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In Search of the Winning Image: Assessing the Connection between Athletics Success on Perceptions of External Prestige

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The impact of identifying with one's organization has been linked positively with commitment (Carmelli, Gillat, & Weisberg, 2006) and social capital (Carmelli, 2007). These impacts are also connected with perceptions of external prestige (e.g. Carmelli et al., 2006). Notably, in higher education, this perception of prestige has been impacted by athletics when football success was linked with perceived academic prestige of an institution by external stakeholders (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006). No research, however, has looked at the connection between organizational identification, perceived organizational prestige, and the role of athletics success, from an internal perspective. The purpose of the current study, then, was to fill this gap by utilizing multiple measures of athletics success, university and team identification, and perceptions of university prestige among college students. Using responses from 633 students across 27 NCAA, Bowl Champion Series-level institutions, the study's results found that broad-based athletics success impacted perceptions of external academic prestige, while high-profile athletics success in men's basketball and football success did not. However, all measures of athletics success significantly contributed to perceptions of external athletic prestige and overall external prestige.

Introduction

Perceptions of an organization carry significant impact for its numerous stakeholders. These perceptions include organizational image, reputation, prestige, and even identity. Of these, individual members tend to maintain two separate images of one's organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). The first is built upon an individual's assessment of what the organization represents and upon what it stands (i.e. organizational identity). The second perceived image, on the contrary, reflects the individual's interpretation of what outsiders perceive the organization to represent or for what it stands. This aspect has been referred to as the construed external image (Dutton et al.) or the perceived external prestige (Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001). This perception of external prestige has been shown as a significant link in identifying with one's organization, where numerous positive work outcomes are impacted. Among these, members who exhibit a strong organizational identity also show a supportive

attitude toward the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), higher work satisfaction (Van Dick et al., 2004a), a lower intention to leave the organization (Van Dick, Wagner, & Lemmer, 2004c), and a willingness to make financial sacrifices (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The salience of perceived external prestige in linking with organizational identification rests upon the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978), where an individual's need to maintain a positive self-esteem is built upon maintaining membership in positively-perceived social groups. The link is also reinforced by Cialdini et al. (1976)'s "Basking in Reflected Glory," where individual members often identify more-highly with groups or organizations perceived as successful.

The influence of perceived external prestige has even been observed at the university level, where perceptions of prestige have positively impacted student loyalty and satisfaction (Alves & Raposo, 2010) and have been shown to be the strongest predictor of positive student attitudes (Sung & Yang, 2008). Even the Flutie Factor, where increased applications to a university is thought to be attributed in part to success in athletics, has its roots in this notion that athletics can shape perceptions of stakeholders in terms of academic quality. Among the assumptions of the Flutie Factor is that exposure to a college or university's successful athletic team(s) enhances prospective students' perceptions of that university as prestigious. In addition to pursuing the various intricacies of the Flutie Factor, past research has also explored the extent to which high-profile athletics success impacts perceptions of overall university prestige (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006) and the academic prestige of an institution (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2005). Still, no research to date has examined actual perceptions of external prestige, which is defined as insiders' perceptions of what, or how, outsiders view their organization (Smidts et al., 2001). Thus, because of the salience of perceived prestige to numerous student behaviors and attitudes, the current study sought to explore the extent to which a college or university's success in athletics predicted student's perceptions of external prestige of their institution.

Perceived External Prestige

The basis of perceived external prestige is grounded in social classifications and the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978). In the organizational literature, the social identity approach is based on three major elements: 1) that individuals strive for positive self-esteem, 2) that part of their self-concept stems from their membership in certain social groups, and 3) that a positive identity can be maintained or enhanced through comparison with relevant outgroups (Van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, & Christ, 2004b). This is how perceived external prestige has shaped the relative attractiveness of an organization during recruitment (Collins & Han, 2004), has caused members to bask in the reflected perceived glory of the organization (Cialdini et al., 1976), and how students are more satisfied with higher retention rates in universities that they perceive with more prestige (Alves & Raposo, 2010). In essence, perceived external prestige facilitates the process of organizational identification. This process takes an individual from outgroup to ingroup and further into the character and identity of the organization. It is there that positive perceptions of external prestige are manifested into positive work outcomes. And this process occurs because organization members strive to maintain a positive self-esteem, something that is achieved by belonging to an organization that outsiders perceive as prestigious.

