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**Title:** Response Paper 1B

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**Keywords:** Key Words: Student athlete, perception, academic integrity, stereotypes, pressure, stigmas

**Abstract:** Abstract: Student athletes on this campus are perceived differently based on their athletic prowess. As long as the players continue to be glorified and celebrated throughout the community, the division will most likely remain. People support athletics and athletes in an attempt to build community and camaraderie. This forms a hierarchy in which athletes are automatically inserted into once they become part of the team. However, not all of the athletes are perceived accolades or scrutiny. Most of this attention is placed on “money athletes”, or the “basketball and football” players. These athletes attract the eye of the public interest. Public interest and TV contracts cast these students as more than athletes’ representatives of the university. Are there different perceptions by the student body towards the athletes? Do athletes feel pressured by these stigmas placed on them, and how do they deal with those stereotypes? Is the public’s perception related to the division of athletes? Is this linked to performance? Athletes are targeted by different populations on campus because of their reflection of the university; these athletes deal with these pressures with different levels of emotion.

**Response I:** Chapter 3 denotes the growing inclination for the body to become civilized. This body civilization I believe is directly concurrent with the current desire for power. A thirst for control arisen from the culture transferred to that of body process and function. Not only power over the body but power within the body is looked at as ideal. The iconic sports figures and celebrities of society today represent this lust for ultimate strength and power craved by many.

## Chapter 5

The readings again raise the social context of the situations we examined in class the other day involving Cost Cutters and Target. Which parts of the situations should be private? It is my belief that the changing culture

inherits to the ideas of what is publicly accepted. Perhaps 40 years ago, the guys in the barbershop would've been looked upon critically while the issue of spanking seemed more accepted by the public onlookers.

Does the quest for the civilized body run concurrently with today's power hungry society or does it in part fuel the lust of society?

**Response II:** Chapter 2 is once again looking at way in which people “attempt to construct an alternative physical ideal.” The women in the study are mostly there to regain a sense of their ideal body or alter their body image to themselves or others around them. Each class member attempts to create an identity that does not rely on the flawed body. Again, as we have looked at numerous times in class, they are in a chase to become normalized and idealized. The girls in the movie “Thin” took these concerns and potential conquests of the body to a grave extreme. It has often become too commonplace to take these fears, concerns, and ideals to dangerous levels. The subjects studied have to see aerobics as the author put it, “a method for modern women to work out issues of considerable significance,” rather than a source of self-doubt, domination, and disruption.

Chapter 4 involves another way in which people have constructed a normative identity by renegotiating the relationship of body and self. The NAAFA is an organization which seeks to bring acceptance and awareness towards the betterment of “fat people”. I believe NAAFA and similar organizations are in place to build self-assurance and self-empowerment in the fact that there are others who battle the same battles

and have similar viewpoints of the world. “They seek out constructive ways of incorporating the stigmatized body into identity - of not equating a failed body with a flawed self.” This piece goes along the whole theme of our class so far with the struggle to separate body and self. Unfortunately as the author stated, “they [fat people] reinforce, rather than undermine the cultural fear and repudiation of fat.

**Proposal Pitch:** Sports Culture: The Perception of the Collegiate Athlete

Today’s student-athlete experiences many situations foreign to the everyday student. Constantly balancing the pressures of the court and the classroom weigh heavily on the athlete’s minds. In addition, they have to deal with the environment and stigmas that come along with sports culture. Based upon performance, athletes can become the 'Big Man on Campus' or be the butt of scrutiny. How

'Money sport' athletes are under much more of a spotlight than other athletes. Public interest and TV contracts have cast these students as more than athletes, but representations of the university. For them, the pressures are heightened. For them, the pressures are heightened. Other athletes, especially females, can run around in more ambiguity.

Do students perceive athletes differently?

How do athletes deal with the stigmas?

Are there any myths that athletes wish to dismiss?

How do athletes balance a class schedule while still maintaining their athletic prowess?

Do athletes feel pressures from the student body and public?  
Does this public perception change with performance?

What can be done to change such stigmas?

