarding the football team/athletes at the school, especially when associated with negative ideas.

Interestingly, it appeared as though the respondents felt more comfortable discussing athletes who were not immediately present. Several people made claims that it was actually the swim team who was responsible for the heaviest drinking on campus. Even more stunning, this was actually seen in other research as well (Martens et al. 2006). This is a clear example of the visibility of the football team, at St. Olaf and other schools, being responsible for many others exaggerating the drinking habits of the team as a whole. Obviously, it would be much more difficult to see five drunken swimmers together on campus from the team of twenty-five, than it would be to see five intoxicated football players from the team of one-hundred and twenty-five.

Additionally, examples of contradictions in this study were observed between interviews. This could be seen as a product of the groups with which the interviewees identified themselves. Students were confronted with the question, “What are your general thoughts on the football team as a whole?” It appeared as though the responses to this question were grouped into two different categories. There were athletes that were interviewed who were more or less in support of the football team, even if they had stated that they did not interact with

any of them on a consistent basis. Several replies from athletes were along the lines of “tight-knit group,” “good influence on the school as a whole,” and “they demonstrate education [academic skill] and athleticism well.” It seemed as though there was some sort of connection between athletes at St. Olaf that transcended any particular sport. Going further, students were posed the question, “Do you believe that student-athletes receive special accommodations academically if they miss a test, forget to do an assignment, etc.? How come?” Perhaps seeking to acquire an equal position academically with the non-athletes, or attempting to be looked upon as average students, the athletes believed that they did not receive special accommodations. However, first they must *believe* that they are unequal, which then lends support to the idea that this is the perception on campus . In other words, it seemed as though the athletes generally felt both that other students think they receive special treatment by faculty when this is not the case, and that athletes felt looked down upon by other students both because of this perceived special treatment and because they are thought of as being less intelligent or less serious students. It appeared as if the athletes were actively combating this. One student remarked:

“I think that baseball is the only sport where you could say that happens. But other than that, I would say that it is the opposite here. I remember during Christmas Fest, Professor [ ] told all the choir and band kids to “not worry about missing class, because I know how important this time is for you.” When I needed to miss class for an away game, he told me to “get my priorities straight.”

Baseball was mentioned because over the past few years, it has been necessary to take their finals on the road and in hotels as a result of having NCAA playoff games during finals week. Another student noted:

I would consider it an advantage to being an athlete, but I have noticed that the music kids receive more accommodations than athletes. There was an orchestra member that received an exam extension, and that same week I had a game and a doctor’s appointment for my sprained ankle. I had to miss class for both and didn’t get anything.

The above general sentiments, expressed by numerous athletes, seemed to make it apparent that athletes felt that there was an unfair stereotype associated with them on campus.

On the other hand, there were those respondents who were interviewed who told of a completely different story. When speaking with students who were not associated with athletics at the college, comments to the “general thoughts on the football team” question above included statements such as, “cocky people,” “some are douchebags,” and “loud drunks,” to cite a few. The same students noted that their closest friends on campus were not athletes and they openly claimed that they did not regularly interact with players from the team.

Regarding the question as to whether student-athletes receive special accommodations academically, the non-athletes related that this was very true, and provided examples. One student replied:

Yes, I think they do. I remember one time when I was going to have surgery before a test and asked if I could move it [the test] back. The [professor] wouldn't let me, but he let the football players in class move it because they had an away game at Concordia.

Many non-athletes at the school reported this same feeling, that athletes receive special consideration from faculty, which is in stark opposition to what the athletes believed.

From these questions, it gives a real-world glimpse into the ideas that Baucom and Lantz have stated regarding stereotyping the athlete, as well as Social Impact Theory and even a little psychology. Baucom and Lantz stated “being a student-athlete alone is sufficient to produce [such] prejudicial attitudes” (2001:267). Negative academic stereotypes concerning athletes in American society are so prevalent, and from all accounts pervasive, that some of the non-athletes who were interviewed had no anecdotal evidence, personal or otherwise, to support claims of athletes garnering special academic consideration, yet they claimed it all the same. Perhaps this discourse stems from anger or jealousy as a result of athletes in the US, worthy or not, receiving scholarships, being famous, wealthy, etc. Whatever the reason, it is apparent that St. Olaf is not immune to the ubiquitous dumb/pampered athlete stereotype.