Thus, the impact of an organization's prestige represents the underlying quality of itself as an organization. This quality component is often viewed broadly in organizational literature and is often broadened further still to refer to the *attractiveness* of an organization (Carmelli, 2005). The quality, attractiveness, reputation, and prestige of an organization are all manifested

through images of the organization – both internally and externally. Members' attachment is affected by the particular images they believe others attribute to their organization (Dutton et al., 1994). While Dutton et al. presented this as the *construed external image* of the organization, Carmelli and Freund (2009) separated the construed external image of an organization from its perceived external prestige. Dutton et al. believed that construed external image stems from the employee or member's own perceptions of the way outsiders think about the organization. Conversely, perceived external prestige is a construct that implies a judgment or evaluation regarding the organization's status according to some kind of favorable or unfavorable evaluative criteria (Carmelli & Freund 2009?). Thus, for example, the perceived external prestige of an organization will be dependent upon the specific, selected evaluative criteria for judgment and the extent to which said criteria is both salient and either favorable or unfavorable. The salience of the criteria is also fleshed out in its social relevance, as perceived external prestige is thought to address the overall social value of membership in the organization (Dutton et al. 1994). In other words, perceived external prestige can be interpreted as reflecting the social value assigned by employees to their employer's identity – or, perhaps, the social value assigned by students to their alma mater's identity. Not only should any attempt to assess perceived external prestige be specific, but the criteria will need to be those that are proven to be relevant and important to the organization's members. In the university context, such measures of prestige may include academic prestige, professional prestige, social prestige, and even athletic prestige, among others.

Another unique aspect to exploring perceived external prestige is that it has been found to be an individual-level variable (Smidts et al., 2001). According to this view, members of the same organization may vary in their perceptions of the organizations external prestige because they usually interact with different organizational outsiders and have different levels of knowledge about those characteristics of the organization that serve as measures of prestige to those outsiders (Smidts et al. 2001?). This individual-level view of perceived external prestige reinforces the relevance of the evaluative criteria (Carmelli & Freund, 2009) in assessing these perceptions. Such elements as social, economic, ethical and overall prestige have been examined throughout extant organizational literature and maintain a distinction in prestige assessment. In fact, Carmelli (2005) partitioned perceived external prestige of an organization into two subsets: perceived economic prestige and perceived social prestige of the organization. Notably, both forms of perceived external prestige were found to significantly enhance the affective commitment and citizenship behaviors of organization members. However, it was the perceptions of social prestige that augmented commitment to a larger degree than did economic prestige. These findings reinforce the notion that perceptions of external prestige are constructed upon criteria that are salient to the individual organization members. This will predominantly depend upon both the specific aspect of prestige being assessed, and amongst which external stakeholders the prestige is presumed.

While perceptions of external prestige are known to augment numerous critical elements to organizational effectiveness, including self-esteem and attachment to the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), turnover intentions (Mignonac, Herrbach, & Guerrero, 2006), and organizational identification (Carmelli, Gilat, & Weisberg, 2006); a remarkably lesser amount of research has explored the *construction* of perceived external prestige. Originally, March and Simon (1958) proposed perceived prestige to stem from two streams: the position of the organization in the society and the organization member's standards of prestige. The societal position of the organization, accordingly, is based upon the extent to which it possesses the

symbols of success that are recognized within the particular society (March & Simon), thus, furthering importance for the accuracy of the criteria on which perceived external prestige of an individual's organization is assessed. Moreover, such symbols of success may embody visibility of the organization or the extent to which the organization is achieving its goals. This achievement of goals is widely recognized as an organization's performance and is generally accepted as a predictor of prestige perceptions (Sine, Shane, & DiGregorio, 2003). More recently, research has confirmed March and Simon's antecedents of perceived organizational prestige, but caution that still "virtually nothing is known about how perceptions of prestige are formed" (Fuller et al., 2006, p. 834).