**Group Proposal/Plan:** Sports Culture: The Perception of the Collegiate Athlete

Today’s student-athlete experiences many situations foreign to the everyday student. Often times it is forgotten that these

athletes are actually students. Constantly balancing the pressures of the court and the classroom weigh heavily on the athlete's minds. In addition, they have to deal with the environment and stigmas that come along with sports culture. Based upon performance, athletes can become the 'Big Man on Campus' or be the butt of scrutiny.

An interesting aspect of sports is the informal connections fans make with the athletes based upon little more than performance. Few jobs in college are watched by thousands, even millions, of spectators. Public interest and TV contracts have cast these students as more than athletes, rather representations of the university. These 'money sport' athletes are under much more of a spotlight than other athletes. For them, the pressures are heightened. Other athletes, especially females, can run around in relative ambiguity, while 'money athletes' are constantly in the public eye. For better or worse, the public construes perceptions of these athletes from an outsider's perspective often times based on little more than athletic prowess.

Do students perceive athletes differently?

Do students perceive 'money athletes' differently than other athletes?

How were these perceptions formed?

How do athletes deal with the stigmas?

Are there any myths that athletes wish to dismiss?

What can be done to change such stigmas?

Do athletes feel they are socially targeted or typecast?

Is there a difference in athletes' demeanors on and off the field?

How much does their on-field behavior carry over to public perception?

Do athletes feel pressures from the student body and public?

How does this public perception change with performance?

**Data I:** Data 1: Observation Paper

**Data II:** Data II: 442 Interviews (see Word document below)

**Group Analysis:** Sports Culture: The Perception of the Student-Athlete Adam Latarski Eric Anderson KIN 442 analysis Athletes are targeted by different populations on campus because of their reflection of the university; these athletes deal with these pressures with different levels of emotion. The student athletes are perceived differently based on their athletic prowess. In addition, the division of athletes here on campus influences the way spectators view them. Are there different perceptions by the student body towards the athletes? Do athletes feel pressured by these stigmas placed on them, and how do they deal with these stereotypes? Is the public's perception related to the division of athletes? From this hypothesis, the goal of this project was to research and find just exactly if these assumptions were true regarding the athletes and whether any bias did in fact exist. Through our observations and interviews, the data should show a clear reflection of the different perceptions on athletes and also the athletes' perceptions and thoughts on this issue. This topic was construed for a variety of reasons. It is an issue that many people, if not all, can familiarize themselves with here on campus. There is a long history of an equivocal balance between athletes and perceptions from the media and fans. It becomes an even bigger issue when you are at a big Division I school, because of the dollar signs involved. The fact is that the athletes are representatives of the school and people like to identify with groups in order to form bonds. Athletics is a prime example of this. People support athletics and athletes in an attempt to build community and camaraderie. This forms a hierarchy in which athletes are automatically inserted into once they become part of the team. However, many of these perceptions and pressures are not placed as highly on 'other' lesser known, 'Olympic sport' athletes, at least as far as the media and campus community is concerned. As public figures, athletes are placed under a spotlight that can shine brightly or in a flash, cast a dark shadow. The public at large enjoys placing labels onto groups in order to create an easier way to form descriptions. This leads to a stereotyping of athletes under an often times undeserved umbrella. The use of television, broadcasting, and advertisement has a strong influence and can determine the way outsiders view athletes. Many of the less recognized sports do not gain a lot of notoriety. This can lead to an unfair bias on some of the athletes who do receive more attention. Through observations and interviews, data has been collected to enhance the knowledge of the perception of athletes here on campus. In the first observation the purpose was to get a rough draft on the

