

Trinity College Athletics:
Perceptions Of Male High Profile
Athletes.

Research Question:

- What perceptions do students have of high profile male athletes (HPMA) and what perceptions do HPMA's feel students hold of them?
- Do students and HPMA's feel these perceptions affect the social and academic interactions at Trinity College?

Definition of High Profile Male Athlete (HPMA)

- A High Profile Male Athlete as defined by Bowen and Shulman and many other researchers in the field as a male athlete that has received a varsity letter in Football, Basketball or Hockey.
- For the purposes of this study all HPMA's will be in their senior year.

Significance

- In The Game of Life, Shulman and Bowen state: college and university presidents, administrators and trustees are all questioning “whether we as a society want colleges to expend resources on athletics that seem less and less amateur.”
- Sarah Levin states that “big time athletic programs face a host of other issues and pressures....the educational issues associated with college sports today are in fact more important at the liberal arts colleges.”(www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ/game.htm)
- “Trinity College embraces intercollegiate athletics as an educational experience that is an integral component of the academic mission of the College. [Trinity] attracts a diverse group of student-athletes who will contribute academically athletically and socially to the life of our campus.”
(www.trincoll.edu/depts/athletics, 10/28/02)

Significance Continued

- Also, in a preliminary report to the NESCAC Presidents Bowen, Levin, Shulman, and Campbell state that based upon G.P.A. And class rank HPMA's underperform compared to their peers. However they fail to realize the importance of campus culture in the NESCAC by not collecting any data which would inform the public how actual students and athletes perceive each other. This data may help inform whether or not those actually experiencing a liberal arts education believe this is an issue which needs to be addressed.
- A major part of the Trinity experience is developing close academic and personal relationships among peers. Since a significant number of students (15% of males in '95) participate high profile sports in the NESCAC it is important to find out how the two groups perceive each other and if perceptions affect academic and social interactions.

Primary Sources

- Eight Trinity College seniors have been interviewed for the purposes of this study.
- Four seniors are high profile male athletes. (must participate in a varsity sport and received one varsity letter)
- 4 seniors are students are (2 female, 2 male)
- Students do not participate in varsity sports nor have they received a varsity letter at any point at Trinity.

Methodology

Thesis

Student Perceptions of HPMA's at Trinity

- Students believe HPMA's receive special advantages in the admissions process at Trinity.
- Students do not believe HPMA's are less qualified than the average student at Trinity in terms of prior academic records (SAT, G.P.A.)
- There are stereotypes on this campus that are often correlated with HPMA's, especially when the athlete is physically larger than the average student.

How do HPMA's feel student's perceive them

- HPMA's believe that students perceive them to have received special advantages in the admissions process at Trinity and agree that this is in fact true in their own case.
- HPMA's believe student's perceive them to be less qualified academically than the average Trinity student, and also agree that this is in fact true in their own case.
- HPMA's believe that they are often stereotyped by student's at Trinity.

Perceptions affecting social and academic interactions

- HPMA's do not feel that they fit existing stereotypes and student perceptions, and that there is no affect on social and academic interaction
- Students feel that stereotypes could possibly have an affect on the academic interactions for athletes, however they do not believe these perceptions affect social interaction at Trinity.

Students believe HPMA's receive special advantages in the admissions process

- 3/4 Students interviewed believe HPMA's receive special advantages and answered "yes" to assuming something about HPMA's acceptance to Trinity. They stated the following regarding HPMA's receiving special advantages.
- "Yeah, no doubt they do. I know kids on teams who I knew only got in here because they play they played a particular sport. Of course I wasn't in the admissions office at the time, but I couldn't count the number of times I've heard someone say that they wouldn't have gotten in here without their sport.
- "Sure they do. I don't know if there are sports scholarships here, but there are spots set aside for athletes.... People have told me and athletes have told me. Every once in a while you'll here an athlete say they wouldn't have gotten in here if it weren't for their sport."

Students do not believe that HPMA's are less qualified academically (SAT scores and G.P.A.)

- Only one of the four students (female) responded that they thought HPMA's are less qualified than student's at Trinity.
- One student responded that he did not know.
- Two of the four students said that they were not sure, but did say it may be a possibility. Each of these students also made reference to SAT scores being a poor measurement of any student's academic ability.