As with most organizations, colleges and universities have also been impacted by perceptions of prestige, status, and reputation and through the public images that they maintain. Throughout the literature, most research uses the measures of institutional prestige, reputation of the university, and university image interchangeably – a connection that we will later delineate. Heretofore, however, the organizational image of a university has marked impacts upon its varied stakeholders. Past research has found a significant connection between perceived university image and prestige with the satisfaction and loyalty of current students (Alves & Raposo, 2010), with students' commitment to, and identification with, the university (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001), and between perceived external prestige and organizational attachment of university faculty and staff (Fuller et al., 2006). Notably, perceptions of external prestige were more strongly related to affective commitment and withdrawal cognitions of university faculty than to those of university staff and administrators (Fuller et al. 2006). The same perception of prestige have also been shown to increase a university's licensing rate over and above past performance and is suggested to lead to a stratification in the creation and distribution of university-generated knowledge (Sine et al., 2003). It is, in part, for this reason that a college or university's reputation and perceived prestige may be its most valuable asset (Theus, 1993) and why many universities have increased their investments in an effort to strengthen the image of "prestige" or "quality" (Ghosh, Whipple, & Bryan, 2001). In viewing the existence of the institution within a systems perspective, Theus (1993) iterated that the organization must produce outputs – that are both tangible and intangible – to its environment that will empower it enough to receive the inputs necessary for its survival. Moreover, as resource-acquiring institutions, colleges and universities depend upon positive public attitudes to attract the students, faculty, and financial resources needed to retain stability. Interestingly, though, while colleges and universities – knowing the importance of public perceptions of the organization – are investing more into shaping the perceived image and prestige of the institution, they are becoming increasingly criticized for their use of resources (Theus, 1993). Still, as stated with previous research (Fuller et al., 2006), little is known about the construction of perceived external prestige of the university. One aspect alluding to this process is the university's *dual identity*. The *normative* identity of a university is one which is the traditional, ideological image that individuals typically carry of the institution (Albert & Whetton, 1985). This would be more aligned with Toma's (1999) collegiate ideal, where

Higher education in the United States has never been just about the classroom or laboratory, but has embodied a romanticized collegiate ideal where academic endeavors coexist with the pursuit of campus community through customs and rituals . . . events and activities . . . (p. 82).

Still, there also exists a *utilitarian* identity, which is the more cost-effective image of the university (Albert & Whetton, 1985). Where the normative identity might be more of the “church” image, the utilitarian identity is that of the “business” image. This dichotomy exists along a continuum where even college athletics, for example, can contribute to the collegiate ideal as a community building, image enhancing element to college life on one end of the spectrum, and yet exist as a high-stakes business centered on revenue streams and profit margins (Sperber, 2000). Additionally, the notion of multiple images and identities of colleges and universities were promoted by Kazoleas, Kim, and Moffitt (2001) who suggested that these multiple images, such as academics and athletics, can be held concurrently and may even struggle against each other. This balance occurs within each individual holding the perceived image or prestige and can change often depending upon the factors influencing the perceptions. Ultimately, it was posited that organizational members and other stakeholders hold several images of perception of a university which contribute to the overall image. This notion was expanded upon in later findings, such as with Arpan, Raney, and Zivnuska (2003) who examined ten different major U.S. universities through two different sets of stakeholders: current university students and adult, non-students. Among the students, three factors were found to predict the perceptions of the university, including academic factors, athletic factors, and the extent of news coverage of the university. Among the adult, non-students, however, were four factors predicting perceptions: a combination of all university attributes (academic and athletic factors), the extent of news coverage, the education level of respondents, and the respondent’s level of fan identity (Arpan et al.). Notably, however, the role of athletics among the universities was mixed. While athletics predicted the overall perception ratings among the entire sample, athletics did not contribute to four of the ten universities in the study. These findings allude to the need for pursuing perceptions of prestige as an individual-level variable (Smidts et al., 2001) because of the dynamic balancing of prestige upon diverse publics with diverse backgrounds (Kazoleas et al., 2001). Sung and Yang (2008) went on to later support these findings when they found that social prestige of the university, the extent to which significant others held the university in prestige, the academic ranking of the university, and the overall media coverage all contributed to perceptions of external prestige of the current students.

