

A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATION: STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS OF PREFERENTIAL  
TREATMENT OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

by

Darrin Scott Tipton

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2021

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand students' perceptions of teachers' preferential treatment of high school student-athletes at two Georgia high schools using a multiple case design. Social cognitive theory and the social identity theory guided this study as they relate to high school students' perceptions of the treatment of student-athletes by classroom teachers. The participants were seniors from two north Georgia high schools who were asked to complete a demographic survey. Purposeful sampling was used to select four student-athletes and four non-student-athletes from each school that then participated in interview sessions and created documentation in the form of letters to their teachers. The data collected from the surveys, interviews, and letters were transcribed and analyzed to identify patterns and themes within each school and using cross-case pattern analysis between schools. I determined that most students perceived that student-athletes received preferential treatment. However, while student-athletes had a positive view of this treatment, many of the non-student-athletes reported varying mildly to harshly negative feelings. By conducting this study, I added to the body of knowledge on perceptions of preferential treatment of student athletes by showing that high school students shared some of the same perceptions from previous research with college students and high school teachers. Recommendations for future research include performing studies at different school districts or private schools, increasing the scope of research by including all high school students instead of just seniors, focusing on just one specific group of students or just one set of student-athletes based on their sport, and using a more in-depth survey for quantitative analysis.

*Keywords:* athlete, academic achievement, extracurricular activity, injuries, physical exhaustion, preferential treatment, student perceptions, time commitments

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Leigh who has supported me throughout this process and allowed me to spend the necessary time to complete my doctoral program. I also dedicate this paper to my parents who encouraged me to pursue this degree.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the school system and the high schools who allowed me to conduct my research with their students and who assisted me in conducting the initial survey. I want to thank my principal who gave me advice and encouragement throughout this process. I also want to thank Laney Parks and Dr. Frank Bailey for her help in editing my paper. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. David Gorman and Dr. Lucinda Spaulding for their diligence, patience, and assistance throughout the proposal, research, and dissertation process.

## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .....	3
Dedication .....	4
Acknowledgments .....	5
List of Tables .....	11
List of Abbreviations .....	12
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Overview.....	13
Background.....	13
Historical Context.....	14
Social Context.....	14
Theoretical Context.....	15
Situation to Self.....	16
Problem Statement.....	18
Purpose Statement.....	19
Significance of the Study.....	19
Research Questions.....	20
Definitions.....	21
Summary.....	22
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	24
Overview.....	24
Theoretical Framework.....	24
Social Cognitive Theory.....	25

Social Identity Theory.....	27
Related Literature.....	28
Extracurricular Participation.....	29
Sports Participation Benefits.....	31
Student-Athlete Needs.....	32
Non-Student-Athletes.....	41
School Responsibilities.....	44
Summary.....	51
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	55
Overview.....	55
Design.....	55
Research Questions.....	57
Setting.....	58
Participants.....	59
Procedures.....	61
The Researcher's Role.....	63
Data Collection Methods.....	64
Pilot Study.....	64
Demographic Survey.....	65
Interviews.....	67
Documentation - Letter to a Teacher.....	70
Data Analysis.....	71
Trustworthiness.....	73

Credibility .....73

Dependability and Confirmability .....74

Transferability.....74

Ethical Considerations .....75

Summary .....76

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....77

Overview .....77

Participants.....77

    Kim .....78

    Wes .....78

    Dan .....79

    Lynn .....79

    Betty.....79

    Marie.....80

    Mike .....80

    Gina.....80

    Sue.....81

    Jerry.....81

    Jose.....81

    Gary.....82

    Sofia .....82

    Isabella .....82

    Renee.....83



Missy.....	83
Results.....	83
Demographic Survey .....	84
Theme Development.....	88
Cross-Case Analysis .....	98
Summary.....	104
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	106
Overview.....	106
Summary of Findings.....	106
Discussion.....	108
Implications.....	118
Delimitations and Limitations.....	122
Recommendations for Future Research .....	123
Summary.....	123
REFERENCES .....	125
APPENDIX A: CODE FREQUENCY CHART.....	144
APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY.....	145
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY DATA – HIGH SCHOOL A.....	147
APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY DATA – HIGH SCHOOL B.....	149
APPENDIX E: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL .....	151
APPENDIX F: MANIFESTATION OF MULTICASE THEMES IN EACH CASE.....	152
APPENDIX G: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM.....	153
APPENDIX H: PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY OPT-OUT FORM .....	156

APPENDIX I: RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....159

APPENDIX J: SCHOOL DISTRICT PERMISSION LETTER .....161

**List of Tables**

Table 1 – High School Participant Demographics.....	61
Table 2 – Code Frequency Chart.....	89
Table 3 – Manifestation of Multicase Themes in Each School.....	98

**List of Abbreviations**

Grade point average (GPA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

In the 2016-17 school year, The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported that just over 15,000,000 students enrolled in public education. During that same year, almost 8,000,000 students participated in at least one interscholastic sport (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2017). With such a high number of high school students participating in one or more interscholastic sports, teachers should develop a keen understanding of issues faced by student-athletes due to their participation in sports. Students' perceptions of the teachers' treatment of student-athletes may lead to issues in their relationships with all students (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017; Hawley et al., 2014). I investigated this issue by exploring students' perceptions of teachers' preferential treatment of high school student-athletes.

This chapter includes a discussion of the background of the problem as well the situation to self. The chapter then provides an explanation of the problem and the purpose statement and continues with the significance of the study and the research questions. The chapter concludes with important definitions and a summary.

### **Background**

Student-athletes must balance academics and the sports (Gomez et al., 2018). In balancing these academic and athletic requirements, student-athletes may need additional support from their teachers due to time constraints or injuries. Researchers discovered that educational interventions help student-athletes improve academic performance (Firth-Clark et al., 2019). However, student perceptions of teacher treatment of student-athletes may create tension and resentment between teachers and students, particularly if the treatment of the student-athletes is

deemed as preferential. For instance, Wallace et al. (2016) found that students' perceptions and interpretations of classroom experiences are partially based on how respected and safe they feel. These feelings may be affected by negative perceptions they have about the treatment of student-athletes by teachers. Schools may be able to use this research to foster understanding and trust between teachers and students regarding equitable treatment for all.

### **Historical Context**

Since 1980, high school enrollment in the United States has increased annually (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The number of high school interscholastic sports and the number of students participating in those sports has also increased annually (High School Sports Participation, 2017). The increase in the number of students participating in sports has led to an increase in sports participation issues that may have an impact on student-athletes' academics. Many student-athletes devote significant amounts of time to their sport through practice, games, and off-season training, leaving less time outside of the classroom for homework or study (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Gomez et al., 2018). Some athletes devote themselves to year-round participation in a single sport, having no off-season or rest from the sport or training (Ferguson & Stern, 2014). These student-athletes also must deal with the other aspects of participating in their sport, such as mental and physical fatigue which can translate into a lack of focus and an inability to complete assignments (Parker et al., 2016). School personnel are also finding that they must be knowledgeable on issues related to concussions and accommodations student-athletes may need (Kasamatsu et al., 2016).

### **Social Context**

A phenomenon that needs further investigation is students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes. Researchers found that one of the factors related to student

academic success was a positive relationship between student and teacher (Prewett et al., 2019; Sointu et al., 2017). Knowing a teacher has a positive attitude about providing needed support to student-athletes creates a positive perception of the teacher to the student-athlete. Support could include additional time to complete assignments, modifications for physical injuries, and tutoring across content areas. However, a non-student-athlete could view the situation differently. They may perceive that some teachers believe student-athletes deserve preferential treatment due to their representation of the school in sporting events (Fuller et al., 2017). This perception could have implications for the school if non-student-athletes start resenting the teacher or the student-athletes.

### **Theoretical Context**

Because student-teacher relationships may affect the academic success of students, it is important to determine how students perceive teacher treatment of student-athletes. Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) and Tajfel's social identity theory (SIT) guided this study. According to Bandura (1999, 2018), human relationships can be explained by triadic reciprocal causation, in that a person's personal factors, behavioral patterns, and environmental factors influence each other bidirectionally. The high school environment, the behavior of the teachers, and personal factors of students and teachers may influence student perception of the treatment of student-athletes. Students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes may influence the relationships students have with their teachers. Developing positive relationships with all students may help teachers understand issues student-athletes and non-student-athletes face and thus, motivate teachers to provide fair and equitable treatment (Font et al., 2016).

With Tajfel's SIT (2010), the social group to which each person belongs may affect student views on teachers' treatment of student-athletes (McLeod, 2019). Some student-athletes

may feel that teachers do not provide adequate support while non-student-athletes and some teachers may feel that student-athletes receive preferential treatment (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017; Hawley et al., 2014). Through the lens of SCT and SIT, I investigated students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes.

### **Situation to Self**

I currently serve as an assistant principal and athletic director at a Georgia middle school. In these roles, I have seen how student-athletes have sometimes failed to remain academically eligible to participate in sports. I have also worked with students as a teacher and athletic director and assisted them in overcoming educational obstacles to their education caused by injuries such as concussions. I have had conversations with some teachers who exhibited negative attitudes toward what they considered preferential treatment for student-athletes. Some even feel pressured by coaches or administration to provide assistance they feel is unwarranted. Furthermore, I have had personal interactions with non-student-athletes who also felt that student-athletes received preferential treatment.

I conducted this qualitative study from a social constructivism worldview in that I sought to understand the meanings of the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research begins with the assumptions that a researcher uses to “inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 8). From a social constructivism view, these assumptions are axiological and epistemological. Axiological assumptions honor the values of the individual while epistemological assumptions address how individual realities shape the beliefs of the researcher and participants (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Conversely, Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that the ontological assumption guiding qualitative inquiry is that multiple



realities are shaped by interactions with others. Patton (2015), however, concluded that ontological realism is actual reality, regardless of one's views.

The motivation for conducting this study was the axiological assumption that students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes regarding the treatment of student-athletes may create relational issues between teachers and students, especially if student-athletes perceive teachers give preferential treatment to student-athletes or if others believe the teachers are not providing adequate support (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another important aspect was the epistemological assumption that observing and discussing the issues with students in their setting may help identify perceptions students have of teachers' treatment of student-athletes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, using Creswell and Poth's view, the ontological assumption that multiple realities were shaped through interactions with others reinforces the importance of gathering different perspectives from participants about their view of teachers' attitudes toward student-athletes. Finally, the rhetorical assumption was that "terms and a narrative unique to the qualitative approach" was used to illuminate the personal perceptions of the participants' realities based on their experiences instead of trying to determine a universal truth (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 327).

Throughout my first 15 years as a teacher, I have had several conversations with teachers who resented what they felt was preferential treatment of student-athletes by some teachers and administrators. These teachers felt that student-athletes were allowed to receive additional academic support and excused absences due to their sports participation that were not afforded to other students. I have also heard non-student-athletes discuss how they believed that student-athletes had a different set of rules, academically and behaviorally. My own children made comments to me that student-athletes, especially star athletes, were given preferential treatment

to keep them academically eligible and that behavior issues were brushed aside so the athlete did not miss games.

I believe this study has relevance for anyone who teaches student-athletes. It is important to understand how students perceive their teachers' treatment of all students. Student-athletes want assurance that the teachers understand the academic and physical challenges they face due to participation in sports while non-student-athletes want to ensure that they receive fair treatment. This study adds to the research on the impact of teacher-student relationships on student attitudes toward school and can help teachers understand students' perceptions of the treatment of student-athletes.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem was the lack of understanding regarding high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes. Student-athletes face many challenges in achieving high performance in athletics while also maintaining academic eligibility (Parker et al., 2016). An issue for many student-athletes is the time required for training, traveling, and competing which leaves little time to study or complete assignments outside of the classroom. It can result in academic issues and lead to depression in student athletes (Schultz, 2017; Sheehan et al., 2018). Because of these commitments, student-athletes have little social time, which may cause additional stress (Brown, 2016). Finally, physical exertion from training and competing can cause fatigue, and injuries such as concussions may have lasting cognitive impact (Williams et al. 2015).

Because student-athletes face a variety of issues, many educators believe they deserve preferential treatment (Fuller et al., 2017). While there has been research on the issues student-athletes face and educators' perceptions of preferential treatment, there is a gap in the literature

concerning high school students' perceptions of classroom teachers' treatment of student-athletes.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand students' perceptions of teachers' preferential treatment of high school student-athletes at two Georgia high schools using a multiple case design. Preferential treatment of student-athletes was defined as policies and strategies teachers only provide to student-athletes for them to maintain academic eligibility (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017). One of the theories guiding this study was SCT as it related to high school students' perceptions of classroom teachers' treatment of student-athletes. Student perception is based on the behaviors of the teacher toward student-athletes, the environment of the school and classroom, and their personal beliefs. Further, SCT was a lens through which I sought to understand teacher motivation and ability to recognize and support student-athletes with problems arising from participation in sports (Rogelberg, 2017). The SIT was the lens through which I sought to understand the differences in perceptions that resulted from participants belonging to different social groups such as student-athletes, versus non-student-athletes (Fuller et al., 2019; Hawley et al., 2014).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because of the number of students who participate in sports and may need support. It was also significant due to student perceptions of teacher treatment of student-athletes. As an athletic director who verifies eligibility for student-athletes, I have been involved with coach and teacher discussions on what support student-athletes need to maintain athletic eligibility. This study added to the SCT knowledge base in that students observed how teachers treated student-athletes and constructed knowledge and opinions based on their

perceptions of the teachers' actions (Miller, 2011). The study also supports SIT by determining the different perceptions that various student groups have in the treatment of student-athletes (Hawley et al., 2014). Finally, this study may help teachers understand how students perceive their treatment of student-athletes and how their perceptions may affect their relationships.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions used to guide this study helped me explore the issue of students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes and were developed through a review of the literature as the research plan was developed. The central research question guided the overall research, while each of the sub-questions was designed to gather a deeper understanding of phenomena that may affect the students' overall perceptions.

**Central Research Question:** What are high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes?

#### **Sub-Questions**

**SQ1:** What are non-student-athletes' perceptions of teachers providing academic support for student-athletes due to athletic participation?

**SQ2:** What are student-athletes' perceptions of teachers providing academic support needed for student-athletes due to athletic participation?

**SQ3:** What are students' perceptions of teachers' equitable treatment of student-athletes as compared to non-student-athletes?

The central question emerged from a review of the literature concerning the needs of student-athletes. Researchers found that some high school teachers believed that student-athletes should be allowed preferential treatment because of their needed supports due to participation in sports (Fuller et al., 2017). Researchers also concluded that many college students believed that

college student-athletes received preferential treatment (Fuller et al., 2019). However, I discovered no research investigating high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes.

The first and second sub-questions were designed to examine non-student-athletes' and student-athletes' perceptions of teachers providing academic supports needed by student-athletes due to their participation in athletics. Because of the time commitments and factors such as injuries, student-athletes may need additional academic support (Parker et al., 2016). Students' perceptions of whether a teacher is providing support may create negative feelings between the teacher and students.

The third sub-question arose due to an awareness that inequitable treatment of student-athletes and non-student-athletes may have an effect on relationships between teachers and students (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Fuller et al., 2019). Students need to feel that teachers are fair in their treatment of students while teachers need to ensure that students understand the concept of equitable treatment.

### **Definitions**

In this section, key terms are defined for clarity and uniformity of application.

1. *Academic Eligibility* – Academic eligibility refers to the minimum academic requirement students must maintain to participate in athletics. For this study, a minimum grade of 70% in five out of seven classes from the previous semester was required (Grandy et al., 2016).
2. *Academic Support* – Academic support refers to the support used by educators to assist students with academic learning deficiencies. Examples are extra time to complete assignments, reduction in assignment length, number of assignments, alternative

assignments, tutoring, on-line assistance, recording classes, and providing notes (Grandy et al., 2016).

3. *Attitude* – Attitude is a psychological tendency that involves regarding a situation with favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).
4. *Equitable* – Equitable (or equity), means providing students with what they need to be successful (Smith et al., 2017).
5. *Interscholastic sports* – Interscholastic sports are team sports offered by high schools that fall under the jurisdiction of the state high school athletic association. The schools in this study offered football, cheerleading, softball, baseball, basketball, golf, tennis, cross-country, track, volleyball, wrestling, and soccer (Johnson et al., 2019).
6. *Motivation* – Motivation is a feeling that leads people to perform actions or make efforts to reach goals (Börü, 2018).
7. *Non-student-athlete* – A student who does not participate in interscholastic sports is a non-student-athlete (Fuller et al., 2017).
8. *Preferential treatment* – Preferential treatment refers to teachers treating some students more favorably than others (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017).
9. *Student-athlete* – A student who participates in at least one interscholastic sport is a student athlete (Fuller et al., 2017).

### **Summary**

There is a lack of understanding regarding high school student's perceptions of teacher preferential treatment of student athletes. This exploratory multiple case study was guided by SCT and SIT to gain insight into understanding high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes. While there has been research on high school teachers' and college

level students' perceptions of preferential treatment of student athletes, it is important to gain insight into perceptions of high school students. This study will have significance to school administration and staff as they may understand how students view the actions of teachers and how it may affect relationships between teachers and students. Chapter One introduces the study; Chapters Two and Three comprise a more in-depth review.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Chapter Two is a review of the literature pertaining to the study's theoretical framework and the challenges faced by student-athletes and non-student-athletes. This study was grounded in social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2018; Beauchamp et al., 2018; Font et al., 2016) and social identity theory (SIT) (Brown, 2000; Hogg et al., 2017; Tajfel, 2010). The first section is a review of the theoretical framework and importance of the theories. The second section synthesizes recent literature pertaining to the benefits and challenges related to sports participation. Next, literature is discussed regarding the challenges non-student-athletes have which may influence perceptions of student-athlete preferential treatment. Finally, research regarding current and promising strategies to assist student-athletes and non-student-athletes in academics is discussed. The review was also used to identify a gap in the literature as it relates to students' perceptions of teachers' preferential treatment of student-athletes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In conducting this exploratory multiple case study, it was important to identify a theoretical framework. A theoretical framework is necessary because it is an "explanation of a certain set of observed phenomena in terms of a system of constructs and laws that relate these constructs to each other" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 6). These theoretical constructs are concepts that are "inferred from observed phenomena" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 7). The theoretical frameworks of SCT and SIT were useful in understanding students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes. This literature review explored student-athlete needs due to participation in interscholastic sports, and non-student-athlete needs from other extracurricular participation or other non-school-related issues. Students' perceptions may be influenced by their individual



traits, their environment, their behaviors, and the behavior of others (Bandura, 1999). Students' individual traits may include athleticism and academic ability. Student's environments are made up of the classroom and school climate, home life, and the local community. Students' behaviors include interactions in and out of the classroom with peers, staff, and family. Therefore, this study was focused on the construct of triadic reciprocal causation of Bandura's SCT in that students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes may be influenced by their own traits, their environment, their behavior, and others' behavior.