Social Impact Theory provides some insight as well. Many are familiar with the old cliché, “one bad apple spoils the bunch,” and it is impossible to avoid here. When students did have evidence to support their claims, it was never more than one instance where they saw the stereotype play out. SIT claims that it is only necessary for a portion of the group interacting with an individual to have a strong influence on that person's perspective. Football players who were observed for the study made note of this. One in particular noted that, “Coach tells us all the time that it only takes one kid to ruin the whole team's reputation

on campus.” This occurs because it is simply easier for people to think in terms of groups and categories, and as such, these things are innately human. We would be simply overloaded with information without them.

Also, psychologists tell us with the Model of Attributions that snap judgments are automatic and require no thought. Once a person acquires a label for a set of people, it is just easier to continue thinking in this way, rather than amend a possibly incorrect judgment which takes higher cognitive processing. In this way, “prior information effect” shows how people use information that they already have (a stereotype) to interpret new things that they may experience. For example, if a person already believes that football players are immoral, lazy, unintelligent, etc., then when they come into contact with any more football players, regardless of the situation or the individual, they will attribute these characteristics to the new person. Moreover, the theory known as person bias states that people inherently place too much weight with personality when giving attributions to people. To illustrate this, imagine that someone sees a person on campus whom he or she knows to be a football player, and this person is making a scene in the cafeteria. Psychological experiments have shown that humans will attribute this behavior almost exclusively to that person’s personality (i.e. football players are loud, obnoxious, they have no common sense, etc.), rather than to the situation (i.e. he is having a great day, he just got engaged, etc.). Person bias is difficult to avoid without considerable effort (Gray 2006).

Going further, we learn from psychological studies that people want to avoid dissonant information. As has been mentioned, some of the respondents had never come into contact or had a meaningful interaction with a football player. When a person encounters an individual that bucks a particular stereotype, they will unconsciously not attend to this information and let it slip away without encoding the data. Again, humans only focus on information that supports their existing views (Gray 2006).

Finally, contradictions are a part of normal human interactions. However, only when they are unpacked and examined, can one truly come to appreciate the complex reasons behind these differing opinions and perspectives. Here, we have seen how the two groups of athletes and non-athletes at St. Olaf College perceive certain aspects of one another and of college life.

### *Going Further: Stereotypes*

In addition to the positive and negative stereotypes and perceptions that accompany being an athlete on the campus of St. Olaf College, members of the music community at the school also take on similar labels. Being that St. Olaf is a prestigious institution, those that are involved in music; such as the various choirs, instrument ensembles, or orchestras; are looked at as the representatives

of the college as a whole. Indeed, it is nationally recognized and probably the most visible public aspect of the school. In order to extend the point made previously that St. Olaf is a diverse school, it is important to examine this idea from this differing perspective.

Although not explicitly asked about in our data collection, the topic students involved in music came up frequently, especially regarding which, if any, students receive special academic considerations or exceptions and admissions policies. Here, it should be noted that no one who was interviewed was involved in music at The College. However, this does not make conclusions drawn about this group any less valuable. In fact, it most likely enhances the ability to understand how this group is viewed on campus.

Throughout the interviews, many students noted that it was the “music majors” or “Christmas Fest” participants were the most likely to receive special accommodations concerning academic matters (see page 15). This is interesting to see as no research that was reviewed for this project noted this group of students and their interactions with faculty. It was observed, however, that athletes were the ones many perceived to garner particular favor in this area.

Once again, this brings up the question of why a group of students is viewed in such a stereotypical manner. As often is the case, there is a grain of truth inherent in stereotyping. The students that were interviewed did have evidence to back up their claims, yet many others do not. This points back to the idea that the ideas of a few, vocal and visible individuals can influence the construction of stereotypes of a larger group.

Regarding the faculty at St. Olaf, it appears as if they, too, are a stereotyped bunch from our data. Students seemed to conclude that they were more tolerant and/or forgiving of one group of students rather than others when it came to classroom matters. Baucom and Lantz have a not so subtle view on this issue.