The role of college athletics in contributing to perceptions of external prestige remains, then, unsettled. While past research has suggested that such attributes as “athletic prowess” are assumed to enhance university reputations (Theus, 1993); the literature does exhibit a definite impact of athletics presence in perceptions of colleges and universities. While the impact of athletics success upon student enrollment is mixed (e.g. Toma & Cross, 1998), increases in perceived athletic prestige have led to more generous alumni contributions (Holmes, 2009). In viewing outsiders’ perceptions of academic prestige of universities, Lovaglia and Lucas (2005) discovered that athletics success predicted the perceptions of prestige of those institutions in the study. However, the study failed to assess multiple images of prestige, an inclusion that would paint a more accurate image of perceptions of a university based on Albert and Whetton’s (1985) dual identity. Second, while Lovaglia and Lucas operationalized perceptions of prestige for their study, the true assessment they compiled was a university’s academic *reputation*. As suggested by Dutton et al. (1994), organizational reputation and perceived external prestige are distinct constructs. Whereas organizational reputation refers to outsiders’ beliefs about an organization, perceived external prestige refers to a member’s own view of the outsiders’ beliefs. This distinction is critical to accurately portray the findings of the current study and to appropriately catalog the results of previous studies on perceptions of university “prestige” from outsiders.

Another study finding a significant relationship between athletics success and perceptions of university quality occurred with Goidel and Hamilton (2006). There, citizens as part of an annual state-wide survey showed that the success of the major in-state college football team affected their view of the overall quality of the state's flagship university. Using the notion of prestige, Goidel and Hamilton also were measuring university reputation. Thus, scant research efforts have explored the perceptions of external university prestige through the eyes of the student members of the organization. Further, still, no research has examined the potential impact that athletics success may have on the extent to which these students on campus might perceive how outsiders view their university.

For the current study, we chose to pursue the potential role that athletics success of a college or university may possess on the perceptions of students regarding the external prestige of their institution. To achieve this, we based our conception of perceived external prestige on Carmelli's (2005) definition of perceived external prestige, which was bifurcated into two subsets that he declared as the two most salient constructs for that study's organizations: perceptions of *economic* and *social* prestige. Knowing this, along with Albert and Whetton's (1985) dual identity of a university and Kazeolas et al.'s (2001) multiple images of a university, we chose to adopt the two subsets of Carmelli and adapt them to the two most-salient views of university prestige for this study: perceived academic prestige and perceived athletic prestige. As with Carmelli's perceived external prestige, we then defined overall perceived external prestige as the summation of the two subsets.

From this, we formulated the following three hypotheses:

H1: Athletics success will significantly predict perceptions of academic prestige among university students.

H2: Athletics success will significantly predict perceptions of athletic prestige among university students.

H3: Athletics success will significantly predict perceptions of overall university prestige among university students.

Our hypotheses were based on previous literature where athletic factors have shown limited, but positive and significant, impact on students' perceptions of their university (Arpan et al., 2003). These perceptions are also built upon positive news media coverage (e.g. Arpan et al.) and familiarity and name recognition (Yugo & Reeve, 2007), which have been factors influenced to some extent by sporting events (Toma & Cross, 1998).

Method

The population was limited to traditional-aged, undergraduate students attending schools at the NCAA Division I level as members of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). Of the total population, 27 institutions maintained active, and accessible, online campus directories and were included in the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

Perceived External Prestige (PEP). As mentioned before, the assessment of perceived external prestige was achieved through two subscales of perceived external prestige of the

university (e.g. academic and athletic). Adapted from Carmelli (2005), whose two forms were theoretically drawn from Fryxwell and Wang (1994) and Hammond and Slocum (1996), each of PEP's subscales consisted of four items. Academic prestige had a Cronbach's α of .87, and included statements based upon the university having a reputation of having a high level of "quality of faculty in teaching and scholarship," and "quality of degrees and programs." For the athletic prestige subset, a reliability measure of Cronbach's α of .88 was found and was built upon similar statements on the university having a reputation of having a high level of "talented athletes and coaches that makeup the athletics program," and "team and individual success in athletics."

Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES). Using the CSES, university identity was controlled for through the definition of the extent to which each student identified as a member of his or her college or university. Students responded to 16 items assessing their level of identification with a group along a seven point Likert scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Further, with an original Cronbach's α of .85 and four sub-scales of membership identity, private identity, public identity, and overall identity, the CSES contains statements like "In general, I am glad to be a member of the social groups to which I belong," or "I am a cooperative participant in the social groups to which I belong" (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

Sport Spectatorship Identification Scale (SSIS). The other identity control variable was ascertained by the Sport Spectatorship Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993), which measures the extent to which individuals identify with a sports team or program. This seven-item scale asks the subjects such questions as "How important to you is it that the (school's teams) win?" "During the season, how closely do you follow the (school's teams)?" and "How much do you dislike (the school's) greatest rivals? (Wann & Branscombe, 1993)." The SSIS has a Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$ and has been used in many research studies to assess an individual's team identification level and, most recently, the extent to which that identity contributes to a student's overall social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2010).