This study was also grounded in SIT. People tend to associate themselves with groups and base their self-worth, opinion, and behaviors toward others on the group identity (Brown, 2000). For instance, groups may include student-athletes, band students, drama students, gang members, club groups, or students who do not participate in any extracurricular activities. Staff members may also belong to groups, including those with or without athletic backgrounds. The different groups may have conflicting opinions regarding the attitude teachers have on the treatment of student-athletes, which may in turn affect the respect students and teachers have toward each other and impact school culture (O'Neill et al., 2017).

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

According to SCT (1986), knowledge is acquired through the cognitive processing of observational information (Miller, 2011). According to Bandura (1999, 2018), human relationships with others are explained by triadic reciprocal causation in that a person's personal factors, behavioral patterns, and environmental factors influence each other bidirectionally. Personal factors include cognitive, affective, and biological events (Bandura, 2001). These personal factors can have an impact on teacher treatment of student-athletes and students' perceptions of this treatment. The environment of the school setting may be very influential to

behaviors and perceptions. For example, high profile and successful athletic programs may have a different feel to students than one with a lower profile or success.

I looked at studies in which SCT was used to determine if actions by individuals were based on their self-efficacy. Font et al. (2016) noted that “sustainable empathy can be partly explained by the relationship between the person acting and the beneficiary of their sustainable actions” (p. 66). Developing a strong relationship with the student-athlete may give the teacher greater empathy for the issues related to being an athlete and provide them with greater motivation to help that student. According to Rubenstein et al. (2018, p. 102), “Self-efficacy is a motivational belief and key aspect of SCT.” Teachers need motivation to provide for the needs of student-athletes. Other studies have shown that an increase in self-efficacy can improve aspects of a person’s behavior (Ozyilmaz et al., 2018). For instance, in a study that included cancer survivors, Stacey et al. (2015) found that after interventions that increased self-efficacy, cancer survivors also increased their physical activity rates.

Although SCT may help explain a teacher’s motives for having empathy for student-athletes and provide them with additional support, there may be unintended consequences in relation to both student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Bandura (2018) noted people self-regulate morality, which in turn determines self-regard and ability to live in peace with themselves. However, they can violate their morals and dispute the effect it has on others by rationalizing their actions are beneficial to some and harmless to others (Bandura, 2018). Student-athletes may develop an unfavorable perception of teachers who, due to their moral values, decline to provide academic support to student-athletes. Conversely, if a teacher decides to go against their moral value of offering additional assistance to student-athletes, because it is beneficial to those students, non-student-athletes may develop an unfavorable perception of the

teacher's fairness in the treatment of all students. In either case, the student's unfavorable perception of the teacher's treatment of student-athletes may create cognitive distortions in which the students believe that they are being harmed and, thus, their emotions and behaviors are negatively impacted (Barsky, 2017).

### **Social Identity Theory**

SIT is based on the belief that people want to achieve or maintain a positive social identity through interactions within and out of their social group (Brown, 2000). As individuals identify with a group, they take on its identity, seeking sameness of the group, but distinction from those outside the group (Hogg et al., 2017; Hornung et al., 2018; Steffens et al., 2018). People tend to believe that their social group is superior to other groups and may behave in a discriminatory manner.

SIT is important to this study because researcher have found that student-athletes and non-student-athletes may have different opinions on how student-athletes should be treated (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017; Hawley et al., 2014; Hogg et al., 2017). Hawley et al. (2014) noted that when a student-athlete required punishment, student-athletes wanted less punishment for that athlete than teachers and non-student-athletes felt was appropriate. Hawley et al. also reported that athletes and non-athletes believe most students and teachers have negative attitudes toward student-athletes regarding academics, press exposure, and privilege. Steffens et al. (2018) found that people within groups believe that they have qualitatively different characteristics from those outside the group supporting the idea that student-athletes may have different perceptions of how teachers treat them as opposed to those not within their group, including non-student-athletes and teachers (Hogg et al., 2017; Hornung et al., 2018).

Teachers may look at students differently when determining the support each group needs such, as special education students or those with 504 plans. Some teachers may also look at student-athletes differently, giving them preferential treatment such as extra time to complete assignments, time off from class for practice or games, or additional tutoring to help them remain academically eligible (Fuller et al., 2017). Student-athletes may come to feel entitled to preferential treatment while non-student-athletes may feel resentful that a group of students receives special benefits (Hawley et al., 2014). Students need to believe teachers treat students equitably to prevent a negative influence on the teacher-student relationship (Mitchell et al., 2018). Educators need to be cognizant of the needs of all students and provide the support that each student needs.

SCT and SIT are important to this study because of their implications to the relationships between teachers, student-athletes, and non-student-athletes. They helped shape the design and contributed to the analysis. As the data were analyzed, these theories were used to help formulate practical policies that can be used to support both student-athletes and non-student-athletes and have a positive impact on teacher-student relations and school climate.

### **Related Literature**

With the rise of social media and the proliferation of 24-hour sports programming, the recruitment of high school athletes has become more scrutinized. Student-athletes, especially elite athletes vying for scholarships to high-profile programs are under increased pressure to maintain academic eligibility (O'Neill et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2016). Researchers found that high school teachers perceived that student-athletes received preferential treatment, especially academically in the form of extended time, extra tutoring, excused class time, or even grade inflation (Fuller et al., 2017). However, Fuller et al. (2017) noted that not all teachers believed

student-athletes should receive additional help. However, their attitudes may be influenced by a better understanding of the unique needs of these students (Fuller et al., 2017; O'Neill et al., 2017). O'Neill et al. (2017) found that teachers with no athletic background may not be fully aware of the issues that student-athletes face. Fuller et al. (2017) noted that teacher attitudes regarding preferential treatment corresponds to SIT; teachers who were or are athletes were more likely to believe student-athletes deserved preferential treatment. Fuller et al. (2019) also found that college students perceived that student-athletes received preferential treatment in the form of additional time to complete assignments and relaxed grading standards. These same college students said this preferential treatment resulted in negative feelings for both college student-athletes and professors. Researchers have also shown that non-student-athletes may have challenges that could affect their academics (Chinyakata et al., 2019; Wadood et al., 2018).

### **Extracurricular Participation**

Participation in extracurricular activities, including sports and other activities such as clubs, band, and chorus, has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement (Bradley & Conway, 2016; Chen, 2016; Haghighat & Knifsend, 2019; Im et al., 2016). For some students, participating in extracurricular activities increases self-efficacy, which in turn results in conscientiousness, motivation, and persistence (Bradley & Conway, 2016). Participation in extracurricular activities also increases self-esteem, social skills, and school connectedness (Bradley & Conway, 2016). Students who feel connected to their school demonstrate higher levels of educational success and more positive behavioral outcomes, especially Hispanic students (Niehaus et al., 2016).

Research established that participating in extracurricular activities has benefits that continue over time (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2019; Im et al., 2016). Haghighat and Knifsend

(2019) found that 10th-grade students who participated in a variety of extracurricular activities placed greater value on their educational achievement which led to higher educational attainment. They posited that extracurricular activities motivated students to spend additional time on schoolwork and place a higher value on education. Im et al. (2016) also noted positive benefits of extracurricular participation as students exhibited an increase in academic self-efficacy and were confident in their ability to overcome challenges. Im et al. discovered that although student-athletes had confidence in their academic ability, their academic achievement was lower than those who participated in non-sport extracurricular activities.

Students from low socioeconomic status (SES) families may also benefit from participation in extracurricular activities. Marchetti et al. (2016) discovered that students from low SES families who participated in extracurricular activity performed better on math and reading benchmarks than those who did not. Several factors may have contributed to their academic success, including a wish to remain academically eligible to participate and a sense of belonging and connection to the school (Marchetti et al., 2016). Morris (2016) also found that extracurricular participation had a positive impact on high school math achievement and four-year college attendance rates, regardless of family income. Extracurricular participation has also been shown to have a positive impact on students with disabilities (Palmer et al., 2017). Palmer et al. (2017) observed that students with disabilities who participated in extracurricular activities in high school had a greater likelihood of completing a post-secondary degree.

Research indicates extracurricular activities has a positive impact on student motivation (Denault & Guay, 2016). Denault and Guay (2016) discovered that participation in extracurricular activities was especially beneficial to students from disadvantaged neighborhoods. Students from disadvantaged neighborhoods who participated in extracurricular

activities enjoyed learning and going to school more than those who did not (Denault & Guay, 2016).

### **Sports Participation Benefits**

Physical activity and involvement in sports can be beneficial to students. Researchers noted that physical fitness improved cognition and neurological functions due to increased blood flow to the brain (Andersen et al., 2016). Andersen et al. (2016) discovered a significant positive relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement for students of different socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic groups, and gender. While research has shown positive relationships between sports participation and academic achievement, research by Dyer et al. (2017) indicated that socioeconomic status and gender may influence those positive relationships.

Wretmen (2017) observed that students who participated in any form of sport saw benefits in academics, self-esteem, and body image perceptions. Participation in sports may even influence whether a student decides to attend college. Shifrer et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between high school sports participation and college enrollment across genders and ethnicities. However, they noted that since girls' participation in high school sports were lower than boys', they benefitted less.

Research indicates that there are various benefits from physical activity (Andersen et al., 2016; Wretman, 2017). While schools should be encouraging physical activity and sport participation, they need to understand the needs of student-athletes and offer the support they need.

## **Student-Athlete Needs**

Student-athletes must balance a variety of commitments to excel athletically and maintain academic eligibility (Parker et al., 2016). According to Gomez et al. (2018), “Balancing priorities is key as the high-performance student-athlete aims to reach a high level academically while continuing to perform in their sport” (p, 330). Student-athletes have a variety of challenges related to their sport and demanding academic requirements (Parker et al., 2016). Parker et al. (2016) found that student-athletes encountered physical challenges such as fatigue, rest and recovery demands, injury, and time constraints because of training requirements and competitions that overlapped with class schedules. Further, research indicates that student-athletes experience mental health benefits and negative mental health issues trying to balance athletics with academic requirements (Sheehan et al., 2018). A literature review of the challenges student-athletes have is needed to lay a foundation for understanding teachers’ perceptions and their self-efficacy in assisting student-athletes in overcoming these challenges.

## ***Academics***

One requirement for participating in athletics in high school is maintaining academic eligibility, but there is conflicting research regarding how academics are affected by participation in sports. Schultz (2017) conducted a study to determine if student-athletes’ grades increased when the student-athlete was not participating in interscholastic sports. Schultz discovered that the level of the athlete and the type of course had an impact on the student-athlete’s academic performance. First, there was a negative in-season effect on the grade point average (GPA) for varsity athletes in English and history courses. This negative effect may have been due to significantly more reading requirements than math or science courses. However, Schultz noted that junior varsity players had an increase in GPA due to higher grades in math and science.



Schultz suggested that there was an academic cost for varsity athletes due to the additional time spent on their sport.

Pestana et al. (2018) argued that students who engaged in sports or other physical activities actually did not perform lower academically; however, they noted that other variables could have had an impact on the results, “such as parental educational support, the positive attitude of teachers, and the motivation of children in relation to school” (p. 643). Levine et al. (2014) found that student-athletes who only socialized with other student-athletes who underperformed on academics were also more likely to underperform on academics, a phenomenon known as pluralistic ignorance. However, the researchers conducted the study on college student-athletes, and they noted that additional studies were needed to determine if the same effect occurred in high school student-athletes. Levine et al. also noted that the athletes, while underperforming in academics, prioritized academics over athletics.

**Attendance.** Absences due to missed class time from injury may affect student-athletes. Bretzin et al. (2018) discovered that sometimes students with concussions only missed one or two full days, but returned for half-days for up to 12 days. Research indicates that absences can have a negative impact on student achievement. Dey (2018) found that absenteeism had a negative impact on students’ academics. Lukkarinen et al. (2016) and Kassarnig et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between teacher motivation and student attendance levels. Rendleman (2017) noted that “attendance itself had a consistent positive impact on grades from year to year” (p. 350).

Dey (2018) and Kwak et al. (2019) concluded that students who struggled academically could benefit most from attending class regularly. Kwak et al. noted that that face-to-face instruction was crucial to academic performance but noted that the quality of the instructor could

be important to the learning process. Both studies indicated that face-to-face interaction was beneficial to the weakest students. That is important for this study in that student-athletes who may be struggling academically may fall further behind by missing classes. It is imperative that teachers understand how injuries due to sports participation may result in attendance issues for student-athletes and therefore prepare remediation and additional assistance if needed.

**Attitudes.** Another overlooked aspect of student-athlete academic performance is their attitude about academics, and teacher and non-student-athlete attitudes about student-athletes. Brown (2016) conducted a study to determine the attitudes on ethics and performance in two private schools with elite athletic programs. The student-athletes did not perceive themselves as being “brainy” and consequently, had a lower opinion of their academics. Likewise, the coaches had a lower opinion of the student-athletes’ academic abilities compared to non-student-athletes. The coaches and students believed that sacrifices had to be made to be elite athletes, and one of those sacrifices was academics. Both coaches and student-athletes considered these private schools to be a non-academic entity. The coaches considered student-athletes who focused solely on their sports to be good role models.

Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) conducted a study on college student-athletes and discovered that attitudes of student-athletes about academics was determined by how they viewed themselves in relation to their peer groups. Student-athletes who considered themselves students first and identified more with non-student-athlete groups tended to view themselves as more academic in nature and performed higher in academics. Conversely, student-athletes who identified more with athletes and had a low opinion of athletes’ academic abilities had lower academic performance. This reinforces SIT in that students tend to identify with specific groups and conform their behavior to the groups’ norms (Hogg et al., 2017; Hornung et al., 2018).

Cosh and Tully (2014) interviewed 20 elite Australian student-athletes regarding their attitudes toward academics. The student-athletes prioritized their sport above academics. Most of the student-athletes believed that they were more than capable of high achievement in academics, but that sport commitments were more important. Student-athletes felt obligated to do enough academic work to maintain academic eligibility.

Student athletes' attitudes toward academics may also be impacted by burnout. Gustafsson et al. (2018) studied the motivational profiles of 391 elite athletes to determine if different types of motivation had an impact on sports burnout. They discovered that athletes with more extrinsic motivation than intrinsic motivation were more likely to experience burnout and devaluation of the importance of sport. This is relevant to the academics of student-athletes because if the student-athletes begin to lose motivation and enthusiasm in their sport, they may lose interest in academics (O'Neil et al., 2021).

The attitudes of teachers, coaches, and administrators also play an important role in assisting student-athletes and their unique needs. Fuller et al. (2017) discovered that while most staff agreed that student-athletes need and receive additional treatment, some staff opposed providing it. Staff with a background in athletics were more likely to believe that student-athletes should receive preferential treatment. This finding is relevant because if a teacher does not believe student-athletes deserve academic support they may not allow make-up work for missing assignments. Conversely, if a teacher with an athletic background provides preferential treatment to student-athletes while ignoring the needs of non-athletes, the non-student athletes may harbor feelings of resentment (Fuller et al., 2019).

Rubin and Moses (2017) found that the perceptions of student-athletes toward non-student-athletes depended on what groups the non-student-athletes belonged. Rubin and Moses

(2017) found that student-athletes believed non-student-athletes had a negative view of student-athletes' academic abilities and among student-athletes, the views of male student-athletes and female student-athletes differed. Male student-athletes tended to view female student-athletes as more academically inclined while female student-athletes did not think male student-athletes approached academics seriously. They also found that student-athletes believed that staff had negative perceptions of student-athletes' academic abilities.

Other research indicated that student-athletes opinions of themselves had an affect on their academics. Riciputi and Erdal (2017) found that student-athletes who felt they were stereotyped as "dumb jocks" seemed to attempt fewer problems and perform lower in math than non-student-athletes. They pointed out that while student-athletes attempted significantly fewer problems than their classmates on math assessments, they may have gone slower to be more accurate on the problems, thereby focusing on accuracy instead of speed.

In their study of college student perceptions of student-athletes, Wininger and White (2015) discovered that the dumb jock stereotype was prevalent among non-student-athletes. Not only did students perceive student-athletes as low-performing but they also felt that teachers had lower academic expectations for them. Student-athletes were aware of the non-student-athlete's perceptions but felt that teachers had higher, not lower, academic expectations for them. In addition, the student-athletes felt that teachers and other students were willing to provide academic help because they were student-athletes. However, help from others may not necessarily be viewed as a positive. Wininger and White asserted that academic assistance might be "preferential treatment or sympathy because student-athletes are viewed as less capable academically" (p. 83).

Other researchers pointed out that some teachers realize the impact sports participation has on student-athletes. O'Neill et al. (2017) noted that some teachers have observed the exhaustion and time issues faced by student-athletes, empathizing with the plight of the student-athlete and the need for teachers to understand the issues. They pointed out that teachers without athletic backgrounds may not fully understand the demands student-athletes encounter; therefore, it is imperative that administration and teachers with this background help others gain an awareness of the workloads and commitments of student-athletes.

Students may also be able to perceive a teacher's attitudes in the outward emotions they exhibit when extending additional support to students. Jiang et al. (2016) found that if teachers are unable to self-regulate their emotions or exhibit negative emotions in front of students, it may have an overall negative impact on the relationships. Thus, how teachers respond to giving support to student-athletes may impact their relationship with all students.

**Time Management.** Time management is an area of focus among researchers investigating academic achievement among student-athletes. Student-athletes must spend significant time training and competing (Gomez et al., 2018; O'Neill et al., 2021). Cosh and Tully (2014) interviewed athletes who discussed how time commitments to their sport reduced the amount of time available for academics, and how their sport took precedence over academics. The athletes stated that they only did enough to stay academically eligible. In a study of nine student-athletes at an Irish university, Gomez et al. (2018) observed that time management was the most common source of stress among the athletes. They discovered that poor time management could "lead to a feeling of inadequacy, impact negatively on athletic performance and academic results" (p. 336). Student-athletes reported frustration balancing athletics and

academics. The most important outcome of this study was need to teach time management to student-athletes to counter the demands of the sport.

