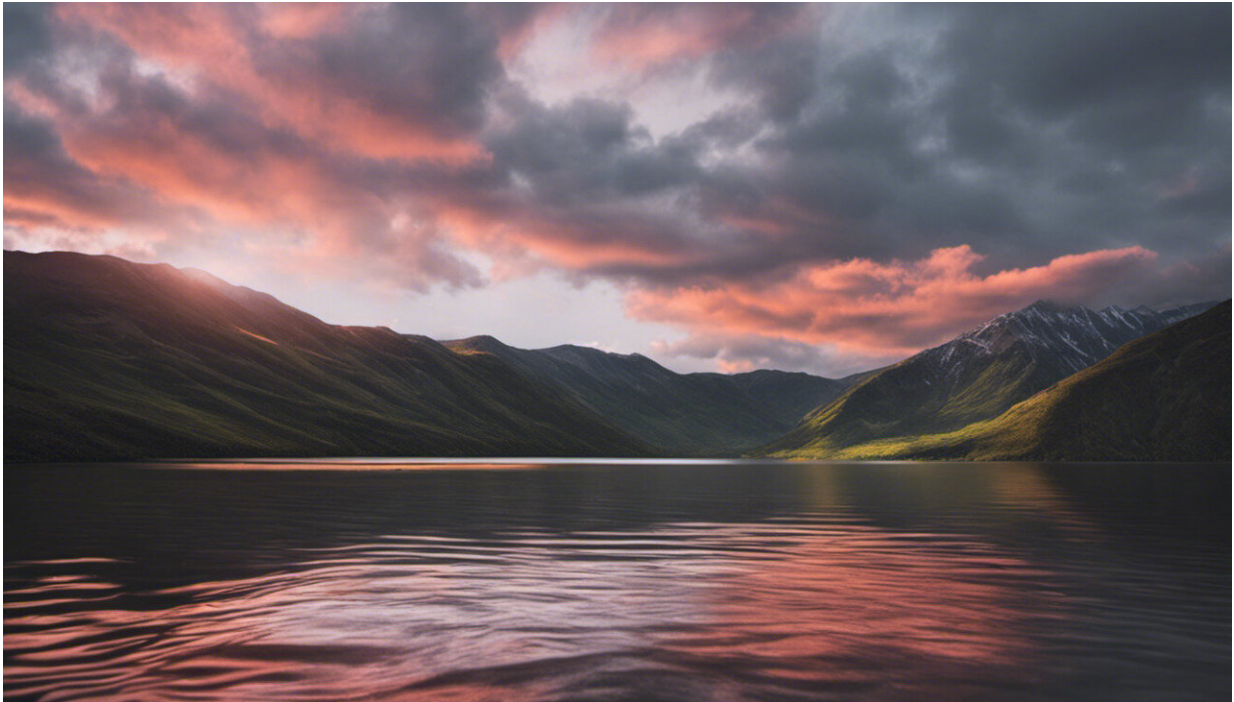


# Stereotypes can affect athletes' academic performance

March 27 2014, by Clifton B. Parker

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The academic stigma associated with being a student-athlete can lead to underperformance in the classroom, according to a study by Stanford researcher Thomas Dee.

Thomas Dee, a professor in the Stanford Graduate School of Education,

writes in a new study that the academic stigma associated with being a student-athlete can lead to underperformance in the classroom, particularly for males.

Through a controlled experiment at an East Coast college, Dee's research examined "stereotype threats" for college athletes. A [stereotype threat](#) occurs when individuals experience reduced performance after becoming anxious about how they're possibly viewed by others.

For example, if a student-athlete believes he or she is looked at as a "dumb jock," that anxiety may become self-fulfilling. In Dee's research, student-athletes who were reminded of their jock identities scored about 12 percent lower on Graduate Record Examination (GRE)-style tests, relative to nonathletes.

Gender differences exist, too. The decreases on test results for males were more than twice as large than that of females.

Underperforming due to this anxiety could lead student-athletes to believe they don't belong in college as students. Dee points out that the stereotype threat has been studied extensively in the context of race and gender.

## **'Social identities'**

Eighty-four students from the East Coast college participated in the hourlong experiment. Students, athlete and nonathlete alike, were divided into two groups, one of which was a control group. They all received the same set of 39 questions taken from the GRE.

One group was "primed" beforehand with additional questions such as, "Are you (or have you been) a member of a National Collegiate Athletic Association sports team at the college?" Then they were asked whether

they had experienced any scheduling conflicts due to their involvement in athletics. The [control group](#) answered the same questionnaire – except for the athlete-related questions – and instead was queried about dormitory conditions.

The results included "large and statistically significant reductions" in scores for the student-athletes, according to the researchers. The "dumb jock" stereotype threat was even more pronounced among males.

## Coping and counseling

As Dee explains, slots in the nation's best colleges are highly coveted. Academic underperformance of student-athletes partly reflects the "performance-dampening anxiety associated with the perception that they didn't deserve to be admitted," he said.

He suggests that higher education institutions develop ways to help student-athletes deal with the issue.

For example, before the start of a new season, a coach or academic adviser could talk with athletes about stereotype threat. Simply warning people about the phenomenon can help them overcome feelings or thoughts that they don't belong to a particular group, Dee added.

**More information:** DEE, T. S. (2014), 2006. "Stereotype threat and the student-athlete." *Economic Inquiry*, 52: 173–182. [DOI: 10.1111/ecin.12006](https://doi.org/10.1111/ecin.12006)

Provided by Stanford University

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