Athletics Success. Finally, the predictor variable of athletics success was assessed through three separate measures. For each, a two-year performance measure was used for the year prior to data collection and the year of data collection. This method was used in an attempt to include the amount of impact on the campus and the students' perceptions from the previous seasons. The first measure was the Directors' Cup Points Total, where points are awarded for athletic success across the board of all three NCAA divisions and NAIA athletics. Published annually, points from these totals indicate the overall success rate of each university or college's athletics program. The second and third measures of athletics success were the two-year winning percentages of the university's men's basketball teams and football teams. It is in these spectator sports where the majority of visibility and prestige is attached and is anticipated to carry weight upon overall perceptions of prestige (Toma, 2003).

Method of Data Collection

Pre-notification letters for participation were sent electronically to randomly-selected students ($N = 1800$) from institutions in three BCS conferences, chosen for their regional representation of the East, Midwest, and West Coast. Data were collected from a total sample of 934 students responded for an overall response rate of 51.89%. After removing students from the sample due to age or school year limitations ($n = 187$) or due to incomplete responses ($n = 113$), the overall sample of usable responses ($n = 633$) provided a usable response rate of 35.22%.

Of the total sample included in this study ($n = 633$), a slight majority, 52.3%, of the respondents were women ($n = 331$) while the remaining subjects were men (47.7%; $n = 302$). Further, an overwhelming majority of the sample were white students ($n = 550$), with an average age of 20.64 ($S.D. = 1.51$).

Analysis of Data

To analyze the data for the relationship between athletics success and perceived external prestige, three multiple, hierarchical regression equations were constructed utilizing the independent variable (athletics success) to predict the dependent variables (perceived academic prestige, perceived athletic prestige, and overall perceived external prestige). Each regression equation was constructed based off of the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model (Astin, 1993), an analysis structure based upon the Input-Process-Outcome (I-P-O) Model. The I-E-O model, arranges variables for college students according to *inputs* (gender, race, age), *environment* (year in school, on-campus/off-campus housing status, athlete status, GPA, team identification, and university identification); and *outcomes* (perceived external prestige). Control variables were either dummy-coded prior to inclusion (i.e. race – white/non-white, athlete status – athlete/non-athlete, campus residence – on-campus/off-campus) or derived from their respective scales (e.g. team identity and university identity).

While the variables in the first two blocks of each regression analysis were entered hierarchically, the measures of athletics success were entered into the final block in a stepwise entry method. The stepwise entry method was used to allow for the analysis to choose which variables of athletics success were brought into the final analysis based upon levels of significance. This method was chosen as there was no theoretical framework behind the specific measures of athletics success.

Results

Athletics Success and Perceived External Academic Prestige

In the initial regression analysis, the three measures of athletics success were included in the final model stepwise, beyond university identity, team identity, and the control variables. Findings from the analysis showed that only the Directors' Cup Point Totals ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), the athletics measure of broad-based athletics success across male and female sports, contributed to enhancing student perceptions of external *academic* prestige ($R^2\Delta = .06, p < .001$). Not surprisingly, the extent to which students identified with the university overall also contributed positively to their perceptions of external academic prestige ($\beta = .36, p < .001$). This finding was consistent with previous organizational research where a strong connection exists between perceptions of prestige and organizational identity (e.g. Carmelli, 2005). Notably, however, were the failures of the two high-profile, more publicly visible measures of athletics success (men's basketball success and football success) in contributing to perceptions of academic prestige. No significant connection existed between these variables. In a similar vein, the team identity of the students, which has seen numerous social and academic outcomes in line with the university (e.g. Clopton & Finch, 2010; Wann & Robinson, 2002), also showed no significant relationship with perceptions of academic prestige. These findings suggest a potential divide between big-time, high profile athletics and its use in promoting the academic quality of an

institution. Though using academic reputation from stakeholders outside of the organization, it was this claim made by previous research (e.g. Goidel & Hamilton, 2006; Lovaglia & Lucas, 2005) that did not hold any significance. While utilizing spectator sports as a vehicle for external relations and in shaping the collegiate ideal has some merit (Toma, 1999); athletics success contributing to perceptions of academic prestige among students is tenuous at best.