Cosh and Tully (2014) was also investigated time management. In their study, the athletes discussed how time commitments to their sport reduced the amount of time available for academics, and they believed their sport should take precedence over the academics, doing only enough to stay academically eligible. Schultz (2017), however, only observed time management issues to be a problem for varsity-level athletes in high schools. Schulz's research focused on the student-athletes' grades in-season versus off-season for their sport. While the difference in grade point average (GPA) was significant between in-season and off-season for English and social studies due to the outside reading time commitments, these varsity student-athletes' overall GPAs were not significantly reduced in-season. Student-athletes had higher math and science GPAs in-season, which helped to offset the lower English and social studies GPAs.

### ***Physical***

Student-athletes also must deal with the physical toll from athletic participation. Student-athletes may experience mental and physical exhaustion (O'Neill et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2016). Furthermore, student-athletes are subject to injuries that may force them to miss class or struggle to concentrate (Bretzin et al., 2018; Kasamatsu et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2015). Sports related injuries may affect student-athletes' academic performance due to missed class time or cognitive issues (Bretzin et al., 2018; Kasamatsu et al., 2016; O'Neill et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2015).

**Fatigue.** Student-athletes must also deal with mental and physical fatigue (Parker et al., 2016). Studying 669 university freshman athletes and non-athletes, Parker et al. (2016) determined that interventions such as attributional retraining and motivation intervention

treatment can help student-athletes overcome issues related to persistence. Student-athletes may come to school physically and mentally exhausted from participating in sports and staying up late trying to complete a school assignment (O'Neill et al., 2017). The exhaustion can affect focus, putting further strain on their academic endeavors (Parker et al., 2016).

Researchers found that students who had inconsistent sleep patterns demonstrated lower academic performance than those with regular sleep patterns (Urrila et al., 2017). This is relevant in that student-athletes may be staying up later during the week because of athletic commitments and trying to catch up on sleep during the weekend. Urrila et al. (2017) reported that even though students were able to sleep longer on weekends, their inconsistent sleep patterns seemed to indicate that their school performance still suffered. Driller et al. (2017) noted that student-athletes slept less and had poorer sleep habits compared to non-student-athletes. They attributed the student-athletes' poor sleep habits to their late-day practice times, caffeine intake, and staying awake thinking about their sports performance or upcoming contests.

Skein et al. (2019) reported that student-athletes were sleep deprived and not getting the recommended eight to ten hours of sleep per night. They noted that the student-athletes also sacrificed time engaged in social activities and meal times while also noting that the stress caused by sleep deprivation may also impact both school and sporting performance.

Harding et al. (2018) found that students who experienced tiredness or sleepiness during the day exhibited sluggish cognitive abilities and experienced negative effects on their academic performance. Since many student-athletes stay up late to finish school assignments or report to school early for workouts, they may be susceptible to feelings of sluggishness and sleepiness (Harding et al.). Cadime et al. (2016) discovered that while tiredness or exhaustion may not be completely related to lower academic achievement, it might indicate that a student is

experiencing stress, which may lead to reduced energy. Cadime et al. saw the correlation between exhaustion and low academic achievement as weak but indicated that students who experienced sports-related stress while trying to maintain academic achievement may have their academics impacted by fatigue.

**Injury.** Injuries in athletics are common, including sprains, broken bones, concussions, and major trauma that may require hospitalization. Injuries may cause students to miss class time, which may result in falling behind in academics. Injuries to the brain such as concussions may also result in cognitive issues that can affect a student-athlete's long-term neurological development (Cover et al., 2018).

The most prevalent sports injury discussed in recent years is the concussion (Rosenthal et al., 2014; Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). Kasamatsu et al. (2016) determined that many athletic trainers do not have a policy regarding the resumption of academics following a concussion and recommended that student-athletes get both physical and cognitive rest. This includes a delay in returning to school, extended time to complete assignments, and educational modifications such as restricted use of technological devices (Kasamatsu et al., 2016; Kolodziej & Ploeg, 2016). Williams et al. (2015) noted that more experienced athletic trainers were more knowledgeable on concussion protocols for student-athletes, and they should share their knowledge with younger athletic trainers and other staff members such as teachers. An important note for educators is that female athletes have a greater risk for concussion than males because of anatomical differences in their neck and head areas (Bretzin et al., 2018). While this may mean they miss substantially more athletic time than males, females do not miss significantly more class time than males.

Other injuries may also have an impact on student-athletes. Broken bones can cause mobility and pain issues that negatively influence academic performance. The inherent risk in



aggressive and violent contact sports such as football can lead to severe injuries (Caine et al., 2014; McCunn et al., 2017). Singh et al. (2015) reported that major dental injuries may lead to academic struggles also, impacting communication between a student-athlete and the teacher.

Some educators may lack the awareness or training on how to work with students with sports-related injuries. Valovich et al. (2017) found that student-athletes perceived inconsistencies in educators' abilities to assist them appropriately when they returned to the classroom after an injury. Injuries may keep students from class due to recovery or medical treatment creating situations where they may fall behind in academics.

### **Non-Student-Athletes**

As noted in the previous sections, student-athletes have a variety of needs that should be met by educators because they participate in interscholastic sports. However, many students do not participate in sports but do have time commitments to other extra-curricular school activities such as clubs, band, or chorus, or part-time jobs. These students may also have academic, behavioral, and social needs that should be met by the schools. Students perceive unfairness when they see students receiving preferential treatment (Trusz, 2017). Fuller et al. (2019) observed that most college non-student-athletes perceived that student-athletes received preferential treatment in the classroom. The non-student-athletes were resentful that student-athletes were able to turn in assignments late, miss class with no repercussions, benefit from less stringent grading standards, and display disruptive behavior without consequence (Fuller et al., 2019).

### ***Part-Time student employment***

Students participating in extracurricular activities other than sports reap benefits such as academic success and a feeling of school connectedness. However, some extracurricular activity

consists of part-time work that is unrelated to school. Students may work weeknights and weekends, thus limiting their time to complete schoolwork. Research on students who work part-time has mixed results; some studies indicate students who work part-time struggle academically (Chinyakata et al., 2019; Wadood et al., 2018) and others indicate students who work part-time experience positive, negative, or no effects (Hwang & Domina, 2017; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2016).

Chinyakata et al. (2019) found that college students who worked part-time struggled academically for a variety of reasons, including higher absenteeism and missing academic deadlines. The students could not join other students to study. Fatigue and stress from balancing work and school created issues with concentration that caused some students to fail classes or have low academic performance. Some of the students took longer to complete degrees or dropped out (Chinyakata et al., 2019).

Several studies have pointed out the effects of part-time work may be related to the number of hours worked each week. Wadood et al. (2018) found that students who worked more than 20 hours per week had more school absenteeism and struggled academically; however, students who worked 10-15 hours per week developed skills that helped them in school, like time management. Conversely, Hwang and Domina (2017) found that the more hours a student worked, the more likely they would experience negative academic outcomes. Interestingly, the students most impacted by working longer hours were White students. Students of other races did not report as much part-time work during the school year and were not impacted as greatly (Hwang & Domina, 2017).

Van Houtte and Stevens (2016) found that working part-time did not appear to be related to elevated grades. However, they did note that students in a vocational track and working were

less likely to see the value of school, which led to a higher dropout rate among those students. Even though they were passing classes, the students reported feelings of having no control over their success at school and a sense of hopelessness of their future in school (Van Houte & Stevens, 2016).

### ***Other Challenges***

Research suggests that non-student-athletes have some disadvantages that may need to be addressed by educators. Student-athletes tend to be more cooperative, self-confident, and exhibit higher levels of leadership and self-respect (Celse et al., 2017). Hoffer and Giddings (2016) discovered that student-athletes displayed higher levels of willpower than non-student-athletes because they learned to overcome obstacles experienced in their sport. Kniffin et al. (2015) noted that non-student-athletes had less persistence in completing tasks than student-athletes.

As classrooms have moved from traditional lecture delivery to hands-on and collaborative learning, teachers design lessons accordingly. Celse et al. (2017) observed that employees who played competitive sports in school exhibited significantly better collaborative behavior due to having been a part of a team focused on collaboration. While non-student-athletes may also exhibit collaborative traits, educators need to be cognizant that they have had fewer opportunities to experience collegial activities and may need guidance during group activities.

Other characteristics conducive to students successful are willpower and persistence. Hoffer and Giddings (2016) observed that non-student-athletes' lost willpower and persistence significantly faster than student-athletes when trying to complete difficult tasks. They theorized that it was due to years of training and development that the non-athletes did not have. Educators

need to understand that non-student-athletes may not have the same persistence and willpower that student-athletes have to overcome learning struggles.

Kniffin et al. (2015) found that student-athletes exhibited higher levels of leadership, self-confidence, and self-respect than their non-student-athlete peers. Students who struggle with self-confidence and low educational expectations may have more academic struggles (Binning et al., 2018). Teachers need to be aware that non-student-athletes have not experienced the same opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-respect as student-athletes, so they may need to develop strategies and activities to improve these characteristics (Binning et al., 2018; Kniffin et al., 2015). Schools should consider classes designed to develop these skills for non-student-athletes, especially since Kniffin et al. determined that such skills manifested as workplace success and prosocial behaviors later in life.

### **School Responsibilities**

School officials need be cognizant of student-athlete needs and prepare teachers and staff to work with students to mitigate challenges they face due to participation in sports. This can be done by ensuring at-risk student-athletes are identified and appropriate interventions such as the motivation treatment intervention are applied (Parker et al., 2016). Staff should be trained in student-athlete needs pertaining to academics, injuries, and policies and procedures that can be used to overcome academic obstacles (Kasamatsu et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2015). Staff needs to be aware that the emotional maturity of the student-athletes may be a factor in how they are able to cope with the stresses that come from balancing academics and athletics (Nicholls et al., 2015).

In addition to student athletes, school officials must consider the perceptions of non-student-athletes and teachers on student-athletes receiving preferential treatment. Providing for

the needs of one group of students while deferring the needs of others could lead to the perception that some students are receiving preferential treatment (Fuller et al., 2019; Trusz, 2017). Fuller et al. (2019) found that perceptions that student-athletes are receiving preferential treatment may lead to resentment among non-student-athletes. Fuller et al. (2017) found that some teachers perceived pressures from coaches and administrators to provide preferential treatment, causing some resentment among teachers.

### ***Extracurricular Opportunities***

Since research has shown that students who participate in extracurricular activities tend to have a higher connectedness to their schools (Bradley & Conway, 2016), it would be beneficial to provide a variety of extracurricular activities. School connectedness has been shown to increase student engagement; therefore, schools with diverse populations could benefit from providing extracurricular opportunities to support minority populations that have been shown to feel less connected to schools than their White counterparts (Niehaus et al., 2016).

### ***Teacher-Student relationships***

Research has shown that teacher-student relationships play an important role in the academic success of students. Claessens et al. (2017) found that motivation and learning are related to student and teacher relationships. Yu et al. (2018) discovered that positive teacher-student relationships resulted in mutual feelings of trust, respect, closeness, and an increase in academic skills. Forsberg et al. (2021) found that caring and supportive relationships between students and teachers positively affected school climate. Positive relationships with students also have been shown to have benefits for teachers. Westfall et al. (2018) found that coaches experience less burnout when they experience positive relationships with their student-athletes.

In their study, Martin and Collie, (2019) found that student engagement increased as the number of positive relationships between students and teachers increased. Rankin et al. (2016) found that school climate and the relationship between student-athletes and teachers is related to the academic success of student-athletes. Rankin et al. noted that the climate student-athletes encountered in the classroom, as indicated by the interaction between athletes and teachers, had the greatest potential to advance academic achievement. Positive interaction between athletic personnel, such as coaches and trainers, and student-athletes also have the potential to yield positive academic results for student-athletes. This may be due to elevated self-esteem and self-efficacy through positive interactions with the staff (Rankin et al., 2016). Bradley and Conway (2016) also noted the importance of school climate. They said that promoting varied extracurricular activities was vital and that interaction between teachers and students was a gauge of the benefits of the activity.

Konold et al. (2017) noted positive school climate was associated with higher levels of student engagement, especially among White and Hispanic students. Black students perceived teachers as less supportive and more demanding and they felt that teachers treated them unfairly behaviorally and academically, expecting more from them than other classmates. Voight et al. (2015) found that Black and Hispanic students perceived less favorable relationships with teachers. These studies point out the need for educators to understand the perceptions of populations who think they are treated unfairly compared to other populations and may not have experience a positive connection with the adults in the school.

Because of the connection between student and teacher relationships and academic success, Rytivaara and Frelin (2017) suggested that state and local school leaders should incorporate staff development on the relationship building skills needed for supportive

relationships with students. They also suggested that time blocks be built into the school day to provide opportunities for teachers to get to know students on a personal level. Elhay and Hershkovitz (2019) found that communication in and out of the classroom plays a large role in creating and promoting a positive classroom climate and relationships with students. They recommended that teachers work on communication skills while being cognizant of the ethical dilemmas and challenges of social media interaction between students and teachers.

### ***Scheduling***

One area in which schools may consider is monitoring, with the goal of reducing, student-athlete absences because of athletic scheduling (Hancock et al., 2018). Skien et al. (2019) found that student-athletes reported higher stress levels due to the scheduling demands of sporting competitions since the students had to leave school early or come home late after the competition. This left little time for rest or completion of homework. While schools may not be able to remedy student-athletes missing class due to injuries, scheduling might reduce or eliminate the need for athletes to leave school early or get home late. Schools could schedule contests earlier in the day and possibly on weekends. As noted, missing class can have adverse effects on a student's academic performance, so it is important for schools to work on reducing the amount of time an athlete misses class.

### ***Stakeholder Collaboration***

Research has shown that student academic achievement is enhanced through collaboration among stakeholders, especially when teachers collaborate for instructional practices (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). In a qualitative study on promoting academic engagement in Black male student-athletes, Harris et al. (2014) discovered that a collaborative effort between the school, family, and community was the best approach to support them academically.

Post et al. (2019) discussed the importance of stakeholder collaboration for student-athletes who participate on both school and club teams for the same sport. They found that coaches from both teams and parents need to collaborate to ensure that student-athletes do not exceed the recommended time of sports participation each week so as to not contribute to possible overuse injuries (Post et al. 2019). Currently, it is recommended that the maximum hours per week for youth to participate in sports be equal or less than their age (Post et al.)

Conner (2017) completed research on the impact of stakeholder collaboration between diverse groups for Native American students. The results of the study showed that higher levels of collaboration among the stakeholders had a positive effect on student outcomes. While these studies focused on specific groups of students, the results show that stakeholder collaboration is beneficial for all students.

### *Coaches*

Coaches can play a vital role in assessing and attending to the needs of student-athletes. Coaches often develop strong personal relationships with players. Research has shown that for most coaches, their greatest joy comes from developing student-athlete growth, athletically and academically, and seeing lifelong growth and success (Baltzell et al., 2014; Cranmer et al., 2020). To ensure a player remains eligible, coaches are generally aware of academic standing, but coaches are not always trained to support student-athletes with their academic needs. Banwell and Kerr (2016) conducted a qualitative study that included eight head coaches from a Canadian university and found that most did not understand how to stimulate the personal development of student-athletes. Most of the coaches thought developing student-athletes encompassed offering life skills training and academic support. While this training is helpful, it is less than a holistic approach.



Fuller et al. (2017) noted instances wherein coaches tried to pressure teachers into changing grades or inflating grades to help student-athletes remain academically eligible. If non-student-athletes become aware of grade inflation for student-athletes, conflict may occur among groups (Fuller et al., 2019; Hawley et al., 2014). Instead of trying to influence teachers for grade inflation or changes, coaches should work with schools on providing effective remedial or tutoring opportunities for student-athletes. Hazzaa et al. (2018) found that student-athlete academic performance was enhanced when provided with academic advising programs that were tailored to the athlete's specific academic needs.

Coaches also serve a pivotal role in keeping student-athletes healthy by monitoring the health of the athletes and adopting proper injury prevention strategies (Norcross et al., 2015). Keeping student-athletes healthy and less prone to injury will help reduce absenteeism. Coaches should also be aware of how much time the student-athletes are participating in sports both at the school and with club teams. Post et al. (2019) found that neither high school coaches nor club coaches were tracking the amount of time student-athletes were participating in both sports. Due to a lack of communication between coaches, student-athletes who participated in both high school and club sports may have been exceeding the recommended time constraints for their sport (Post et al.). Post et al. noted that the excessive time spent participating in one sport increases the chance of overuse injuries. High school coaches need to implement communication policies with parents, student-athletes, and other coaches to make sure that the athletes are not exceeding the recommended number of hours per week participating in sports.

### ***Administration***

Previous research provides evidence that school-level leadership is a strong contributor to student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2019). School administration can provide help to teachers

and staff in meeting the academic needs of both student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Policies and procedures need to be implemented to assess and meet the needs of the student-athletes and non-student-athletes (Harris et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2016) and provide professional development (Banwell & Kerr, 2016; Kasamatsu et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2015). Administration also needs to ensure that non-student-athletes are aware of the needs of student-athletes. SIT (Tajfel, 2010) substantiates that non-student-athletes may not share all of the values and beliefs of student-athletes which could lead to tension and conflict among the two groups and staff as well.

Administration needs to be aware of and sensitive to pressures exerted on teachers to provide preferential treatment to student athletes (Fuller et al., 2017). Fuller et al. (2017) found that teachers perceived social pressures from coaches and administrators to provide preferential treatment to student-athletes. The researchers concluded that administration needs to implement clearly defined policies and practices in the treatment of student-athletes to mitigate the pressures perceived by the teachers (Fuller et al.).

Teachers without an athletic background may not understand the demands and commitments required of student-athletes (O'Neill et al., 2017). Conversely, teachers with an athletic background may provide support to student-athletes without considering the needs of non-student-athletes (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017; O'Neill et al., 2017). The administration should ensure that staff is aware of the necessity of providing support to both groups of students based on their needs. Fuller et al. (2019) noted that non-student-athletes should be made aware that support may also be available to them if circumstances require, such as extended absences due to injury or illness. Non-student-athletes who have after-school work commitments or other school-related activities can also be provided with additional time to

complete assignments; the same support afforded that is offered to student-athletes.

Administration can also determine if providing programs for promoting and developing leadership, self-confidence, and self-respect targeting non-student-athletes would be beneficial as these skills are important in and out of school (Kniffin et al., 2015).