correlation between not only athletes, but people in general and the communication between them when dealing with sports. In this observation, a basketball game took place between two intramural teams. One player was looked at closely throughout the game to monitor his performance and the reactions of the spectators. What was seen was a positive attitude towards him when his level of play was high, turned into a negative attitude when he was not performing as highly. He would get cheered when he did well, and even booed when he performed poorly. These findings lead me to support my hypothesis that an athlete's performance determined the reaction or bias he would receive from certain populations on campus. Another observation took place at one of the most vaunted locations on campus. The Assembly Hall has long been a landmark of Illinois basketball and the University of Illinois itself. It was a Senior Night vs. Minnesota, and a special game for a lot of people in attendance. The three senior ballplayers, the senior managers, the senior members of the band, cheerleading, and dance squads, and the seniors in the Orange Krush student section were all a part of their last home basketball game as a member of the University of Illinois student body. Senior Night is a special night in which the players and the fans get to thank one another one last time in a special tribute to their services and contributions to the community and the team. It's always filled with a lot of emotion and reflection developed over the last four years. This day was no exception. As the pregame festivities were about to begin, there was a different feeling in the arena than had been present in my previous three attendances of Senior Night. The stands were not filled; in fact the seats were barely half full. Gone was the mystique from Illinois legends. In its place was a rather maligned, exhausted crowd ready to move on and put this season behind them. Nevertheless, the crowd of around 7500 that was in attendance displayed gratitude towards the seniors and their accomplishments along the way. Even then, the jeers were toned down to a point where it seemed as though the crowd as a whole was doing little more than paying lip service to their respective seniors. Why has there been such a change in the response over the last 4 years? Was it the people being honored? Or was it a simple fact of wins and losses and the related fallout? In the third observation, some of the basketball players here on campus were observed through practice and also from a tour with senior citizens. In this study, the goal was to observe the relationship between athletes and fans and also differentiate the relationship between the athletes and older adults and the athletes and the students. Through this observation the athletes' relationship between them and the older

adults was different than from the students. The players were quicker to show more respect to the adults, while some of the students they might have seen as friends. It was an intriguing note about power in society with position among age. A lot of the older adults could make a couple rude comments here and there and get away with it; where as the younger students would refrain from saying something ignorant because of their age and power in society. Also, one of the adults was huge fan of one of the past players, where a couple of the students hardly knew any players or even cared. This showed the differences in the way people on and off campus treat or glorify athletes. It also put a perspective on some of the fans here on campus. In addition, four interviews were conducted to see how different perspectives see the issues of perception. The interviewees included a male student, a female student, a male basketball manager, and an athlete on the varsity men's basketball team. Again, it became obvious that where they happen to stand is where they would stand on an issue. When interviewing the athlete and from personal experiences around the basketball team, there was a distinctively different approach to the questions. Obviously, they encounter more interviews, however the proceeding arrogance, or confidence if you will, shown through in both the cookie cutter responses, and the attitude towards their place upon the campus hierarchy. Overall, the interviews revealed the fact that yes, there is a perceptual difference between athletes and the general student body, a division amongst athletes themselves, and stigmas around campus that reflect upon them. Students also called into question the academic integrity of the university when admitting athletes. It is an issue that is seen within many major sports programs. Should athletes receive lower standards of admittance? There is a tradeoff that is seen by the department heads which allow this to occur. In order for services beneficial to the university, the athletes are allowed to enter with lower scores than normally acceptable. These findings in this data led us to believe that athletes are indeed perceived differently by different populations; some based on performance while others still unknown. Another finding in this study was that even though the gym facility was separated equally from men and women's basketball, the women's side was hardly looked at. The men's were almost exclusively looked at and received a great deal of review, while the women's were almost unseen. This raised a number of questions. Not only was the division of athletics shown, but also the differences in male and female sports. Once again, this can be traced back to the fact that higher advertisement contributed to more attention or emphasis being placed on the athletes. These findings from our data were very

crucial in supporting our claims. Being able to view the athletes was important in developing a sense of communication, verbal and nonverbal, between the athletes and their fans. We were able to look closely at how the fans view the athletes, and how the players respond. The data also showed how performance plays a dramatic role in determining a player's stereotype. Also, these findings spoke a lot about this university. If you're watching a game on T.V. you see how many crazy fans are at the game and you quickly jump to generalizations everyone's beliefs and actions. However, from one of the observations it was clear that that is not the case. Many of the students failed to name 2 of the players, whereas the older adults knew almost all of the players and were a lot more enthused with the tour. A key component of this observation was that the basketball athletes were able to be observed. This was crucial because basketball is arguably the most popular sport here at this university. This is where the highest levels of critique would take place. Another important finding outside of this data is from another observation with senior citizens. A different tour was taken at the golf facility. At this event, many of the older adults were less excited or interested in the trip. This drew a connection between the more popular sports on campus, compared to the less recognized or appreciated. Little is known about some of the less popular sports on campus, because they don't have the same exposure opportunities as some of the highly notarized ones. They don't receive a lot of media or television time, so the common fan cannot necessarily draw the same interest as for example, football or basketball due basically to the TV contracts and money involved. Either way, much of the criticism is not fair to the athlete and shouldn't be tolerated. In order for things to change the way they are about this issue, a great deal would first have to change. For one, if the athletes feel too much pressure and don't like the situation they are in then they shouldn't be playing because they're not the ones who are going to be able to take action. The main source comes from the television network. Some of these athletes shouldn't be glorified as much on T.V. because this can lead to a high disregard from their peers. The less notoriety the athletes receive, the less criticism he or she is going to take. However, this will also lead to less positive attention as well, which many of the athletes would not choose to have. Again, there are other cases in which athletes thrive on attention and become local legends and community ambassadors. So, it is really a two-way street, and it is a part of the coaching staff's duties to prepare their players for such situations, and definitely influences the staff to evaluate players based upon their character and emotional makeup when