The Directors' Cup Point Totals as a contributor to positive academic prestige is discussed further in the next section, as this finding is to be generalized with caution. While the current findings suggest there may certainly be a connection between broad-based athletics success and perceived academic prestige, the typical institutions which are successful in the Directors' Cup Points Standings are also the institutions already acknowledged as academically prestigious.

Table 1

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Predicting Perceived External *Academic* Prestige ($n = 605$)

Variable	Regression Equation for Perceived External <i>Academic</i> Prestige		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1			
Gender	-0.17	0.30	-0.02
Race	0.09	0.18	0.02
Age	0.56	0.20	0.21**
Step 2			
Year in School	-0.57	0.23	-0.18*
Campus Residence	-0.56	0.30	-0.08
Athlete Status	0.78	0.55	0.05
Grade Point Average	0.30	0.31	0.04
Team Identity Total	-0.02	0.02	-0.04
University Identity Total	0.26	0.04	0.36***
Step 3			
Directors' Cup Points	0.01	<0.001	0.24***

Note for Perceived External *Academic* Prestige. $R^2 = .003$, $p = .61$ for Step 1; $R^2_{\Delta} = .13$, $p < .001$ for Step 2; $R^2_{\Delta} = .06$, $p < .001$ for Step 3

Athletics Success and Perceived External Athletic Prestige

To assess the students' perceptions of external athletics prestige, the same variables were analyzed again into the same regression structure, with the measures of athletic success entered stepwise. This analysis, not surprisingly, showed the success of athletics significantly impacting perceived external athletic prestige. The success of men's basketball was entered first into the third block ($R^2_{\Delta} = .09$, $p < .001$), followed by the Directors' Cup Point Totals ($R^2_{\Delta} = .04$, $p < .001$) in the fourth block, and the success of football entered into the fifth – and final – block of

the regression analysis ($R^2\Delta = .04, p < .001$). Outside of athletics success of the institution, only one's identification with the school's athletics teams ($\beta = .21, p < .001$) and overall university identity ($\beta = .10, p < .05$) were significant contributors to the students' perceptions of external athletic prestige. While these results were not surprising and fell in line with the second proposed hypothesis, it was nonetheless notable that no other variable was connected with perceived levels of external athletic prestige. As opposed to perceptions of academic prestige, it might be that athletics is truly divisive enough (e.g. Mahony, Riemer, Breeding, & Hums, 2006) that it fails to take presence in any one significant control variable or is actually inclusive enough that it failed to divide between any of these variables. This is discussed further in the final section of the article.

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Predicting Perceived External *Athletic* Prestige ($n = 605$)

Variable	Regression Equation for Perceived External <i>Academic</i> Prestige		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1			
Gender	0.51	0.35	0.05
Race	0.15	0.20	0.03
Age	0.38	0.22	0.12
Step 2			
Year in School	-0.30	0.27	-0.08
Campus Residence	-0.08	0.35	-0.01
Athlete Status	-0.85	0.62	-0.05
Grade Point Average	0.21	0.35	0.02
Team Identity Total	0.12	0.03	0.21***
University Identity Total	0.09	0.04	0.10*
Step 3			
Men's Basketball Win %	7.34	1.09	0.25***
Step 4			
Directors' Cup Points	0.01	<0.001	0.23***
Step 5			
Football Win %	6.17	1.05	0.21***

Note for Perceived External Academic Prestige. $R^2 = .003, p = .61$ for Step 1; $R^2\Delta = .13, p < .001$ for Step 2; $R^2\Delta = .06, p < .001$ for Step 3

Athletics Success and Overall Perceived External Prestige

In the final regression analysis, the two subsets of perceived external prestige were aggregated to create an overall measure of the students' perceptions of external prestige of their

university. The Directors' Cup Point Totals were entered into the third regression block ($R^2\Delta = .09, p < .001$), followed by men's basketball success in the fourth block ($R^2\Delta = .03, p < .001$), and by football success in the fifth and final block ($R^2\Delta = .01, p < .001$). While maintaining statistical significance, the two measures of high-profile spectator sports – men's basketball ($\beta = .17, p < .001$) and football ($\beta = .11, p < .01$) – showed a nominal contribution to perceptions of overall university external prestige. Again, even though the significance supported the final research hypothesis, the limited impact from both men's basketball and football success was surprising. Team identity was another variable that contributed immensely to perceptions of athletic prestige, nothing to academic prestige, and only nominally to overall external prestige ($\beta = .11, p < .05$).