### **Summary**

Participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, band, chorus, and clubs has been reported to increase self-esteem and confidence, thus boosting student academic achievement (Bradley & Conway, 2016; Chen, 2016; Haghghat & Knifsend, 2019; Im et al., 2016). Further, Bradley and Conway found that extracurricular participation may increase a student's sense of the value of education and their connectedness to a school, which also has a positive impact on academic success. Extracurricular participation has been linked to increased motivation (Denault & Guay, 2016), and post-secondary completion for high school students with disabilities (Palmer et al., 2017). While participation in extracurricular activities has shown benefits for student-athletes and non-student-athletes, there are challenges that come from this participation,

Student-athletes have several challenges that may affect their ability to achieve academic success and their emotional well-being. One of the most obvious is the time commitment required to participate in sports (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Gomez et al., 2018; Shultz, 2017). Time commitments to athletics take away time that could be spent on academics, possibly compromising academic achievement, creating stress, and even depression (Gomez et al., 2018; Skein et al., 2019). The time commitments also leave less time for socialization, including with family, which may cause additional stress on the student-athlete. Student-athletes also may miss classes due event scheduling or treatment due to injuries. Missing class time may have a negative academic impact (Lukkarinen et al., 2016; Rendleman, 2017). Some student-athletes may also

have a passive attitude regarding academics, prioritizing athletics and doing the minimum required for academic eligibility (Cosh & Tully, 2014).

Physical impairments are another challenge for student-athletes. Physical exertion from training and contests can cause tiredness and exhaustion, which in turn may lead to an inability to focus on academics (Parker et al., 2016; Harding et al., 2018). Sleep deprivation may lead to stress for student-athletes and lead to challenges with school and sporting performance (Skein et al., 2019). Injuries may cause missed class time due to recuperation, physical therapy, and other medical appointments (Bretzin et al., 2018; Caine et al., 2014; Rosenthal et al., 2014; Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). Educators need to be aware of, and know how to mitigate common injuries such as concussions that can have lasting cognitive effects that impair academic progress (Cover et al., 2018; Valovich et al., 2017).

While student-athletes have various needs, non-student-athletes may also have needs that require attention. Students in other extracurricular activities also may have time restraints on their non-school hours. Students who work part-time jobs, especially those that work more than 20 hours per week may experience time conflicts, fatigue, and absenteeism (Chinyakata et al., 2019; Wadood et al., 2018). Furthermore, students who do not participate in sports may lack the experiences necessary to develop characteristics such as persistence, willpower, self-confidence, and self-respect (Kniffin et al., 2015).

Schools can try to alleviate the challenges incurred by participating in sports by offering additional time to complete assignments or offering additional tutoring services to help students close gaps in learning (Fuller et al., 2019). Schools can also work on scheduling of sporting competitions to minimize the class time missed and collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure that student-athletes do not exceed the recommended time spent on a sport in a week (Conner,

2017; Post et al., 2019). Fuller et al. (2019) discussed how schools can also make a concerted effort to improve school climate and build positive relationships between teachers and students by providing professional development on relationship-building and scheduling time for relationship-building and maintenance. Positive relationships between teachers and students have been shown increase student engagement in the classroom (Martin & Collie, 2019). Teachers and coaches can monitor student-athletes to ensure that their academics do not lag (Baltzell et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Rubin, 2016; Rubin & Moses, 2017).

Schools need to ensure that non-student-athletes also have the support needed to be academically successful. Fuller et al. (2019) discussed how the celebration of athletic successes usually overshadows areas of successes by non-athletes. They suggested that schools make a concerted effort to ensure that non-student-athlete success is celebrated with the same fervor and passion shown for athletic success through vehicles such as local news outlets or social media announcements. Schools can also work on improving relationships between student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Schools can create programs for interactions between student-athletes and non-student-athletes, such as mentoring programs and student-athlete ambassador programs (Fuller et al. 2019).

A gap in the literature exists. While researchers addressed the challenges student-athletes faced, there is limited research investigating high school students' perceptions of teacher preferential treatment of student-athletes. Several studies focused on perceptions of preferential treatment of college student-athletes or treatment of specific segments of high school athletes, such as special needs students or students from disadvantaged areas (Denault & Guay, 2016; Fuller et al., 2019; Palmer et al., 2017; Voight et al., 2015). A few studies examined teachers' attitudes on addressing the needs of student-athletes and their perceptions of preferential

treatment of student-athletes (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017). This study illuminates high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes to facilitate policies and procedures to enhance academic success for both student-athletes and non-student-athletes.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this exploratory multiple case study was to understand high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes at two Georgia high schools. Chapter Three begins with a description of this study's research design and the rationale for choosing the design. Next, I restate this study's central research question and sub-questions. The next two sections include descriptions of the setting of the research and the participants. The research procedures are detailed in the next section and include information on securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, selecting participants, and collecting and recording of data. I discuss my role in the next section and include a discussion of the research paradigm and the philosophical assumptions that guided my approach to this study. The data collection procedures are detailed in the next section followed by a description of the data analysis procedures. The next two sections include discussions of the methods to achieve trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations to address. Finally, Chapter Three ends with a concluding summary.

### **Design**

I used an exploratory case study to conduct this qualitative study. Qualitative research attempts to make sense or meaning of phenomena by studying things in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative approach is appropriate since the study was performed in the high school students' environments and allowed them to be observed in their natural setting. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that theoretical frameworks are used to research social or human problems. This study used both social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) and social

identity theory (Tajfel, 2010) to guide the research investigating high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes.

According to Yin (2018), a case study is “an empirical method that investigates a phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). Case studies are used in several disciplines to investigate and understand real-world complex phenomenon (Harrison et al., 2017). Yin (2018) noted that case studies have many variables of interest and use multiple sources of data. Prior research was utilized to narrow the focus of the research and identify gaps in the literature. Multiple sources of data were collected, including a demographic questionnaire, interviews, and documents in the form of letters written from the students to the teachers expressing their views on the topic.

Researchers use case studies to analyze a variety of issues, identify and challenge educational assumptions, and provide guidance on possible solutions (Cheek et al., 2018). A case study was appropriate for this study because I sought to investigate the phenomenon of how students feel about the way teachers address the needs of student-athletes. Case studies are useful in understanding students' perceptions on educational issues (Osgerby et al., 2018). I sought to understand high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes.

Three case study designs were considered for this study. Researchers who use an explanatory case study seek to explain a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The focus of my study was to understand a phenomenon, not explain why it is occurring. A descriptive case study involves describing an event or events over time without trying to understand the events (Merriam, 2007; Yin 2018). My investigation was to find an understanding of student perceptions, so a descriptive case study would not be appropriate. An exploratory case study is focused “on an issue or



concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issues” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 98). This study was bounded to two high schools in one school district. To be exploratory, a case study should have a direction or purpose and rationale as it begins (Yin, 2018). An exploratory case study was appropriate because the purpose was to understand students’ perceptions of teachers’ treatment of student-athletes using a variety of data collection methods. This exploratory case study used a demographic survey, interviews, and documents to obtain data for the study. This exploratory case study was a multiple case study. A multiple case study uses more than one case to collect and analyze data (Merriam, 2007). Two high schools were used in this study and necessitated a multiple case study.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions used to guide this study of students’ perceptions of teachers’ treatment of student-athletes were as follows:

**Central Research Question:** What are high school students’ perceptions of teachers’ treatment of student-athletes?

#### **Sub-Questions**

**SQ1:** What are non-student-athletes’ perceptions of teachers providing academic supports for student-athletes due to athletic participation?

**SQ2:** What are student-athletes’ perceptions of teachers providing academic supports needed for student-athletes due to athletic participation?

**SQ3:** What are students’ perceptions of teachers’ equitable treatment of student-athletes as compared to non-student-athletes?

## Setting

The study occurred within two high schools in a school system in a Southeast state. The school system and the schools received pseudonyms to minimize the risk of identity. The school system was comprised of 26,832 students in 2020-2021, with 8,402 of them being high school students (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). The school system is composed of 36 schools, 20 elementary schools, eight middle schools, and eight high schools. The school system operates under the authority of the locally elected school board while the superintendent hired by the school board manages the day-to-day operations. Two of the eight high schools were the focus of the study.

### High School One

The first high school in this study had a student population of 1,256 (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). This student body is 52% male and 48% female, with a demographic breakdown of 62% White, 27% Hispanic, 7% African American, and 4% other (Georgia Department of Education). The school has one principal and three assistant principals, one of whom serves as the athletic director. This school's sports teams have had a variety of successes over the last several years. The football team has had many successful seasons, including playing in the semi-finals and finals several times and is consistently ranked in the top 10 in the state. The girls' basketball team played in the state championship in 2020 and 2021, and the girls' soccer team played in the state championship in 2019. The boys' baseball team and girls' softball team are also perennial playoff teams. The boys' cross-country team has won multiple state championships, and the competition cheerleading team placed in the top five at the state championships during the current school year.

## **High School Two**

The second high school had a student population of 1,274 students is 49% male and 51% female, with a demographic makeup of 77% Hispanic, 18% White, 4% African American, and 1% other (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). The school has one principal and three assistant principals, one of whom serves as the athletic director. The boys' soccer team has won multiple state championships. Most of the other sports teams are usually less successful, although a few have occasionally had a winning season. The school system and schools were chosen based on several criteria, including the difference in school demographics, the variety of high school athletic opportunities, and the proximity of the schools to the researcher.

### **Participants**

I used purposeful sampling to select information-rich cases that were useful for an in-depth study (Patton, 2015). As Patton (2015) noted, "purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 264). The participants in this study were high school seniors. I chose high school seniors because they would have the most experience in classes with student-athletes. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of both male and female students, different ethnicities, and athletes and non-athletes. I also used purposeful sampling to select student-athletes from different sports.

For the pilot study, I included two former students, one student-athlete and one non-student-athlete. Participants for the study were selected from volunteers who completed the survey. From those who volunteered, I chose four student-athletes and four non-student-athletes from each school. The administration at the schools were contacted to assist with the administration of an online survey. All seniors at each school were asked to complete an online anonymous questionnaire to gather some basic demographic data and an open-ended question

asking if the student would assent to participate in a one-on-one interview. A parent opt-out form was mailed to the home of each senior prior to giving the survey to the students. The parents were given two weeks to respond that they do not want their student to participate in the survey. Students interested were asked to provide their name and address so that a parental consent form could be mailed to their parents or guardians. The forms were mailed back to the researcher with a provided self-addressed stamped envelope. Each form also asked each student which sports, if any, he or she participates in or has participated in while at the school.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the four student-athletes and the four non-athletes from each school who returned the signed consent forms to participate in the interview and documentation phase of the study. Table 1 on the next page presents the participant demographics of the students from both high schools in terms of gender, ethnicity, and athletic status. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. High School A students are listed first, followed by students from High School B.

**Table 1***High School Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	School	Gender	Ethnicity	Athlete
Kim	A	Female	White	Yes
Wes	A	Male	Black	Yes
Dan	A	Male	White	Yes
Lynn	A	Female	White	Yes
Betty	A	Female	White	No
Marie	A	Female	Hispanic	No
Mike	A	Male	White	No
Gina	A	Female	White	No
Sue	B	Female	White	Yes
Jerry	B	Male	Hispanic	Yes
Jose	B	Male	White	Yes
Gary	B	Male	White	Yes
Sofia	B	Female	Hispanic	No
Isabella	B	Female	Hispanic	No
Renee	B	Female	Black	No
Missy	B	Female	White	No

**Procedures**

To understand the perspectives of students regarding teacher treatment of student-athletes, I used an exploratory case study design (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2018). Exploring the

viewpoint of the students helped gain an understanding of how they felt about teachers' treatment of student-athletes. Findings from this study contributed to the body of knowledge of teachers' treatment of high school student-athletes.

The study took place in a school system located in North Georgia. The system and schools were chosen due to the proximity to the researcher and the large number of interscholastic sports available to students. IRB approval from Liberty University IRB was then obtained to begin the study (See Appendix E). After IRB approval, a pilot study was conducted with two recent high school graduates to test the validity of the interview instrument. Data collection methods consisted of a demographic survey, interviews, and letter documentation. Parental permission forms (See Appendix G) were mailed home to those students who expressed an interest in participating in the interviews. A parent opt-out form (See Appendix H) was mailed to the parents of all seniors at each school to give the parents or guardians the chance to opt-out of having their student participate in the initial survey. Seniors were chosen to ensure interaction with student-athletes within a classroom over the last three years. Site approval forms for participation were sent to the school system and the schools to gain approval for the study (See Appendix J). The schools received a link to the survey for the students who were not opted out of the study by their parents or guardians. Data was collected from the surveys completed by students. Participants were purposefully chosen from the student-athletes and non-student-athletes from each of the schools who mailed back the parental permission forms. Four student-athletes and four non-student-athletes from each school were chosen for the research. The students who volunteered were interviewed by me in sessions that took approximately 30 minutes each. Digital audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed for analysis and notes from the observations were written into narrative form. The students then wrote an

anonymous letter to a teacher describing their perceptions of teacher treatment of student-athletes.

Data were first analyzed within each school using an analysis of patterns approach to search for emerging themes to help understand the complexities of the issues, which was organized into categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After I analyzed the data within each school, I then conducted a cross-case pattern of analysis to search for similarities and differences in students' perceptions between the schools (Stake, 2006). All of the data collected from the demographic questionnaires, interviews, and letters were analyzed together to produce the findings.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I approached this study from the paradigm of social constructivism. In using social constructivism, I sought to understand and gain meaning from the experiences of both student-athletes and non-athletes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an administrator and an athletic director at a middle school, I am involved with issues of the eligibility of student-athletes. Because of health or academic issues that may arise for these athletes due to their participation in sports, they may need additional academic supports. I believe that all students' needs are important, and schools should provide all necessary accommodations to assist students. I sought to hear the voice of the students as they discussed their perceptions regarding the teachers' treatment of student-athletes.

In my role as a researcher, I had to also address the philosophical assumptions that arise from the social constructivism view. The axiological assumption was that I would honor the values of each individual participant while the epistemological assumption was that I understood that the realities of the participants and myself are shaped by our individual realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ontological assumption was that the participants also have multiple realities

that are shaped by their interactions with others. The rhetorical assumption was that this study provided a narrative of the personal perceptions of the participants' realities based on their experiences instead of trying to determine a universal truth.

It was imperative I set aside any preconceived biases and experiences resulting from working with student-athletes to increase the trustworthiness of the research. I had to bracket or suspend my own perceptions of teacher treatment of student-athletes (Patton, 2015). I did this by maintaining a journal in which I wrote my own perceptions and compared them to the participant responses to ensure my perceptions did not influence or taint their perceptions. The middle school where I work and the two high schools in the study are in the same school district. While I am acquainted with the administration of both high schools, I do not have any authority over any staff at those schools. None of the participants of this study are students that I have any authority over in my position within the school system.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data collection during a case study requires an inquiring mind, an ability to pose quality questions, and the researcher to be prepared for unexpected conflicts in the field (Yin, 2018). For this study, the data collection methods and procedures included a pilot study, an initial demographic survey, one-on-one interviews, and letter documentation. Each is described in detail below.

#### **Pilot Study**

Pilot studies are used to test ideas or methods prior to research (Maxwell, 2013). A pilot study was conducted to test the validity of the research questions (See Appendix I). Two recent high school graduates were interviewed with the current question list. This data was used to modify or enhance the interview questions to provide validity and reliability to those questions.



## Demographic Survey

An initial demographic survey (See Appendix B) was used to gather preliminary data and to assist in the selection of participants for the interviews and written letter documentation. One advantage of using a survey was that it allowed me to draw participants from a large number of respondents (Stake, 2010). The survey was given to all seniors at both high schools (High School A,  $N = 300$ ; High School B,  $N = 260$ ) whose parents did not opt-out of having their student participate. An online survey device was created, and the link was sent to each school. The link was shared with all seniors who were given the option to take the survey. The surveys were anonymous. At the end of the survey, students were asked if they would assent to participate in interviews. Those who responded in the affirmative were asked to provide contact information so that participation consent forms could be sent home to their parents or guardians. From the returned consent forms, students were selected, and those selected received a \$15 Chick-Fil-A gift card for their participation.

### Demographic Survey

1. Male or Female?
2. Age?
3. Ethnicity?
4. How long have you been in this school?
5. List any school sport in which have you participated, are currently participating, or will participate and the school years you participated in each sport. For example, if you played basketball every year in high school, you would write "Basketball, 9, 10, 11, 12."

6. List any non-sport extra-curricular activities in which you have participated and how many years (band, chorus, drama, clubs, etc.). For example, if you were in chorus just your freshman and sophomore year, you would write “Chorus, 9, 10”.
7. List other time commitments, not including sports or extra-curricular activities, you have or have had outside of school (part-time job, etc.)?
8. Using the drop-down box, choose how you feel about the following statement: Teachers at this school show preferential treatment to student-athletes. Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
9. Using the drop-down box, choose how you feel about the following statement: Administration at this school show preferential treatment to student-athletes. Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
10. Would you be interested in participating in a confidential interview to discuss your views on teacher treatment of student-athletes? If so, please give your name and address below. By providing your name and address to participate in the interview, you will no longer remain anonymous. Both your survey and interview answers will remain confidential between you and the interviewer. If you are not interested in participating in an interview, leave this section blank.

Questions one through seven were used to gather some basic demographic data.

Questions eight and nine were designed to get a basic understanding of the students’ perceptions of preferential treatment of student-athletes. Question 10 was designed to solicit participation in the study and asked for the student’s name so that a participation consent form could be sent home with the student to obtain parental or guardian permission to participate. As an incentive to participate, students were offered a gift card to a local restaurant.

## Interviews

Yin (2018) stated, “one of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview” (p. 56). According to Patton (2015), a quality interview gives insight into the perspectives of people’s worldviews to help make sense of their lived experiences. The interviews were with 16 students, eight of whom were athletes and eight who were non-athletes. The interview sessions were conducted at the participants’ school. The interview was conversational in manner and took from 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Each interview session, with the permission of the participant, was recorded with digital audio. The questions began with some basic background information such as years at the specific school, and then proceeded to questions concerning their perceptions of the teachers’ treatment of student-athletes.

### Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in this school?
2. In what extra-curricular activities, sports, band, chorus, clubs, etc., have you participated?
3. What time commitments other than sports or extra-curricular activities do you have outside of school?
4. To your knowledge, what percentage of your classes in high school had both athletes and non-athletes?
5. Describe the different social groups within the school.
6. How would you describe the social relationships between student-athletes and non-student-athletes?
7. Describe any conflicts between student-athletes and non-student-athletes you may have been a part of or witnessed.