Stereotypes that are associated with HPMA's

- There were a few different stereotypes students mentioned in interviews. The one stereotype which each student believed existed was the “meathead” stereotype.
- Student Definition of Meathead Stereotype: “An athlete who doesn't do as much work and just focuses on the sport they are playing rather than the academics. Someone who is bigger and spends a lot of time in the gym.”
- 3/4 students believed that students associated HPMA's with the term Meathead. When asked if a correlations existed one female student responded: “Yeah there is a correlation, especially with the more talented players. Although I don't think that you'd look at the most successful kids on the squash team and call them a meathead, but that is probably because they are smaller. The term arises from the fact that they do play a sport, and people perceive them as less articulate than they are”

All four HPMA's believe student's percieve that they have recieved special advantages in admissions, and also state that this was the case for them personally

- “Students believe it. It’s a well known fact that athletes receive special advantages. Coming in I didn’t fit academic qualifications. It wasn’t a huge strech, but I know I wouldn’t have gotten in if it weren’t for athletics.”
- “Students think kids get in at a better rate because they play a sport.... Its somewhat true, its undeniable athletics has somewhat of a pull in admissions...I know my grades weren’t up to so called “Trinity standards.”

HPMA's believe students perceive them to be less qualified (based on prior G.P.A. And SAT scores) than the average Trinity student

- “Students probably think we’re less prepared before we get here, the general stereotype is that we don’t care as much. That we kind of just try to get by.”
- “Students think we are less qualified because they know that we wouldn’t get in if it weren’t for our sport.”
- All students admitted they believed they received an advantage in the admissions process and indicated that they had lower than average SAT scores and high school G.P.A.

HPMA's feel they are stereotyped by students

- HPMA's believe that they are most often stereotyped as “meatheads.” This stereotype occurs mostly with those who are physically larger than other students on campus.
- “[Students] probably think I’m a meathead... A lot of kids are surprised that I am applying to law school. There is no real reason for that, they don’t really know anything about my academics. They probably just think I wouldn't aspire to go to law school.
- “High profile athletes are stereotyped, but not all athletes. Sports where players are, in general, physically bigger than a lot of students.”
- “The meathead stereotype is always there, and we are always the first to be blamed for fights or other things like property damage.”

HPMA's do not feel that they fit existing stereotypes and student perceptions, and that there is no affect on social and academic interaction

- All four HPMA's did not feel they fit the existing stereotypes of students, despite admitting they believed they received admissions advantages and were academically less qualified than the average student.
- They did believe students stereotyped them but did not feel that any student perceptions had an affect on social interaction at Trinity. "There is a lot of intergration between student's and athletes socially, or a lot more than people may think. Athletes are more visible, and maybe make themselves more visible. But most attitudes and actions of students and athletes are the same and they interact more than people probably think"

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- All HPMA's answered that they did not believe academic interation was affected, however 2 mentioned faculty in their response. "I know a lot of people on sports teams will hide that they are athletes from faculty because faculty especially probably have those stereotypes. Whether or not that is justified I don't know. On a lot of college campuses there is an emphasis on sports. I don't like to let professors know I play a sport, but I wouldn't hide that from other students."

Students feel that stereotypes could possibly have an affect on the academic interactions for athletes

- “Yeah, they might sometimes, an athlete will say something and people will think oh he is just a meathead, I think I’ve seen that happen. Sometimes its obvious who is a recruited athlete, and maybe some people prejudge them.”
- “Maybe, I can think of isolated situations where somebody who would certainly fit the stereotype of a meathead has said something so stupid that it definitely reinforced the stereotype. But I can also think I’ve many times when someone has said something to subvert the stereotype”

Students do not believe these perceptions affect social interaction at Trinity.

- The following statement best describes all student responses when asked if perceptions affected social interaction:

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- **“I would say social interaction is not affected by any perception of athletes. The relationship between athletes and non athletes is not dissimilar from all non athletes or all students. I don’t think that the fact a person is an athlete at Trinity really informs the relationship they have with other students. A lot of times, especially since so many students on campus are athletes, they tend to congregate with other athletes. However I don’t think that it in any way excludes non-athletic students. Perhaps there is a certain personality type. Someone who is more outgoing or has more confidence may tend associate more with high profile athletes. Those people with similar personalities will associate with that group, but there is no divide.”**