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Predicting *Overall Perceived External Prestige* ($n = 605$)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1			
Gender	0.35	0.56	0.02
Race	-0.51	0.81	-0.02
In-State/Out-of-State Residence	-0.30	0.60	-0.20
Age	1.00	0.36	0.20**
Step 2			
Year in School	-0.79	0.43	-0.13
Campus Residence	0.56	0.71	0.04
Athlete Status	-0.23	1.03	-0.01
Grade Point Average	0.56	0.56	0.04
Team Identity Total	0.11	0.04	0.12*
University Identity Total	0.37	0.07	0.27***
Step 3			
Directors' Cup Points	0.06	0.001	0.26***
Step 4			
Men's Basketball Win %	5.02	1.66	0.12**
Step 5			
Football Win %	3.42	1.56	0.08*

Note for Overall Perceived External Prestige. $R^2 = .02, p = .83$ for Step 1; $R^2 = .15, p < .001$ for Step 2; $R^2 = .10, p < .001$ for Step 3; $R^2 = .01, p < .01$ for Step 4; $R^2 = .01, p < .05$ for Step 5

*values significant at the .05 level

** values significant at the .01 level

*** values significant at the .001 level

Discussion

While previous studies have found evidence that big-time athletics may impact outsider's views of an institution (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006), this study found mixed evidence to suggest that college students (as internal stakeholders) believe that athletics affects outsider's opinions of their universities. The results deepen our understanding of the complexity of the current US collegiate athletics system, with multiple stakeholder groups each having various expectations and demands on a program. By using only internal stakeholders, there appears to be a stark difference in perception between those on the "inside" and those "outside" the university community. Of course, the notable aspect to this reality is that universities have multiple points of attachment (Robinson & Trail, 2005), which provide multiple stakeholders an opportunity to shape the "reality" of college athletics. That is, there still exists the potential to use athletics to shape the perceptions of external stakeholders, but a failure to deliver that as a reality when those external perceptions (from prospective students, for example) are not matched by the internal experience.

The lack of significance of basketball and football success on student's perceived academic and athletic prestige may suggest that student's believe that the general public does not connect big-time athletics and with the quality of the universities academics or athletics overall. However, Director's Cup points, a measure of overall athletic success, were a significant factor. Success across the spectrum of sports may promote an image of overall excellence and balance, rather than being labeled a "football" or "basketball" school. Similar results were found in research looking at team identity and university identity (Clopton & Finch, 2010). This finding may also suggest the presence of a disconnect between big-time athletics and the general student body on campus. When outsiders think about a university, whether the athletic team or the campus, they may see the university one whole organism, with little delineation between academics and athletics. From the inside, students may more readily observe the differentiation between the academic life on campus and the athletic segment, whether this be athletic segregation in the classroom, separate dorm halls or cafeterias, or separate areas of campus where athletes are isolated from non-athletes.

When addressing the overall perceived external prestige of the university, the findings suggest that while numerous benefits are derived from identifying with athletics teams on campus, perhaps some of these may have less impact than previously believed, when controlled for with university identity or when compared to outcomes more fully aligned with the direction of the overall university community (e.g. perceived academic prestige and perceived external prestige).

While current students may be affected by their insider view of campus life, it is important to note that perception may still be more important than reality for outside stakeholders, such as fans and potential students (Alves & Raposo, 2010; Kotler & Fox, 1995). Outsider's views of the quality of the school have been shown to be influenced by successful athletic programs (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2005). Likewise, potential students take into account their brand image of the university, which is also impacted by athletic success or failure (Alves & Raposo). Because of this, several issues arise, including the risks involved with prospective students who have high perceived academic prestige because of successful athletics and may come to school and become a part of group where athletics does not contribute to academic prestige. Universities may run the risk of luring students to their schools at the expense of potentially jading them later in their academic experience.