8. How would you describe the overall relationship culture between students and teachers within your school?
9. Describe the culture of your school as it relates to sports and academics.
10. What is your opinion on how the treatment of student-athletes affects the overall climate of the school?
11. Describe how you believe teachers treat student-athletes in the classroom. Give examples.
12. Describe any differences you see in the way teachers treat student-athletes versus non-athletes, noting any differences due to a teacher's background with athletics.
13. Describe any specific instances in which you believe student-athletes received preferential treatment, noting differences, if any, between athletes of different sports.
14. Describe any personal instance in which you believe you were treated unfairly because of being an athlete or not being an athlete.
15. Describe any personal instance in which you believe you were treated favorably because of being an athlete or not being an athlete.
16. What academic supports do you believe that student-athletes need in the classroom due to their participation in sports?
17. What is your perception of the teachers' abilities to meet the needs of student-athletes?
18. What suggestion would you make to teachers regarding the treatment of student-athletes versus non-student-athletes?
19. What other insight do you wish to share with me about teacher treatment of student-athletes that you think would be important for me to know?

In conducting an interview, it is important to gain the trust of the participants and build a rapport to help the participants feel comfortable with the interviewer (Gall et al., 2007; Patton,

2015). Therefore, to start the study, questions one through three were background questions (Patton, 2015). These questions established the students' history at the school, including participation in athletics or other extra-curricular activities that will ease the conversation to more in-depth questions related to the study.

Questions four and five were knowledge questions (Patton, 2015). In this instance, the participants were asked their knowledge of the number of classes they have shared with student-athletes and of the different social groups within the school. Students are usually very aware of the different social groups within a school (Hawley et al., 2014). These questions helped focus the participant on the behavior of teachers as it relates to each of these groups.

Questions six through 11 and 16 through 18 were designed to elicit opinions from the participants (Patton, 2015). Studies have shown that peer relationships may have an impact on student engagement (Forster et al., 2017; Li, 2018). Each of these questions was designed to address the central research question and sub-questions one and two. Question seven was developed because researchers found that as students experienced more positive relationships teachers, they were more engaged in the classroom (Martin & Collie, 2019; Quin, 2017). Fatou and Kubiszewski (2018) noted that school climate, including the relationships between students and teachers, was an important factor in student engagement, thus leading to the design of questions nine and 10. Research suggests that students and teachers may have different opinions on what supports a student-athlete should receive (Fuller et al., 2017; Hawley et al., 2014), so questions 16 and 17 were designed to determine the students' opinions of the supports student-athletes may need and if they believe the teachers have the ability to meet those needs. The opinions of these students also led to the development of question 18, which sought to give the

students a chance to give feedback on how they believe teachers should treat student-athletes and non-athletes.

Questions 12 through 15 were experience questions that sought to give students a voice in which they discussed instances where they experienced either equitable or non-equitable treatment by teachers. Theobald et al. (2017) found that students performed better when in situations of equitable treatment. Each of these questions was designed to answer the central research question and sub-question 3.

Question 19 was designed as a closing question to give participants a final say (Patton, 2015). This was the final opportunity for the interviewee to discuss or bring up any matter they felt may be important or was not discussed. Furthermore, according to the response, it could possibly lead to follow-up questions to gain more insight into the perceptions of the students.

#### **Documentation: Letter to a Teacher**

In a qualitative study, additional information about the topic can be obtained using documentation in various forms including emails, letters, and personal documents (Yin, 2018). In this case study, at the end of each interview, the participants were asked to write a letter to one hypothetical teacher detailing their views on teacher treatment of student-athletes versus non-athletes. The students were provided with the following prompts to guide them in the creation of their letters.

- As a non-student-athlete, describe to your teacher how you feel about student-athletes receiving preferential treatment in his or her classroom.
- As a student-athlete, write a letter to a teacher describing how they did or did not meet your needed academic supports due to your participating in sports.

The students' letters were not delivered to any teacher but were used as part of the triangulation of data to support the findings of the interviews and demographic questionnaires (Yin, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

Because this was a multiple case study, a cross-case pattern analysis took place after the data for each school were analyzed to look for similar patterns. A cross-case pattern analysis is the “descriptions of actions, perceptions, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that are similar enough to be considered a manifestation of the same thing” (Patton, 2015, p. 551). Similar patterns and themes were searched for both within and between each school.

The data analysis started with the demographic survey, which contained two questions that utilized a Likert scale (APPENDIX B). A Likert scale is a five-point rating scale in which the respondents give a level of agreement to the statement (Warner, 2013). The Likert scale was used to get a general consensus from the overall senior student body of each school on their perceptions of preferential treatment of student-athletes (APPENDIX C and APPENDIX D). The mode of the data from the Likert scale was used to demonstrate the general consensus of the students at each school.

The general strategy of analysis for the interviews and letters was to work the data from the ground up by coding data to search for themes (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the data analysis in the study followed the analysis of patterns approach to help identify issues and look for common themes within each school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I transcribed the interview and letter documentation data using Microsoft Word. The data was uploaded into the software program ATLAS.ti for qualitative analysis. Holistic coding was used on the data from the interviews and documentation (Saldana, 2016). According to Saldana (2016), “a code in qualitative inquiry is

most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 4). The coded data were analyzed so that key terms and emerging themes were explored, and those themes were placed into categories for investigation. By coding the data to discover frequency, intensity, direction, and space, patterns emerged which were then discussed and presented (Creswell, 2015).

Next, the data from the interviews and the letter documentation were used to create thick, rich descriptions of the details of the sessions and letters. The interview questions were designed so that each provided answers to the main research questions. The questions elicited students’ perceptions on teachers’ treatment of both student-athletes and non-student-athletes. The data and the transcriptions of the interviews were stored on the researcher’s personal computer which was password protected to ensure the confidentiality of the data. The letters were locked in a personal safe at the home of the researcher. These data were then coded and analyzed so that key terms and emerging themes could be explored, and those themes were placed into categories for investigation (APPENDIX A). By coding the data to discover frequency, intensity, direction, and space, patterns emerged and then were presented (Creswell, 2015). Next, the coded data from the demographic survey, interviews, and documentation were triangulated to provide validity (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2018). I then used cross-case pattern analysis to search for similar perceptions among the students from both schools. This was accomplished by using a manifestation of multicase pattern and theme worksheet (APPENDIX F) in which each pattern and theme are rated based on the level of manifestation in each case (Stake, 2006).

To ensure a high-quality analysis, all of the evidence obtained must be analyzed, any rival interpretations accounted for and a thorough understanding of the subject matter must be



gained (Yin, 2018). Common themes of instances within the surveys, interviews, and letters were analyzed to find meaning in a process known as categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995). I used cross-case pattern analysis to search for similar patterns between the participants of both schools. As themes and patterns emerged, an understanding of the perceptions of students from each school became clearer. This exploratory case study may be used to “develop pertinent hypothesis and propositions for further inquiry” (Yin, 2014, p. 10) and to develop naturalistic generalizations in which the reader may relate their own experiences to that of the participants (Stake, 2006).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a vital part of research and is a validation of the accuracy of the study using four components: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell, 2015; Amankwaa, 2016). This validation consisted of triangulation of multiple sources of data, member-checking, the use of thick, rich descriptions of the data, and cross-case pattern analysis between the two schools.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is defined as the confidence that the findings of the research have been accurately interpreted by the researcher (Amankwaa, 2016). Credibility was achieved through the triangulation of the survey, interview, and letter documentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Member checking allowed participants to check the transcripts and analysis of their interviews and letters for accuracy and resonance, or significance, with their participation experience (Birt et al., 2016). In this study, I used both triangulation of the data and member checking to ensure the credibility of the findings.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

To ensure the dependability of a study, the research steps and processes must be described in detail so that the research may be replicated by an independent researcher (Amankwaa, 2016; Chowdhury, 2015). To obtain dependability for this study, the processes and procedures of this research were described and detailed in a manner that will allow an independent researcher to conduct the same research. All data collected was stored on my personal computer at my residence and both the computer and the data files were password protected.

Confirmability is the degree to which the findings are formed from the views of the participants and not the biases of the researcher (Amankwaa, 2016). Confirmability can be achieved through triangulation of the different data sources (Amankwaa, 2016; Chowdhury, 2015). Triangulation of qualitative sources compares and cross-checks several sources of data for consistency (Patton, 2015; Yin 2018). In this study, a demographic survey, interviews, and letter documentation were used to gather data that I analyzed. I used these various data sources to triangulate for consistency to aid in the trustworthiness of the study. I also used cross-case pattern analysis to search for patterns between the two schools.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings of the study to a wider population or other situations (Gall et al., 2007; Amankwaa, 2016). Rich descriptions of details and experiences help to bring transferability and naturalistic generalization of a study to a reader (Amankwaa, 2016; Stake, 2006). The use of multiple sources of data to address the research questions and the findings is further evidence of transferability (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The use of purposeful sampling to ensure that diversity of gender, ethnicity, and type of

extracurricular activity also added to the transferability of this study. I used thick, rich descriptions describing details of the participants, interview sessions, and the demographic survey ensure that transferability had been achieved.

It is important that there is trust and confidence in research results (Merriam, 2007). While there can be no guarantee of trustworthiness (Maxwell, 2013), I made every effort to ensure the reliability and validity of the results. Because I followed the guidelines set out under each of these components, this study achieved a level of trustworthiness that attained as high a level of accuracy, reliability, and validity as possible.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Due to the nature of collecting data in case study research, I must be aware of and address ethical considerations (Gall et al., 2007). IRB approval was obtained to ensure that all necessary precautions were taken to ensure the safety of the participants, including obtaining their consent to participate (Patton, 2015). All participants were student volunteers and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities and the identities of the schools and school district. I chose sites that I did not have any authority over the students to ensure our independence from each other. To address bias, I used both triangulation and member checking. I achieved triangulation using multiple sources of evidence (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Yin, 2018). I used member checking in which the participants were allowed to read the final transcript of their individual interviews to verify that no identifying information was included and that it accurately reflected their views. All data collected was stored on my personal computer at my residence and both the computer and the data files were password protected. The final report will be shared only with stakeholders related to the study.

### **Summary**

This study was qualitative in nature, and used an exploratory case study research design to understand students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes. This study was conducted at two Georgia high schools and included both student-athletes and non-student-athletes. This chapter described the research design and the procedures that were followed in the completion of this study, including both the data collection and analysis. The steps to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also discussed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

Chapter Four includes an examination of the findings of the case study. The purpose of this exploratory multiple case study was to understand students' perceptions of teachers' preferential treatment of high school student-athletes at two Georgia high schools using a multiple case design. This chapter has a description of the participants and an analysis of the results of the surveys, interviews, and letter documentation, and a discussion of the process used to identify the themes. A pilot study was conducted, a survey was used to solicit volunteer participants, the participants were interviewed and asked to write a letter to a teacher, and then the results were analyzed to discover emergent themes. An examination of the theme details and the results are presented in relation to the research questions. The data analysis relates to the central research question driving the case study: What are high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes? At the end of the chapter is a concise summary of the results.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were from two high schools from the same North Georgia school. Sixteen total students were purposefully selected from volunteers who completed a survey, eight from each school. Of those selected from each school, four were student-athletes and four were not student-athletes. The student-athletes participated in a variety of sports, including football, basketball, cross-country, track, soccer, cheerleading, baseball, golf, and softball. The non-student-athletes had participated in a variety of school-related extracurricular activities, such as band, theater, and chorus. Several students in both categories also participated

in school-related clubs and activities outside of school, including church groups and part-time jobs.

Students chosen to participate previously completed a qualitative survey in which they volunteered to participate in the interview and write a letter. Consent forms were mailed to the parents to gain permission for the students to participate in the interview. Students are identified by pseudonyms to protect their identity. Detailed information about each student is then given. Each student self-identified with an ethnicity before the interviews began in order to categorize each participant. All quotes from the participants are verbatim. This includes any spelling or grammatical issues so that the voice of the student interviewed is accurately portrayed.

### **Kim**

Kim is a white female student-athlete who has attended High School A for four years. She has participated in cheerleading and a variety of clubs at the school. Outside of school, she participates weekly in a Wednesday church group. In both her interview and letter, Kim perceived preferential treatment of student-athletes. She stated several times that she felt student-athletes had better relationships with teachers because the student-athletes were representatives of their school, which was important for school spirit.

### **Wes**

Wes is a black male student-athlete who has attended High School A for four years. He has participated in football but did not have any other activities either inside or outside of the school. Wes said that he felt that student-athletes probably feel more attached to their school than non-student-athletes. He also said that while he was on good terms with most students, he preferred to just hang out with other football players because they all have the same interests.

**Dan**

Dan is a white male student-athlete who has attended High School A for four years. He has participated in soccer and a variety of clubs. He is also currently dual enrolled, taking both high school and college courses. Dan, like most all of the participants in the interviews, agreed that student-athletes received preferential treatment, but in his opinion, he does not think it is a problem. He did make a point to say that he felt that the sport a person played made a difference in their treatment. As a soccer player, he felt that he did not get the same level of preferential treatment football players received

**Lynn**

Lynn is a white female student-athlete who has attended High School A for four years. She has participated athletically in multiple sports every year. She has also been active in a variety of clubs at the school. She also spent several years playing club soccer that is not related to the school. Lynn was very positive in her views of both the students and teachers at her school. While she did say student-athletes probably did receive preferential treatment, so did not feel that it affected the relationships between teachers and students. She noted that she was friendly with everyone and had a great relationship with all of her teachers.

**Betty**

Betty is a white female non-athlete who has attended High School A for four years. She has participated in chorus, theater, and Beta Club. Outside of school, she participates weekly in a Wednesday church group and has several part-time jobs since her sophomore year. Betty does have a brother who is a student athlete. Despite this, Betty had negative views of preferential treatment of student-athletes, noting in both her interview and letter that teachers should give the same treatment to all students.

**Marie**

Marie has attended High School A for four years and is a Hispanic female non-student-athlete. She has participated in chorus, theater, and student council. She is active in her church youth group on Wednesdays and various other days throughout the week. In her interview and letter, Marie was emphatic on the negative feelings she had on the preferential treatment received by student-athletes. She emphasized how teachers made her feel that she was less important than student-athletes.

**Mike**

Mike is a white male non-student-athlete and has attended High School A for four years. He has participated in band and the Beta Club. Outside of school, he has participated in church youth groups and held various part-time jobs. Mike was mostly ambivalent about preferential treatment of student-athletes, remarking that it probably occurred, but he was ok with it because those student-athletes probably needed additional help from teachers. He said that as far as he could tell, student-athletes and non-student-athletes all got along great at school, although they didn't hang out together after school.

**Gina**

Gina is a white female non-student-athlete and has attended High School A for four years. She has participated in chorus and theater. Gina has also had two different part-time jobs during her junior and senior years. Gina had strong negative feelings about preferential treatment of student athletes, which was more evident in what she wrote in her letter versus what she said in her interviews. Her most prevalent complaint was that teachers did not give equitable treatment to other students, especially when it came to the ability to leave class early in order to participate in extra-curricular activities.



**Sue**

Sue is a white female student-athlete and has attended High School B for four years. She has participated in multiple sports all four years. She was a member of the Beta Club for two years. Outside of school, Sue attended private cheerleading clinics, but has had no other time commitments outside of school. She acknowledged that teachers gave her additional help she needed because she was an athlete, such as getting extra time to turn in assignments or additional help on class material she missed because of having to leave early for contests. Sue expressed a grateful attitude for her teachers that assisted her with any needs she had related to athletics affecting her academic performance.

**Jerry**

Jerry is a white male student-athlete who has attended High School B for four years. He has participated in tennis and been active in a variety of clubs. Outside of school, he attends private tennis clinics and participates in tennis tournaments that are not school-related. Jerry had a positive view of how teachers treated student-athletes. He stated, "It was nice to have someone understand how much student-athletes put in work in and out of the classroom."

**Jose**

Jose is a Hispanic male student-athlete and has attended High School B for four years. He participated in multiple sports and several fine arts extracurricular activities. He has no activities that he participates in outside of school. During his interview, Jose described how he would sometimes struggle in class because he was tired from practice or had to miss class because of games. He had a positive view of how the teachers were willing to help him overcome his struggles.

**Gary**

Gary is a white male student-athlete and has attended High School B for four years. He has participated in multiple sports. He takes private athletic lessons outside of school and participates in athletic tournaments that are not school-related. He has no other commitments outside of school. Gary was another student-athlete who was appreciative of the support he received from his teachers. In his letter he wrote, "Knowing that we had your support made it easier to focus on sports when it was time for that."

**Sofia**

Sofia is a Hispanic female and is a non-student-athlete. She has attended High School B for four years. She has participated in theater all four years. Sofia has also participated in a variety of clubs and other extracurricular activities. Outside of school, she participates in her church youth group on a weekly basis. Sophia has also held several part-time jobs throughout high school. Sofia was one of several non-student athletes who had negative views of the differences in the treatment of student-athletes as compared to non-student-athletes. She was especially negative in her letter when she discussed how she felt neglected in the classroom while student-athletes received the most help and attention from the teacher.

**Isabella**

Isabella is a white female non-student-athlete and has been at High School B for four years. She participated in band and theater. Isabella is very active in her church youth groups, and she worked at a part-time job her freshman year. Isabella acknowledged in both her interview and letter that student-athletes may need additional help but that other students may also need help and teachers should make sure that the needs of all students are met. She did not have negative views of the treatment of student-athletes, she just asked for equitable treatment.

**Renee**

Renee is a black female and has attended High School B for four years. She is a non-student-athlete and has participated in various fine arts and other extracurricular activities. Outside of school, she is active in Wednesday church youth group and has held a part-time job since her junior year. Renee expressed positive views of school, but she did discuss that certain teachers were not as willing to help students who were not athletes. In her letter, she stated that there were times she did not want to go to certain classes because the teacher made her feel less welcome in class than the student-athletes.

**Missy**

Missy is a white female and has been a non-student-athlete at High School B for four years. She has participated in various fine arts activities and several clubs. Missy also spent time outside of school taking private lessons in fine arts activities. Missy expressed appreciation of teachers helping student-athletes with their needs. But, she, like some of the other non-student-athletes, discussed how she felt the teachers need to make more of an effort helping all students. In the interview, she gave the impression of being happy with her school experiences as she noted that she had good relationships with most teachers and enjoyed her time in theater.

**Results**

This section contains the results of the demographic survey, interviews, and student letters. The demographic survey used a Likert scale for an overall view of whether students perceived preferential treatment of student-athletes. The student interviews and letters were analyzed to give a description of the themes in narrative form. This analysis allowed for triangulation to provide validity to the results (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2018). I used cross-case pattern analysis to search for similar perceptions among the students from both schools. I

accomplished this by using a manifestation of multi-case pattern and theme worksheet in which each pattern and theme is rated based on the level of manifestation in each case (Stake, 2006).