The finding that some faculty at a school with such high academic standards hold prejudices toward student-athletes is disconcerting. These prejudices could simply reflect ignorance concerning the university's athletic program and its student-athlete participants. More troublesome is the possibility that these prejudices are the result of stereotypes that have become ingrained in the academic community. If this is the case, then even the most academically gifted athletes will be faced with being considered a “dumbjock” when compared to their non-athlete peers (2001:273).

To the point, the above quote nicely summarizes some points brought up earlier.

There are stereotypes that are ingrained about football players, on St. Olaf's campus and others. However, just like the students, there exists considerable variation in the minds of the faculty at St. Olaf concerning when and who, if anyone, will be allowed to deviate from class expectations or engagements. Similar to all large, diverse groups, on campus or otherwise, it is extremely difficult to classify the group as being one way or another.

### *Conclusion and Further Research Opportunities*

In this study, many people contributed valuable information. In the wide variety of data collected, at times there was some consistency, while at other times there was stark contradiction. The trends that were evident within the data helped facilitate analysis. The most enlightening aspect of our research project was the actual interview process that was required for the collection of information. The opportunity to sit down with another person and converse about generalizations targeted at athletes allowed students' perceptions to be heard and explored.

There are different factors that become present when one is asked questions directly by another person. Emotions, audience and setting all become factors when responding to a question. Despite possibly being asked the exact same questions in a different manner such as via email format, the person is then put in a comfortable setting primarily because there are many fewer influential factors present. As an example, during the interview process some students were hesitant to answer particular questions pertaining to athletes, especially football players, because of the situation they were put in during focus groups.

Social interaction among students during research was interesting as well, especially during the interview commencement. The confidentiality policy was read and all the informative aspects of the interview were explained carefully to the subjects. Interaction, behavior and perception were all affected by putting subjects in a situation they are not used to or for which they were not prepared. Focus groups are a great way to get subjects to interact with one another in a give and take sort of fashion that fosters new ideas that may not have been brought up in a one-on-one interview. Timorous and cautious responses were observed because of the subjects' surroundings and created unlikely responses to some of the questions presented. It seemed convincing that the audience and setting were catalysts for this behavior.

Culturally, the information obtained appeared consistent among all the students that took part in the research project with that of previous research. Areas such as student life, academics, sports and more individual-based information seemed to be the same among most students, in both athletes and non-athletes alike. Pertaining to partying and relaxation on the weekends, the majority of the subjects relayed the same information, that parties and relaxation activities are

typical of college students. The typical perception most people have towards college students in general, whether they are an athlete or not, is a group of young adults who spend their time socializing and studying together for four years.

Concerning the athletes, and particularly the football players within colleges, the spin of information is skewed slightly, excluding the academic aspect of college. The athletes are generalized only into a category of “partiers” and possibly somewhat of an entertainment commodity or a “necessary” part of the college culture. Indeed, what would college be without college football? Despite every student having to meet certain requirements to attend St. Olaf, these stereotypes persist year after year. During the interview process, all students had some fascinating responses to the questions pertaining particularly to the athletes. Students gave their generalized assumptions about student-athletes and why they could possibly harm the school’s standing or reputation. Countless adjectives were given describing the football team such as drinkers, loud, cocky, unintelligent, etc., and numerous subjects on the football team represent none of these claims.

Furthermore, although there exists research that identifies groups other than the football team as being the majority of alcohol consumers on college campuses, there are still generalized beliefs that football players drink the most on campus at St. Olaf College. Students’ responses and behavior were both affected by their audience and setting when interviewed and influenced their responses to many of the questions.

Some possible ideas for further research would begin in the way in which subjects were interviewed. A similar format would apply to all focus group interviews, but the subjects that participate in the focus group would then be asked to be part of a one-on-one interview with a third-party research assistant some time after the group setting. This method could potentially show discrepancies in answers or show different responses to the same question without being influenced by the settings or the audience. Beginning first with the focus groups would allow the interviewer an opportunity to read the person and take into account how long the person took to respond or what their gestures or other physical behaviors were as they responded to the questioning.

Another possible avenue for research might be to explore stereotypes in reverse, regarding how athletes typecast those not involved in sports, or even how faculty relates to certain groups of students on campus. Obviously, much of this was left unsaid in the above research, yet it provided a base for much of what was discussed.

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