Another issue is the role of big-time spectator sports in the collegiate ideal (Toma, 1999). While athletics may yet play an important role in the selection process and social experience on campus, these results may suggest that students may not see big-time, high-profile sports as playing a vital role in outsider's view of the institution or athletic program overall, or that perceptions of external prestige are particularly salient in their view of the collegiate ideal. From the results here, more questions are raised regarding Albert and Whetton's (1985) dual identity of an organization. The current data suggest no connection between the success of men's basketball and football – the two most high-profile athletics teams in NCAA competition – and perceptions of external academic prestige, which would fall into Albert and Whetton's *normative* identity of the university. This particular finding runs counter to Toma's (1999, 2003) call for the use of high-profile athletics to enhance members' perceptions of the collegiate ideal. However, where normative identity was the idealistic, pristine image of an organization, the *utilitarian* identity was more practical and business-like. When athletic prestige is attributed to the utilitarian identity of a university, all measures of athletics success were significantly connected. Such a relationship suggests that students are well-aware of the place of athletics within their university and the role athletics has in the overall organization. Notably, however, it will be this awareness of the internal stakeholders that also limits the benefits of athletics success, in that while the academic prestige amongst outsiders can be enhanced through successful athletics (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2005); students do not make that connection.

In our opinion, it is these last two points that must concern higher education and athletics officials the most. If athletics are to continue to represent the college or university as its “front porch,” then the front porch needs to be representative of the house upon which it stands. Else, we run the risk of developing a significant amount of “buyer's remorse” for college students and/or their parents as tuition-paying stakeholders who were influenced by the lure of prestige through intercollegiate athletics. While effective examples do exist of universities using successful athletics and championship platforms to convey messages of academics and scholarship, higher education administrators must be vigilant in their awareness of the extent to which intercollegiate athletics is used in developing the university's brand – this through both formal and informal modes of brand development.

It is important to note some of the limitations of the current study. This study examined current college student's perceptions of outsider's view of their universities academic and athletic prestige levels. While perceived external prestige was included, other potential benefits from positive perceptions of external prestige, including satisfaction, retention, and academic productivity were not. This study also did not include behaviors and outcomes that might result from such perceptions, such as admission demands and intent to donate. While we acknowledge that the results from research utilizing enrollment, admissions, and alumni/booster donations with athletics are mixed and inconclusive, we chose not to elucidate this further as this was beyond the scope of the current study. We recommend future research attempt to connect the findings here on perceptions of external prestige (both academic and athletic) in a relationship with such outcomes as enrollment and alumni/booster donations. Additionally, this study looked at a wide range of students at the top NCAA Division-I level. Further analysis is necessary to analyze differences at other levels of institutions, such as lower division NCAA schools, and other university groups. Also, the study was limited to a narrow window of athletics' success on college campuses. Greater external validity will result from a longitudinal analysis that would incorporate these variables of athletic performance, along with the additional outcome variables.

A final issue in the results was the overrepresentation of white college students in the sample (US Department of Education). Past research has revealed a significant influence of race on the perceptions between athletics and its impact on the campus community (e.g. Clopton & Burke, 2012). In fact, Clopton and Burke (2012), for example, showed that white college students reported a significantly lower perception of the impact successful athletics has upon the academic and social campus communities. Thus, the conclusions here need to be drawn with caution as the overrepresentation of white students might have impacted, as the relationship might be slightly underestimated in some areas. Specifically, a more balanced population representation might have impacted the finding that football and men's basketball did little to influence perceptions of external academic prestige.

College athletics, at the Division I NCAA competition level, continue to be a popular and well-covered aspect of collegiate life in the United States. Other organizational research has found a connection with perceived external prestige and positive outcomes such as loyalty and retention (Carmelli, 2005). This study sought to examine the potential impacts of athletics on athletic and academic perceived external prestige. The results confirm the importance of athletics, in various forms, on the perceived prestige of the university from student body.

The challenge for researchers and administrators is to properly understand and manage the sometimes conflicting needs and opinions of the various stakeholder groups associated with the university and the athletic program. While one message may be emanating from the college campus, each stakeholder group may be receiving and interpreting it differently. A greater understanding of the perceptions of each stakeholder group about the school, and about the other groups connected to the university, will pay dividends as athletic and campus administrators seek to provide succinct, cost-effective communication and messages to build the brand image, reputation, and perceived quality of the athletic program and the university.

Ultimately, athletic success may never significantly contribute to students' academic prestige perceptions. However, the effects of successful athletics programs on academic reputation, and the findings that a happy, positive public attitude attracts students, faculty, and financial support, suggest that collegiate athletics programs will continue to have an important role in the life of the American university (Theus, 1993).

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