Following the discussion of the results, a narrative answer to the central research question and sub-questions is provided.

### **Demographic Survey**

Parents and guardians had the option to opt-out of their student participating in the survey. The numbers provided for participation included only the students who were not opted-out of the survey. The demographic survey was sent out to 300 seniors at High School A and 260 seniors at High School B. High School A had a participation rate of 40%, with 119 out of 300 completing the survey. Of those who responded for High School A, 55.5% were male and 44.5% were female, and 60% of those who responded had participated in at least one sport during high school. High School B had a participation rate of 34%, with 88 out of 260 completing the survey. Of those who responded for High School B, 51% were female and 49% were male, with 53% of the respondents having participated in at least one sport during high school. The results use a 5-part Likert scale that ranges from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. To calculate a Likert average, each Likert scale answer was assigned a point value from 1 to 5. Strongly Agree was assigned a point value of 5, while Strongly Disagree was assigned a point value of 1.

The results of the survey showed that 59% of all students at High School A either agreed or strongly agreed that teachers gave preferential treatment to student-athletes. This resulted in a Likert average of 3.45. The data shows 61% of student-athletes and 56% of non-student-athletes agreed or strongly agreed that student-athletes received preferential treatment from teachers, resulting in a Likert average of 3.39 for student-athletes and 3.54 for non-student-athletes. The largest difference in percentages came from the male and female groups. While 52% of males

agreed or strongly agreed that student-athletes received preferential treatment from teachers, 68% of female students agreed with that perception. For the males, this resulted in a 3.24 Likert average while the females had a Likert average of 3.72. When I compared the ethnic groups, 65% of White students, 75% of Hispanic students, 42% of African-American students, and 8% of other ethnic groups believed that teachers gave preferential treatment, with Likert scale averages of 3.62, 3.96, 2.67, and 2.65, respectively. It is possible that the lower participation rates for African-American and other ethnic groups skewed their results. Overall, the results showed that the majority of students who replied to the surveys at High School A, no matter which group they belong to, perceived that teachers provided preferential treatment to student-athletes.

At High School A, 61% of all students who responded to the survey believed that the administrators gave preferential treatment to student-athletes, resulting in a Likert average of 3.77. The Likert average was higher than the teacher preferential Likert average because more students across all groups strongly agreed that administrators gave preferential treatment. Athletes had a Likert scale average of 3.59, with 59% who agreed or strongly agreed that administrators gave student-athletes preferential treatment. Non-student-athletes had a Likert scale average of 4.04, with 63% of these students agreeing that administration gave preferential treatment to student-athletes.

The male students had a Likert scale average of 3.71, and the female students had a Likert scale average of 3.85, with 61% of males and 60% of females agreeing or strongly agreeing that the administration gave preferential treatment to student-athletes. The female Likert average was higher because more females chose strongly agree more than males did. For the results by ethnic group, 66% of White students, 63% of Hispanic students, 75% of African-

American students, and 8% of other ethnic groups agreed that administration gave preferential treatment to student-athletes. This resulted in Likert scale averages of 3.85 for White students, 4.00 for Hispanic students, 3.75 for African-American students, and 3.00 for all other ethnic groups. As noted with the teacher preferential treatment, the smaller participation numbers of African-American and other ethnic group students may have skewed those results. As seen throughout most of the groups, students at High School A who took the survey believed that administration gave preferential treatment to student-athletes more strongly than they believed teachers gave preferential treatment.

At High School B, of the 88 students who took the survey, 52% agreed that teachers provided preferential treatment to student-athletes, with a Likert scale average of 3.38. There was a large discrepancy between student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Only 36% of student-athletes agreed that teachers gave them preferential treatment, while 71% of non-student-athletes reported that they believe student-athletes got teacher preferential treatment. This resulted in a Likert scale average of 3.06 for the student-athletes while the non-student-athletes had a Likert scale average of 3.73.

When gender was considered, 58% of male students agreed on the teacher preferential treatment while only 47% of the females agreed. This resulted in a 3.51 Likert scale average for the males and a 3.24 Likert scale average for the females. When I examined the results by ethnicity, 54% of White students, 47% of Hispanic students, 67% of African-American students, and 60% of other ethnic groups agreed that teachers gave preferential treatment to student-athletes, resulting in Likert scale averages of 3.34, 3.22, 3.83, and 4.20, respectively. With only six African-American and five other ethnic group students having completed the survey, their Likert scores may be skewed on the higher end.

Unlike High School A, High School B students split evenly overall in their perception that the administration gave preferential treatment to student-athletes. Of High School B students who responded to the survey, 50% agreed or strongly agreed that the administration gave student-athletes preferential treatment. This resulted in a Likert scale average of 3.42. Similar to the survey results of High School B students on teacher preferential treatment of student athletes, there was a large difference between the student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Only 30% of the student-athletes agreed that the administration gave student-athletes preferential treatment, while 73% of non-student-athletes agreed. This resulted in a Likert scale average of 2.89 for the student-athletes and 4.02 for the non-student-athletes.

As for gender, 51% of males and 49% of females agreed that the administration gave student-athletes preferential treatment, resulting in Likert scale averages of 3.47 for the males and 3.38 for the females. Comparing the ethnic groups, 46% of White students, 44% of Hispanic students, 67% of African-American students, and 100% of other ethnic groups agreed that the administrators at High School B gave student-athletes preferential treatment. The Likert scale averages for the White, Hispanic, African-American, and other ethnic groups were 3.27, 3.39, 4.17, and 4.00, respectively. Again, the lower participation rates among the African-American and other ethnic groups may have skewed the Likert scale averages.

In comparing the surveys of the two schools, students at High School A agreed at a higher percentage that both teachers and administrators give preferential treatment to student-athletes. While 59% of High School A students believed that student-athletes received preferential treatment, 52% of High School B students had the same perception. The largest difference between the two data sets was the perception about administration treatment of student athletes. At High School A, 61% of students believed administration gave preferential

treatment to student athletes while only 50% of students at High School B shared that belief. This difference between the results of the schools came from the student-athletes. High School A's student-athletes agreed at a higher percentage that both teachers and administration gave them preferential treatment, at 61% and 59%, respectively. In comparison, only 36% of student-athletes at High School B believed they receive preferential treatment from teachers, and only 30% believed they received preferential treatment from administration. These results may reflect the student-athlete's perceived cultures at these schools.

### **Theme Development**

The purpose of this case study was to investigate high school students' perceptions of preferential treatment of student-athletes at two high schools in a North Georgia school district. To identify patterns, I analyzed the transcripts of the interview sessions and letter documentation. During this analysis, a selection of words and word phrases were used to develop codes. Table 2 contains these codes and the frequency of occurrence of each.



**Table 2***Code Frequency Chart*

Codes	Frequency From Interviews	Frequency from Student Letters	Frequency Total
Relationship	25	6	31
Understanding	23	12	35
Staff Position	38	4	42
Sport Played	36	9	45
Academics	27	7	34
Recognition	23	2	25
Fairness	38	4	42
Help	28	12	40
Support	29	6	35
Equal	24	3	27
Missed Classes	21	4	25
Missed Assignments	18	4	22
Athletes	38	3	41
Band Students	27	4	31
Theater Students	26	4	30

Prior to the interviews and letters, I performed a pilot study to identify any issues in the interviewing format or wording of the questions. Two recent high school graduates participated: one student-athlete and one non-student-athlete. After the interviews, I asked the two participants if anything about the interview questions or process should change. Neither participant said they

would change anything about the interview process. However, I did make slight changes to the interview questions. Conducting the pilot study helped to ensure the validation of the research interview instrument so that the interviews would have good questions (Merriam, 2007). The data analysis did not include any of the information gathered from the pilot study participants.

Because of my own experiences as a high school athlete, teacher, assistant principal, and athletic director, it was important to guard against researcher bias during the interview process. I set aside my own experiences and assumptions by using bracketing to focus only on the experiences of students interviewed (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Transcription involved using Microsoft Word to put the interview data into word documents. I then input the interview data and student letters into the software program ATLAS.ti for qualitative analysis.

The use of the ATLAS.ti software program and thematic coding helped to identify major and minor themes. The major themes identified were (a) student group identity, (b) relationships, (c) school culture, and (d) treatment of students. Minor themes emerged for some of the major themes and are discussed in further detail with those themes.

### ***Student Group Identity***

Student group identity was the first major theme identified. In both the surveys, interviews, and letters, it became clear that students identified themselves with specific groups, whether it be athletes, band students, chorus students, or theater students. Kim, a student-athlete at High School A stated, “The football players, they all stick together. And then, like the cheerleaders, they all stick together.” Isabella, a non-student-athlete at High School B agreed that many students associated with others in the same extracurricular activities. She stated, “Theater kids will hang out after a show. After show, we'd all go out to eat or we go to somebody's house and the band kids would go, too.”

The students also recognized other groups of students tended to associate mostly within their own group. For example, when discussing how students of different social groups interacted, Marie, a non-student-athlete at High School B said, “They didn't do anything together outside of school, so they definitely stay with their crowd pretty much.” Wes, a student-athlete at High School A, agreed with Marie when he discussed how students of different social groups tended to hang out with those in their social group. Wes stated that, “The band and theater kids are different social, a different social group that would... they usually tend to hang out with each other.” Jose, a student-athlete from High School B, stated, “We have the generic ones you have, your jocks, you have, I guess more of your technology kids. The ones that kind of play more games and on that aspect of it.” Jose continued by saying “the band always hangs out together and stuff like that, but a lot of people really kind of intermingle.” Overall, most students seemed to have clear delineations between the various student groups, including knowing to which groups each participant belonged.

### ***Relationships***

The student interviews revealed that the relationships broke down into two categories: the relationships between students and the relationships between students and teachers. Most of the students discussed the importance of relationships in school. For instance, Renee said in her letter to a teacher that “as a student my favorite part about school is not always the academics or the extracurricular activities, but instead it is the relationships with everyone.” The following is a detailed discussion of these two minor themes.

**Students.** Throughout the interviews, both athletes and student-athletes seemed to agree that all students tended to get along with each other, even if they did not belong to the same social groups. Kim stated, “I think everyone gets along. I don't really think that being an athlete

determines whether or not you get along with people.” Dan agreed with Kim when he said, “everyone gets along and it's always fun.” But many of the students did note that their relationships were usually with those they socialized with the most. Wes discussed how he had a much closer relationship with his football teammates than with other students. Sofia was also in agreement with this point of view when she talked about how many student groups tended to be exclusive, although she did say that most students still got along with each other. These views were similar among all those interviewed.

**Teachers.** When discussing relationships with teachers, the students appeared to have much stronger opinions. Student-athletes described relationships between students and teachers in a positive manner. In her letter, Lynn noted a positive relationship with her teacher: “By encouraging me, and believing that I would strive high in academics helped me a lot throughout your class.” Kim stated in her interview that in her view, “normally it's positive...I've never had a bad relationship with the teacher.” Jerry said, “for the most part it's pretty good, it's pretty respectful on both ends.” Jose’s view was, “Pretty good, I mean in the classroom you occasionally had some of the students that would kind of push back a little bit more to teachers.” Jose continued by saying that, “the vast majority, always, you know we were always kind of paying attention and stuff like that, so no big issues between them.” Many of the athletes also expressed how they believe the teachers were supportive of them while being student-athletes. In his letter to a teacher, Jose noted a sentiment similar to other student-athletes when he wrote “I truly appreciate how you are a supporter of us not only in the classroom, but on the field as well.” Some recognized that the relationship between student-athletes and teachers may have been related to a coach-player bond. As Dan stated, “If their student is also their one of their players, I think they get treated better than the rest of the people in the classroom.” Missy, a non-

student-athlete, shared this sentiment as well in her letter, stating, “I understand the extra time you get to spend with your students-athletes allows you to have a deeper relationship with these students.”

The non-student-athletes had mixed feelings about teacher and student relationships. Sofia said, “We tend to form pretty decent relationships with our teachers.” However, a few non-student-athletes felt that the teachers created greater positive relationships with the student-athletes as a detriment to the relationships with the non-student-athletes. Renee shared that “sometimes I find myself not wanting to come to class because I do not feel as invited as the students who play sports or are involved in sports activities.” She went on to say that “this can be bothersome and perhaps treating us all the same would help with our in-class connections and not make myself or others want to avoid class since we are not receiving the same student-athlete treatment.” Missy noted the following in her letter: “You tend to engage with these students (athletes) more as well by only going to their games and wearing their jersey number.” Betty wrote to her teacher that she “could create a stronger learning environment, and greatly impact a larger number of your students, if you work harder to develop similar relationships with your non-student-athletes as you have with your student-athletes.” While most of the athletes and non-student-athletes had an overall opinion that students tended to get along with each other, the perceptions of teacher relationships with students seemed for the most part to depend on whether a student was or was not an athlete.

### ***School Culture***

During the interview process, students had the chance to give their perceptions on the impact of teacher treatment of student-athletes on the school or classroom culture. Several non-student-athletes had harsh perceptions. In her letter, Marie had negative views of the impact in

the classroom, writing, “I do not appreciate the fact that student-athletes are placed at a higher value in your classroom.” Sofia was just as adamant, stating, “Because of this attitude towards student-athletes, the classic “nerd” and “jock” dynamic from the movies still exists in classrooms today.”

Some of the student-athletes also agreed that the schools’ cultures seemed to have a focus on athletics. Kim stated in her interview, “I think athletics is more important. They always encourage fundraising and, like, t-shirt sales and stuff. It's always towards like the football team or cheerleaders or any other sport that does it.” Gary agreed, stating, “I think that there's a lot more people who are more oriented towards sports.” While Wes also agreed with Gary and Kim, he also noted that the administration does attempt to balance out athletics with academics. He stated, “But the school, like the administration, has to maintain sort of a sort of balance.” For instance, he noted that principals do support student-athletes and athletic programs while also trying to ensure that student-athletes are academically successful. Between the two student groups, there was agreement that the treatment of student-athletes had an impact on school culture, although how much of an impact was unclear.

### ***Student Treatment***

In interviews with the students and in their letters, participants believed that student-athletes received some form of preferential treatment. However, there was disagreement among some as to whether the treatment may or may not have been perceived to be fair. The following is a discussion of the two minor themes of student-athlete treatment and non-student-athlete treatment.

**Student-Athletes.** In analyzing the interviews and letters, most of the student-athletes felt they received preferential treatment in the classroom. Jerry stated, “I definitely notice that we

are. Yes, especially for coaches. They understand that we do other stuff like outside of school. So they're more lenient like on when you can turn in schoolwork and stuff." In his letter to a teacher, Jose said, "I appreciate your understanding of this [athletic time commitment] and your willingness to help me when I am struggling during and after class." Dan also noticed the preferential treatment when he said in his interview, "I've noticed in one of my gym classes that the girls who are close to the teacher don't have to really do anything." Dan went on to say, "They don't have to participate in the activities. I don't know if it's because they're just girls or because they're also athletes because they also play softball." In her letter, Sue wrote the following: "thank you for letting me take a couple extra days to turn in work or giving me another time to do a test."

Not all student-athletes felt they received preferential treatment. Wes stated, "Personally, I haven't really experienced any sort of preferential treatment." He continued by saying that he did not believe his status as a student-athlete allowed him to receive extra-time on assignments or any other treatment that not given to all students received.

Several of the non-student-athletes had strong opinions on student-athlete preferential treatment. In her interview, Sofia stated, "These students, due to their involvement in athletics, are treated much differently. When it comes to submitting work, they are forgiven for late work or work that was clearly given little to no effort." She continued by stating that when it comes to the actual work, "student-athletes should be held at the same standards as all of the other students in the class." She also noted in her letter, "I often feel that they [student-athletes] receive more attention than other students in your classroom. Additionally, excuses are more often accepted and even expected from student-athletes. For example, if a student is constantly missing deadlines, you are more likely to be understanding of their circumstances because of the time

commitment of sports.” Renee agreed with Sofia, stating that, “They [student-athletes] are not required to turn in assignments at the same time and they can leave class much earlier than the rest for any reason.”

Not all of the non-student-athletes felt that student-athlete preferential treatment was unfair or even existed. Mike, for instance, stated in his letter to a teacher that, “special treatment student-athletes receive in relation to extra time given to take tests or complete assignments because of other time commitments was fair” and continued by saying, “I don’t believe you gave special treatment to athletes by giving them easier material or less material to complete in the classroom”

The survey data, however, appeared to show a difference in perceptions based on which high school the students attended. At High School A, the percentage of student-athletes and non-student-athletes who agreed that student-athletes received preferential treatment was similar at 61% and 56%. However, at High School B, only 36% of student-athletes believed they received preferential treatment while 71% of non-student-athletes believed that the athletes did receive preferential treatment. The data showed a greater perception of student-athlete preferential treatment at High School B by the non-student-athletes, while conversely, the athletes at that school perceive the treatment quite differently. This large discrepancy seems to be related to Hispanic student-athletes, as only 33% of them believed that student-athletes received preferential treatment by teachers, and just 20% believed administration gave preferential treatment to student athletes.

**Non-Student-Athletes.** Perceptions of the treatment of non-student-athletes varied among the participants. For instance, some of the student-athletes felt that the teachers were, for the most part, fair to everyone. Student-athlete Wes stated, “I’m pretty sure for the most part,



teachers at [High School A] are pretty fair to all those students, even if they don't do anything after school.” Mike, who is a non-student-athlete, tended to agree with Wes, noting, “It seemed to me that the treatment among everyone in the classroom was fair and non-preferential.”

Most non-student-athletes did not believe the treatment of both student-athletes and non-student-athletes was equitable. Isabella wrote in her letter, “Whether or not they are involved in sports does not matter, and it does not determine what they might need academically.” She then stated, “I don’t mind that you prefer to talk to your team members, but some students may need more help than them.” Marie agreed with Isabella, writing in her teacher letter, “I feel as if your preferential treatment of student-athletes is demeaning to my character and the other students who are not athletes.” In her letter, Gina wrote that she knows that there is a lot of leniency shown to some of the student-athletes and that her biggest hope was that teachers might show some of the same leniency to her and other fellow theatre artists as received by the student-athletes. Sofia also discussed the differences she saw in the treatment of students by saying, “Excuses from other students [non-student-athletes], while not always reasonable, are disregarded much more often and labeled as irresponsibility.” One student even noted having a fear of teachers due to her status as a non-student-athlete. Betty wrote in her letter that, “we feel as if we cannot come to you with extra questions, or to joke and connect or even talk to those students [athletes] out of fear they may tell you.”