recruiting. The main proposal or future plan for this has to come with coming to the sense that athletics are a sport, a game. Sports are great in that they generate athletes so many opportunities. They provide a platform for the select student-athletes to receive free educations, see other cultures, and experience emotions that are hard to duplicate outside of the sports realm. But it is important to keep a perspective on these kids. The competitions are not a war, not politics, not education; they're a game. More emphasis in school should be focused on education, while sports should be looked at more as a game and physical activity. This may seem harsh, but the common fact comes down to that 98% of the players are not going pro, so people should invest in something else to benefit their life. Sports are indeed very important for fans in that they take their mind off of stress and are a great form of entertainment, and that's what they should be seen as. Ideally, this would lead to a lesser bias among divisions in athletes. This would also contribute to less scrutiny towards the athletes, which a negative effect that they do not deserve. In simple, they deserve to be treated as people and not figures. Abstract: Key Words: Student athlete, perception, academic integrity, stereotypes, pressure, stigmas Student athletes on this campus are perceived differently based on their athletic prowess. As long as the players continue to be glorified and celebrated throughout the community, the division will most likely remain. People support athletics and athletes in an attempt to build community and camaraderie. This forms a hierarchy in which athletes are automatically inserted into once they become part of the team. However, not all of the athletes are perceived accolades or scrutiny. Most of this attention is placed on "money athletes", or the "basketball and football" players. These athletes attract the eye of the public interest. Public interest and TV contracts cast these students as more than athletes' representatives of the university. Are there different perceptions by the student body towards the athletes? Do athletes feel pressured by these stigmas placed on them, and how do they deal with those stereotypes? Is the public's perception related to the division of athletes? Is this linked to performance? Athletes are targeted by different populations on campus because of their reflection of the university; these athletes deal with these pressures with different levels of emotion.

**EUI Links:** "Class and the Consumption of Status Symbols on the U of I Campus"

by Jennifer Norberg provides another look at the perceptions and status of groups on campus. Her project focused more on looks, in terms of

clothing and the use consumer goods to display their socio-economic status.

She asked, “Are some students manipulating their image by purchasing expensive clothing or accessories (jeans, purses, cell phones, shoes) to give the appearance that they belong to a higher status than their actual financial means?” Her findings displayed different views and differing opinions on the prominence of status flaunting and social construction based upon consumer goods in much the same way our research is. It’s all about the perspective. The athletes in my study have differing views than the fans than the coaches than the managers.

It basically shows the person’s relationship to a group brings about their answer. Where they happen to stand is where they stand on the issue. Again, it is sometimes hard to see from other perspectives, but I find it interesting that this carries over from Norberg’s study to ours.

**Reflect:** I really enjoyed being able to go out and investigate an issue I saw happening on campus. There seemed to be a discussion amongst athletes and common students, and based upon a multitude of reasons, there is. As long as the players continue to be glorified and celebrated throughout the community, the division will most likely remain.

**Recommendations:** As public figures, the athletes are placed under a spotlight that can shine brightly or in a flash, cast a dark shadow. The public at large enjoys placing labels onto groups in order to create an easier way to form descriptions. This leads to a stereotyping of athletes under an often times undeserved umbrella. It is hard to say what to do to change these perceptions. It is tough to dismiss many stereotypes created over the years. By promoting athletes in another light, such as community leaders, the university can do their part to stray the public from some of their perceptions.