Throughout the interviews and letters, it became clear that both athletes and non-student-athletes felt that student-athletes did receive preferential treatment, but their view of equitability was quite different. Many of the non-student-athletes had strong opinions that the treatment was not equitable or fair.

### Cross-Case Analysis

A cross-case analysis was used to determine the similarities and differences between the students from the different high schools and between the student-athletes and non-student-athletes. To perform the cross-case analysis, a manifestation of multi-case themes worksheet was utilized. This allowed me to see which themes were more prevalent within each student group from the two schools. Table 3 is a representation of the manifestation of the themes present within each group.

**Table 3**

*Manifestation of Multicase Themes in Each Case*

Multicase Themes	High School A Student- Athletes	High School A Non- Student- Athletes	High School B Student- Athletes	High School B Non- Student- Athletes
Ordinariness of this Cases Situation				
Theme 1- Student Identity	M	M	M	M
Theme 2- Relationships	m	M	m	M
Theme 3- School Culture	M	M	M	M
Theme 4- Student Treatment	M	M	m	M

M – high manifestation, m – some manifestation

When I analyzed the data, I found that the students at both schools and in all groups agreed on the themes of student identity and school culture. The majority of students agreed that most students identified with a particular student group, such as athletes, band students, and drama or theater students. The student-athletes also noted that within the athlete groups exist subgroups based on the sport, such as football, cheerleading, basketball, etc. As for the school

culture, most of the students at both schools perceived that sports seemed to have a higher value than academics, though some students did mention that occasionally academics are recognized.

Student perceptions differed across two of the themes. For the theme of relationships, non-student-athletes had much stronger perceptions of the relationships between teachers and students. While the student-athletes did seem to perceive that athletes may have closer relationships with teachers, the non-student-athletes at both schools perceived that teachers definitely had much closer relationships with athletes, usually to the detriment of the non-student-athletes. This was evident when the non-student-athletes discussed the treatment the student-athletes received versus the other students. In both the interviews and the letters, a sense of resentment was noted, especially in the letters that students wrote to an anonymous teacher. During the interviews, the non-student-athletes usually had a more positive view of their relationship with teachers, but their letters tended to show more negative views. In this instance the findings differed across data collection methods. During her interview, Sofia, a student at High School B, spoke mostly positive of her relationships with teachers, but in her letter wrote, “Student-athletes are often placed on a pedestal, while other students feel inferior to them because of this unspoken hierarchy of respect and attention.” Marie, a student at High School A, shared Sofia’s sentiments when she wrote, “I do not appreciate the fact that student-athletes are placed at a higher value in your classroom.”

The other theme that had a difference noted between schools was the treatment of student-athletes. While the interviews and letters of the student-athletes at both schools were similar, the biggest difference was in the student-athletes’ answers on the survey. At High School A, 61% of student-athletes agreed that they received preferential treatment from teachers and 59% agreed that administration gave preferential treatment to student-athletes. Conversely, only

36% of student-athletes at High School B agreed that they received preferential treatment from teachers and only 30% believed they received preferential treatment from administration. The differences noted in the perceptions of the students in these two themes are discussed in Chapter Five.

### **Research Questions**

To answer the Central Research Question and the related sub-questions, I used the data collected and analyzed from the surveys, interviews, and letters. This data was used to synthesize findings within and across cases using a cross-case analysis.

#### ***Central Research Question***

What are high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes?

The analysis of the surveys, interviews, and letters from both cases established that the majority of both student-athletes and non-student-athletes perceived that student-athletes received preferential treatment from teachers, with the exception being the survey results of student-athletes at High School B. This data analysis revealed four major themes: student identity, relationships, school culture, and student treatment.

All of the students recognized and discussed the various student groups within the school and assigning themselves to at least one of the groups. This became important during the rest of the study as for most students it seemed to influence their perceptions of the other three themes.

The second theme was relationships between students and between students and teachers. While most of the students seemed to agree that the relationships between students were positive, there seemed to be differences in the relationships between students and teachers. The student-athletes, in general, seemed to have favorable views of the relationships between teachers and students. Many of the student-athletes noted that the teachers seemed to recognize their roles as

student-athletes and were willing to help them. Several even noted that certain teachers, especially coaches, seemed to have a stronger bond with athletes, especially if that teacher coached those student-athletes. Several of the non-student-athletes, on the other hand, had different perceptions about the relationships. While many started out saying that the relationships seemed positive, several then stated that teachers seemed to relate more positively to student-athletes. What was interesting was that this view came more from the letters than the interviews.

The third major theme was school culture. In general, most of the non-student-athletes seemed to have a negative view of the impact of preferential treatment of student-athletes on the school culture. The student-athletes, for the most part, did say that there seemed to be a higher emphasis on athletics than academics, but most did not feel that the impact on school culture was too negative.

The fourth major theme was the treatment of students by teachers, which had the minor themes of the treatment of student-athletes and the treatment of non-student-athletes. From the surveys, differences were noted in the perceptions of the treatment of student-athletes by teachers and administration between the student-athletes at the two schools. High School A student-athletes reported a greater belief that they received preferential treatment from both teacher and administrators than student-athletes at High School B. All non-student-athletes seemed to agree that student-athletes received preferential treatment in varying degrees, with most of the focus on the ability to turn in assignments late due to athletic participation. When it came to the treatment of non-student-athletes, data collected in the interviews and letters showed that the non-student-athletes expressed stronger feelings about their treatment as compared to student-athletes. Several of the non-student-athletes at both schools expressed that they were not given the same

opportunities or treatment as the student-athletes, with several of them having very strong negative perceptions of the issue.

**Sub Question 1:** What are non-student-athletes' perceptions of teachers providing academic supports for student-athletes due to athletic participation?

Most of the non-student-athletes appeared to have the perception that teachers did provide supports for student-athletes. Many mentioned the teachers allowing student-athletes more time on assignments or working with the athletes to help balance their work with their athletic schedules. While they did acknowledge this treatment, how they felt about it varied among the non-student-athletes. For instance, Gina had a more positive view of the treatment when she wrote in her letter that the teacher did a great job working with student-athletes. Some non-student-athletes did not agree with this sentiment, however. Marie did not appreciate that student-athletes may be afforded extra time to complete assignments while non-student athletes do not receive the same courtesy. Sofia was even more adamant when she discussed how the teacher seemed to be more understanding of a student-athletes' circumstances. She went on to discuss how teachers disregarded excuses from other students and labeled them as irresponsible. While most non-student-athletes recognize teachers do meet the needs of student-athletes, educators may need to be aware that these students may have strong feelings about it they are not sharing with their teachers.

**Sub Question 2:** What are student-athletes' perceptions of teachers providing academic supports needed for student-athletes due to athletic participation?

In the interviews and letters, student-athletes acknowledged that teachers did provide them with supports due to their participation in athletics. For some, it was just the fact that teachers recognized their need for supports. Jerry talked about how he appreciated that teachers

understood how much work he put in to athletics. Jose agreed with Jerry by writing in his letter that he was thankful for the teacher finding a way to help him and other student-athletes in the classroom. Lynn and Sue both shared this sentiment by writing to thank their teachers helping to meet their needs while competing in athletics.

The surveys revealed slightly different results, based on the school. While 61% of High School A student-athletes agreed with the perception that they receive preferential treatment, only 36% of student-athletes at High School B agreed. Differences among racial groups of student-athletes at High School B were also noted. While 57% of Caucasian student-athletes at High School B believed that student-athletes received preferential treatment from teachers, only 33% of the Hispanic students shared that belief. The survey results of High School A showed that 83% of Hispanic student-athletes believed they received preferential treatment from teachers.

**Sub Question 3:** What are student perceptions of teachers' equitable treatment of student-athletes as compared to non-student-athletes?

When it came to the perceptions of equitable treatment, the non-student-athletes tended to have much stronger feelings on the question. Gina felt that teachers did not have the same appreciation for their time commitments as they did for student-athletes. She stated that teachers often forgot that she had schedules just busy as the student-athletes. Some students felt that they were less important to teachers than the student-athletes were. For instance, Sofia said, when she needed help with my studies, she felt somewhat neglected because athletes had the first priority. Sofia made sure to point out that teachers needed to understand that all students need the teacher's attention by writing in her letter that she hoped that all teachers would pay closer

attention to their favoritism towards athletes so that all students have equal opportunities to prosper.

Not all non-student-athletes felt that teachers' treatment of student-athletes was unfair. Mike shared his perception in his interview that the treatment among everyone in the classroom was fair and non-preferential.

Several of the student-athletes also believed that the treatment they received was probably unfair, but most did not seem to think it was much of an issue. Dan, for instance, did think the treatment was kind of unfair, but felt it was because teachers and student-athletes bonded over the sport they played and he did not see it as a big issue. Some student-athletes, while recognizing preferential treatment, still had the perception that teachers were fair to all. Wes shared his view that the teachers at his school were fair to all students. Overall, the perceptions of equitable treatment seemed to generate the strongest views from non-student-athletes.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four included a representation of findings following analysis of the data collected from surveys, interviews, and letters written by the participants from two high schools. This multiple case study was an exploration of students' perceptions of teachers' preferential treatment of student-athletes. Analysis of the data revealed four major themes and minor themes. Major themes included student identity, relationships, school culture, and student treatment. Two of the major themes included minor themes, and all of the major and minor themes were discussed with quotes from the participant interviews and letters. The major themes that emerged addressed the research questions guiding the study.



Chapter Four presented an overview of the data collection and the analysis procedures, as well as a discussion of the major and minor themes that emerged. The major and minor themes answered the research questions and were discussed using data from the surveys, interviews, and letters. Chapter Five contains a discussion and summary of the findings, the implications of the findings, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this multiple case study was to gain insight into high school students' perceptions of teachers' preferential treatment of student-athletes. This chapter of the study consists of five sections that will provide the final discussions of the findings and implications of this research study. The sections of this chapter will include a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, implications of the findings, delimitations and limitations, recommendations for future research, and a summary of the chapter.

### Summary of Findings

To answer the research questions of this study, I conducted an exploratory multiple case study with students from two high schools (i.e., cases) in Georgia. Each school was represented by four student-athletes and four non-student-athletes, for a total of 16 participants. The case study design provided sufficient data for analysis through the sources of (a) a qualitative survey (High School A,  $N = 119$ ) (High School B,  $N = 88$ ), (b) interviews, and (c) student letters. These three sources supplied sufficient data to allow for triangulation. I used bracketing to account for researcher bias; however, it could have affected how I coded the text of the interviews and student letters into major and minor themes. I also used memoing to write notes to reflect my perceptions of both topic of this study and the student's perceptions as I collected data from the demographic surveys, interviews, and letter documentation. Limitations of parent and student response to recruitment for participation, student participation in the survey, and location had no effect on the interpretation of the results, but did affect the collection of data due to the limited sample of participants. Four major themes emerged from the data: student identity, relationships, school culture, and student treatment. Four minor themes emerged, two under relationships and

two under student treatment. These themes assisted in answering the research questions and have implications for future research.

The central research question dealt with students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes. The four major themes helped to answer the central research question: student identity, relationships, school culture, and student treatment. Student identity refers to the groups that students identify within the school and the group that they identify with, such as athlete or non-athlete. The theme for relationships referred to the personal interactions between students and teachers, with two minor themes, which were the relationships between students and the relationships between students and teachers. The theme for school culture referred to the beliefs, behaviors, and values of the students and staff. The fourth major theme, student treatment, referred to the treatment of students by teachers and administrators. The minor themes of student-athletes and non-student-athlete treatment each focused on those specific student groups. The multiple data sources contributed to revealing these four major themes from various students at both schools. Two of the major themes also had minor themes.

The first and second research sub-questions focused on student-athletes' and non-student-athletes' perceptions of teachers providing academic supports to student-athletes due to their participation in athletics. All of the major themes were applicable in answering these questions. Students were able to identify the groups to which they belonged and groups to which they did not belong, and then associated those groups with benefits they did or did not receive due to their group identity. The data collection revealed that many students felt that student-athletes received preferential treatment because of the closer relationships they seemed to have with their teachers and that school culture appeared to emphasize athletics over academics.

The third research sub-question dealt with the students' perceptions of equitable treatment of student-athletes versus non-student-athletes. The data collected from the interviews did not reveal much of a difference between student-athletes and non-student-athletes related to equitable treatment. However, the letters students wrote differed in tone and content when compared to the interviews. The letters revealed that many of the non-student-athletes had quite a bit of resentment that teachers allowed student-athletes benefits in the classroom that others did not receive. A few even made comments suggesting they felt neglected or demeaned by teachers allowing student-athletes privileges not afforded to others while one student even discussed how she felt afraid and intimidated that her teachers would find out about her resentments. These data give evidence to support all of the major themes that emerged during the research.

### **Discussion**

The results of the study showed that most student-athletes and non-student-athletes perceived that student-athletes did receive preferential treatment from teachers. However, how students felt about this treatment differed mostly based on the background and group affiliation of the student. The following sections are an empirical and theoretical discussion of the results of the study.

#### **Empirical Discussion**

The findings of this study fully align with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The literature review detailed the importance of extracurricular activities (Dyer et al., 2017; Haghghat & Knifsend, 2019), the challenges student-athletes face due to sports participation (Gomez et al., 2018; Harding et al., 2018; Sheehan et al., 2018), the challenges faced by non-student-athletes due to other time commitments (Chinyakata et al., 2019; Wadood et al., 2018), and possible issues related to the school culture when student-athletes receive preferential

treatment (Fuller et al., 2019). The literature review suggested that while student-athletes may have needs related to their participation in sports, non-student-athletes have needs as well and may have negative feelings about a perceived difference in this treatment (Fuller et al., 2019; Trusz, 2017). The data analysis from this study suggests that is the case.

By coding and reviewing the data, I was able to do a thematic analysis to discover four major themes. The literature review aligned with these themes in terms of the treatment of student-athletes. The following is a discussion of each of the themes identified.

### ***Student Group Identity***

Student group identity was a major theme in the interviews and letters. This theme coincides with social identity theory, which posits that people usually associate themselves with certain groups and base their self-worth, perceptions, and behaviors on the group identity (Brown, 2000). Students identified the various groups within a school and aligned themselves with a specific group. Athletes also aligned themselves in subgroups based on their particular sport, such as football, cheerleading, and soccer. Research suggest that those who identify with specific groups have their perceptions shaped by their sense of belonging within that group (Steffens et al., 2018). This awareness of the students' belonging to specific groups did appear to affect their views on the treatment of student-athletes in comparison to non-student-athletes. It was particularly noted in the comments by students from both schools who identified as theater students. Student-athletes also appeared to notice that the sport a student participated in made a difference as several noted that football players and cheerleaders seemed to receive the most preferential treatment.

Educators need to understand that students self-identify with the group to which they belong, and this identity can shape the views students have of teachers and how they treat others.

Most students are keenly but silently observing teacher behavior towards other students, and their perceptions that certain groups of students receive preferential treatment may have a negative impact on those students' attitudes and feelings for the teachers and the school itself.

### ***Relationships***

Relationships was another theme that was evident in this study. The students discussed the relationships between student-athletes and non-student-athletes and the relationships between all students and teachers. As research suggests, relationships between student-athletes and teachers can have an effect on student motivation and learning (Claessens et al., 2017; Rankin et al., 2016). Therefore, this theme was an important aspect of this study. Other researchers found that positive relationships with students can also have a positive effect on teacher emotions and joy in the classroom (Hagenauer et al., 2015). This study added to this research by providing evidence that students perceived this to be the case.

\_\_\_\_\_ Several of the student-athletes expressed gratitude to the teachers for assisting them with their needs due to participation in sports, which implied that they had positive views of their relationship with their teachers. A few of the student-athletes perceived that student-athletes seemed to have more positive relationships with their teachers than non-student-athletes, especially if the teacher was also a coach. Kim, for instance, said all of her teachers that were coaches seemed to pay more attention to the student-athletes, which she believed is due to their shared involvement in sports. Non-student-athletes also seemed to notice this, but seemed to acknowledge it more in their letters than in their interviews.

During their interviews, most of the non-student-athletes stated that relationships between all teachers and students seemed positive. However, in their letters, several wrote harsh assessments of some teachers, noting that they felt demeaned or neglected in classes when

compared to the student-athletes. Of those students who did report less favorable relationships with teachers, several were Hispanic. This finding aligned with previous research that found Hispanic students perceived less favorable relationships with teachers (Voight et al., 2015). One participant in my study even said she was scared to say anything to anyone else for fear it may get back to the teacher. These perceptions of the teachers can have a significant influence on how students view their relationship with teachers, which may then have an impact on their motivation and learning in those classes.

Educators need to be aware of how students view their relationships with their teachers. Students are constantly observing the actions of educators and form their views of relationships based on their observations. A teacher may believe they have good relationships with all students, but there may be students who have negative views of teacher behaviors that students deem unfair.

### ***School Culture***

Prior research establishes a correlation between higher levels of student engagement and success, and a positive school climate and culture (Bradley & Conway, 2016; Konold et al., 2017). During the interviews, the majority of students from both schools perceived that the school culture at their school focused more on athletics than academics, fine arts, or other extra-curricular activities. Student-athletes were very consistent in noting that the schools had a greater emphasis on sporting events. Non-student-athletes agreed, but sometimes even more emphatically than the student-athletes did, as noted by the inflection of their voice in the interviews or their use of exclamation points in their letters. Both student-athletes and non-student-athletes did comment that the schools did have some forms of academic recognition, but most said that the focus on academics was much less than it was on sports.

A few students noted that the administration attempted to maintain a balance between academics and sports. Wes, a student-athlete, and Mike, a non-student-athlete, believed their school's administration put some focus on academics, but both agreed that it did not seem to resonate as much within the school as sports. This could be the case because school spirit is most often tied to sports. Students and staff wear school colors and spirit wear associated with their sports teams. Research has shown that sports play an important role in the way students feel a connection to school (Bradley & Conway, 2016).

School culture is an issue that educators should take very seriously, as it could have an impact on student feelings towards the school and teachers. Educators should make a concerted effort to ensure that non-student-athletes feel as recognized and important as athletes do when it comes to their various academic and extracurricular achievements.

### ***Treatment of Students***

This study examined students' perceptions of teacher treatment of student-athletes. Overall, the survey, interviews, and letters of student-athletes and non-student-athletes at both schools indicated that the majority of all students perceived that student-athletes received preferential treatment in the school by both teachers and administrators. For instance, in the surveys, 56% of all students surveyed agreed that teachers and administration give preferential treatment to student athletes. High School A's survey showed that 59% believed teachers gave preferential treatment with 52% of High School B surveyed students agreed. Surveyed students at High School A and High School B believed that administration gave preferential treatment to student athletes at a rate of 61% and 50%, respectively. However, there were instances of differences noted in both the cross-case analysis and across the data collection methods. For instance, the cross-case analysis of the survey data showed that 61% of student-athletes at High



School A believed they received preferential treatment from teachers, while only 36% of student-athletes at High School B shared that perception. This contrast is further explained by the results from the Hispanic student-athletes at High School B. While 53% of Caucasian student-athletes at High School B believe that they receive preferential treatment from teachers, only 33% of Hispanics share that belief. Furthermore, no Hispanic student-athlete believed that administration provided preferential treatment to student-athletes, while 57% of Caucasian student-athletes did believe student-athletes received this preferential treatment. While the reason for the discrepancy is unclear, it is possible that perceptions can be influenced by a student's ethnic culture and background. When comparing their written letters and their interview responses, the non-student-athletes gave a harsher assessment of the differences in how they were treated as compared to student.

This study supports previous research that found teachers perceived student-athletes receive preferential treatment in the classroom (Fuller et al., 2017). Furthermore, just as Fuller et al. (2017) found, several students noted that teachers who were also coaches tended to have better relationships with and focus more attention on the student-athletes. This could be why most of the student-athletes had positive views of the treatment they received from their teachers, especially those who were also coaches. Conversely, non-student-athletes also noted that these stronger relationships between teachers/coaches and student-athletes led to preferential treatment of the student-athletes.

With both students and teachers recognizing this treatment, there is surely an impact on the way the students feel about teachers and the school. Student-athletes acknowledged and appreciated this perceived preferential treatment. Several of the non-student-athletes, however, made sure to point out that the treatment student-athletes received made them feel less

appreciated or even neglected in class. For educators, this is important to ensure that all students feel they receive equitable treatment in the classroom.

### **Theoretical Discussion**

The social cognitive theory (SCT, theorist/year) and the social identity theory (SIT, theorist/year) were the basis for the framework of this study. The sections that follow provide a detailed discussion of how both of these theories provide relevance to the study.

#### ***Social Cognitive Theory***

In Bandura's (1986) SCT, the triadic reciprocal causation of personal and environmental factors and behavioral patterns influence people's perceptions and relationships with others (Bandura, 1999). The participants in this study had personal backgrounds in athletics or other nonathletic activities. They have experienced the environment of high school classrooms and the behavior patterns of teachers, student-athletes, and non-student-athletes. These factors and experiences shaped their perceptions of the treatment of high school student-athletes. Furthermore, the teacher's background or experiences with athletics influenced the students' perceptions of teacher treatment of student-athletes. The results showed that this theory is applicable. Group status, background and observations of teacher behaviors influenced students' perceptions of behaviors. Sofia, a non-student-athlete at High School B, made it clear that she felt neglected by teachers when she needed help, and that the teachers disregarded requests or excuses from non-student-athletes and labeled them as irresponsible.

Marie, a non-student-athlete from High School A, expressed her view that the teachers' preferential treatment of student athletes that she observed was demeaning to her character. The students' belief that teachers provide preferential treatment is reinforced by witnessing the behavior of the teachers. Further, when student-athletes asked for and received treatment that

could be seen as preferential to others, it reinforced that behavior. For instance, Gary, a student-athlete at High School B, noted that he was given extra time to complete assignments. By giving him this extra time, the teacher reinforced his belief that he was entitled to this extra-time due to his status as a student-athlete, therefore, he would continue to expect this behavior from his teachers. This finding aligned with the SCT constructs of expectations and reinforcements (Bandura, 1999). The teachers' behaviors may also have been influenced by witnessing the behavior of other teachers in their interactions with student-athletes and therefore their own behavior was either reinforced or changed by their observations. Kim, a student-athlete at High School A, noted that while the teachers who were coaches recognized the needs of student-athletes, other teachers may not have understood the athletes' needs and were sometimes less willing to be helpful. This also lent credence to how their perceptions of teacher treatment were affected by their personal factors of status as a student-athlete or non-student-athlete.

When discussing school and classroom culture, the majority of students from both schools perceived that athletics is valued higher than academics, fine arts, and other extra-curricular activities. This perception was due to the shared experiences of the students within the school. As Bandura (1986) noted, people make observations of their environment and form beliefs based on their observations. In their classroom environments, the students experienced the behaviors of both the teachers and other students, be they student-athletes or non-student-athletes. The students' and teachers' behaviors and interactions shaped the participants' perceptions of the treatment of student-athletes by their teachers. The students' behaviors were then responses to these experiences.

Kim, a student-athlete from High School A, talked about how she experienced that the school has a culture in which athletics was more important than academics. She discussed how it

seemed to annoy the non-student-athletes and that they seemed to be less likely to have positive relationships with their teachers. She said that she recognized the preferential treatment given to her by teachers, and she believed it had a positive influence on her behavior in the classroom and her relationships with her teachers. Renee, a non-student-athlete from High School B, described how her behavior was a response to teacher preferential treatment of student-athletes when she said that she was afraid to even tell other students how she felt because she didn't want it to get back to the teacher. She also described how there were days she did not want to go to class because of how she felt less invited due to the teacher preferential treatment of student athletes. Missy, a non-student-athlete, shared her belief that athletic competitions, especially football, basketball, and soccer appeared to get the most recognition at her school while academics or other extracurricular activities received only occasional mention. This experience made her feel less appreciated for her accomplishments at school. The implication here is that students' behaviors and attitudes for school may be impacted when they feel their accomplishments are less appreciated by the school than student-athletes' accomplishments. SCT relates to these shared experiences of student-athletes and non-student-athletes as investigated in this study as they expressed either positive or negative feelings of the treatment of student-athletes and how this treatment affected their own behaviors and attitudes in school.

### ***Social Identity Theory***

In SIT (Brown, 2000), people identify with specific groups, and their behaviors and perceptions can be influenced by their sense of belonging in those groups (Hogg et al., 2017; Hornung et al., 2018; Steffens et al., 2018). Throughout the discussions about student treatment, most students had perceptions that there was a different teacher treatment of students based on which groups they belonged. The groups that the students belonged to also seemed to have

influence on how they perceived teacher treatment. Several of the students noted that student-athletes received preferential treatment and had better relationships with teachers because of their status as an athlete. Gary, a student-athlete at High School B, discussed how he felt student-athletes and teachers had better relationships than teachers had with non-student-athletes. He felt this is because the teachers probably liked that the student-athletes were representing the school in athletic contests. Kim, a student-athlete at High School A, shared the same feelings when she noted that held in higher regard at her school. Isabella, a non-student-athlete at High School B, wrote in her letter to a teacher that she observed that the teacher who was a coach seemed to feel more comfortable relating to the athletes because of his or her shared athletic participation. These views implied that the students felt that teachers appeared to be identified more with the athletes of the school.

While they all identified groups as being student-athletes or non-student-athletes, it was interesting that the student-athletes perceived that there were subgroups of student-athletes. Many mentioned football players, cheerleaders, and basketball players most often as the athlete subgroups. This is significant because some of the student-athletes also thought preferential treatment of student-athletes was sometimes based on which sport or sports an athlete plays. Among the student-athletes at both schools, there was the perception that football players and cheerleaders received the most preferential treatment. Kim, a student-athlete at High School A, said that football players and cheerleaders appeared to her to receive the most preferential treatment, and that football players and cheerleaders were held at a higher level of esteem than those of other sports. Gary, a student-athlete at High School B agreed when he said that in his experience football players and cheerleaders seemed to have received better treatment from

teachers. This was especially interesting considering that while High School A had a history of success in football, High School B had a reputation as a soccer powerhouse.

Student identity also influenced how the students felt about teachers' treatment of the various student groups. As seen in prior research, teachers, student-athletes, and non-student-athletes may have different views on the treatment of different student groups (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017; Hogg et al., 2017). In general, student-athletes predictably felt that preferential treatment of student-athletes was justified. Jerry, Jose, and Lynn discussed how much work they put into athletics and that they felt that teachers should allow them extra time to get assignments completed or giving additional help. Conversely, Isabella, Gina, and Betty discussed how they believed teachers overlooked or ignored non-student-athletes in comparison to student-athletes. They shared that they had extra-curricular activities that required additional time commitments and that teacher preferential treatment of student-athletes was unfair to other student groups.

As seen in this study, SIT provided a framework for explaining how students recognized that there are different groups of students and that they identified to a specific group. The students also recognized that the group to which they belonged to seemed to influence their perception of the teachers' treatment of those students. While the students agreed that teachers did provide preferential treatment to student-athletes, the group identity of these students appeared to influence how they felt about the treatment student-athletes received from teachers.

### **Implications**

This study has theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for educators. Each of the following sections is a discussion of these implications.

## **Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical frameworks guiding this study were SCT and SIT. There are significant theoretical implications from the findings of this study. For SCT (Bandura, 2001), the personal and environmental factors and the behavioral patterns of students influenced their perceptions of student treatment, relationships, and school culture. The findings support SCT in that the student backgrounds and observations of behaviors of teachers influenced the students' perceptions of teacher treatment of students (Fuller et al., 2019). While student-athletes seemed to have a favorable perception of the treatment they received from teachers, several of the non-student-athletes had lower favorable opinions of the treatment that student-athletes received in comparison to the treatment they received. Gary, a student-athlete at High School B, was appreciative that teachers recognized his needs and worked with him to either let him have additional time to complete assignments or help him understand material he missed when he missed class due to athletic activities. Marie, a non-student-athlete at High School A, made it clear that she felt that preferential treatment given to student-athletes was demeaning to non-student-athletes. Educators need to be aware that their treatment of students is constantly observed by students, and right or wrong, their perceptions of unfair treatment could have an impact on teacher/student relationship and student attitudes regarding school and academic achievement (Fuller et al.).

Findings also correlate with SIT as people identify with those who are similar to themselves, and this self-identification can shape their views of themselves and others (Hogg et al., 2017; Hornung et al., 2018; Steffens et al., 2018). Data from this study showed that students' perceptions of teacher treatment of student-athletes were based on their sense of belonging to a particular group. The student-athletes showed a sense of appreciation for teachers who provided

preferential treatment, while non-student-athletes expressed feelings of resentment towards teachers for not giving all students equitable treatment. Educators need to recognize that students' sense of belonging to a specific group may influence the way they perceive teacher treatment of the various student groups. The student surveys, interviews, and letters provided an insight into the different student groups' beliefs and perceptions of teachers' treatment of students at the two schools represented in this study.

### **Empirical Implications**

Previous research suggests teachers perceived student-athletes received preferential treatment in the classroom (Fuller et al., 2019; Fuller et al., 2017). This study validated and expanded the previous research in that the majority of both student-athletes and non-student-athletes perceived student-athletes received preferential treatment. The findings in this study aligned with Jiang et al (2016) in that positive relationships between students and teachers occurred when students felt teachers worked to meet their academic needs. Without exception, all of the student-athletes had very favorable views of teachers who willingly helped them with any of their academic needs due to sports participation, such as providing additional time to complete work.

This study also added to the research that student-athletes and non-student-athletes had different perceptions of the preferential treatment of student-athletes (Hogg et al., 2017; Hornug et al., 2018). When non-student-athletes felt they received less attention from the teacher or had a lower stature in school than student-athletes, they had negative attitudes towards teachers and the class in general (Mitchell et al., 2018). These negative feelings could result in poorer teacher-student relationships and reduced academic outcomes.



## Practical Implications

Findings from this study have many practical implications. Students recognized that some received preferential treatment while others did not. For some of the non-student-athletes, observing preferential treatment of student-athletes caused a negative view of the teacher, with some noting how they felt demeaned or neglected in the classroom. Many also discussed how athletics seemed to take precedence over academics, especially when it came to the recognition of achievements. Others also discussed how athletics appeared to be valued more than other extracurricular activities, such as band, chorus, and theater. Educators and schools can implement several things to change student perceptions regarding the preferential treatment of student-athletes.

- Work at getting to know all students on a more personal level.
- Provide all students with the same accommodations for any needs, especially when extra time is needed for assignments.
- Ensure that academic achievements are recognized and celebrated.
- Recognize, honor, and celebrate all extracurricular achievements such as band, chorus, and drama.
- Seek continuous feedback from students with open-ended anonymous surveys.

Educators can help to reduce student feelings of inequity and unfairness in the treatment of both student-athletes and non-student-athletes by understanding and having empathy for the feelings of all. By seeking ways to ensure equitable treatment for all and having an awareness of students' perceptions of this treatment, educators may be able to eliminate the negative feelings that some non-student-athletes have towards teachers.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations of the study include the school district, schools, the grade level of the participants, and the participation or non-participation in school sports. The school district and the schools were chosen based on the location and accessibility to the researcher. The grade level of senior year was chosen to ensure that students had the maximum experiences in school to form their perceptions. Further, this study included both student-athletes and non-student-athletes to ensure that the perceptions were not limited to a specific group of students.

One of the major limitations of this study was limited number of students who volunteered to participate from each school and the inability to get a wide diversity of student participants. This study relied on the voluntary participation of students in an initial qualitative survey, with 35% of High School A seniors responding and 33% of High School B seniors responding (High School A,  $N = 119$ ; High School B,  $N = 88$ ). From those volunteers, I had to rely on students to volunteer to participate in interviews and documentation writing. The reliance on student volunteers, along with the need to have a requisite number of both student-athletes and non-student-athletes from each school limited my ability to get a very diverse cross-section of students. The male population at High School A and High School B is 52% and 49%, respectively, while the male participants were 38% for both schools. At High School A, the Hispanic population is 27%. However, only 13% of the participants were Hispanic. High School B had a much larger discrepancy, where 77% of the student body was Hispanic, but only 38% of the participants were Hispanic. The time required to complete the study limited me from continuing to seek volunteers to widen my demographic base, as research had to be completed within one year of IRB approval. Another limitation was that the initial demographic survey was the number questions that was sent out to all seniors limiting the depth of data obtained.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study contributed to the research from other studies. There are areas for suggested future study. This study focused on seniors at each high school, so future research may widen the focus to the entire student body. By including the entire student body, it may be possible to also increase the number of students who volunteer to participate in the interview process, thus increasing the ability to have a more diverse cross-section of students.

Since this study was limited to two high schools in one Northeast Georgia school district, future research might take place at other school districts to determine if perceptions are different based on region, or at schools with strong fine arts programs. This study took place in public schools, so a study that focuses on private schools may be another area for future research.

This study included both student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Future qualitative research might just focus on one group of students to get a more in-depth analysis of specific groups views. Since the student-athlete participants represented a variety of sports, future research may want to narrow the focus to only one sport or expand to include a greater focus on fine arts programs. Conversely, future research could research differences in the perceptions of student-athletes based on their particular sport. Future research may include quantitative research using surveys with more in-depth questions.

### **Summary**

Chapter Five is the conclusion to this exploratory multiple case study exploring high school students' perceptions of teachers' treatment of student-athletes. Interviews and letters from 16 senior students from two Northeast Georgia high schools were obtained, along with qualitative surveys of 119 High School A seniors and 88 High School B seniors. The data analysis led to findings that most students perceived student-athletes received preferential

treatment, but the attitudes towards that treatment differed between most student-athletes and non-student-athletes. While most student-athletes had positive views of the preferential treatment provided by teachers, many of the non-student-athletes voiced opinions of resentment that treatment for all was not equitable or fair. This study contributed to research that reinforced the importance of valuing and supporting all students, including valuing academics, fine arts programs, and other extra-curricular activities. Future studies may focus on other school's athletic programs, or on schools that known to value fine arts program.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**CODE FREQUENCY CHART**

Codes	Frequency From Interviews	Frequency from Student Letters	Frequency Total
Relationship	25	6	31
Understanding	23	12	35
Staff Position	38	4	42
Sport Played	36	9	45
Academics	27	7	34
Recognition	23	2	25
Fairness	38	4	42
Help	28	12	40
Support	29	6	35
Equal	24	3	27
Missed Classes	21	4	25
Missed Assignments	18	4	22
Athletes	38	3	41
Band Students	27	4	31
Theater Students	26	4	30



**APPENDIX B**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

1. Male or Female?
2. Age?
3. Ethnicity?
4. How long have you been in this school?
5. List any school sport in which have you participated, are currently participating, or will participate and the school years you participated in each sport. For example, if you played basketball every year in high school, you would write “Basketball, 9, 10, 11, 12”.
6. List any non-sport extra-curricular activities in which you have participated and how many years (band, chorus, drama, clubs, etc.). For example, if you were in chorus just your freshman and sophomore year, you would write “Chorus, 9, 10”.
7. List other time commitments, not including sports or extra-curricular activities, you have or have had outside of school (part-time job, etc.)?
8. Using the drop-down box, choose how you feel about the following statement: Teachers at this school show preferential treatment to student-athletes. Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
9. Using the drop-down box, choose how you feel about the following statement: Administration at this school show preferential treatment to student-athletes. Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
10. Would you be interested in participating in a confidential interview to discuss your views on teacher treatment of student-athletes? If so, please give your name and address below. By providing your name and address to participate in the interview, you will no longer remain

anonymous. Both your survey responses and your interview answers will be kept confidential between you and the interviewer. If you are not interested in participating in an interview, leave this section blank.

**APPENDIX C**

**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY DATA – HIGH SCHOOL A**

*High School A Survey Data – Teacher Preferential Treatment of Student-athletes*

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Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Students	13	57	26	17	6
Athletes	5	38	14	8	6
Non-athletes	8	19	12	9	0
Male	7	27	13	13	6
Female	6	30	13	4	0
White	6	40	17	8	0
Hispanic	5	13	6	0	0
Black	1	4	2	0	5
Other	1	0	1	9	1

---

*High School A Survey Data – Administration Preferential Treatment of Student-athletes*

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Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Students	31	41	38	7	2
Athletes	11	31	20	7	2
Non-athletes	20	10	18	0	0
Male	14	26	21	3	2
Female	17	15	17	4	0
White	17	30	19	5	0
Hispanic	10	5	8	1	0
Black	3	6	1	1	1
Other	1	0	10	0	1

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**APPENDIX D**

**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY DATA – HIGH SCHOOL B**

*High School B Survey Data – Teacher Preferential Treatment of Student-athletes*

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Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Students	8	38	25	13	4
Athletes	3	14	16	11	3
Non-athletes	5	24	9	2	1
Male	4	21	12	5	1
Female	4	17	13	8	3
White	2	20	12	4	3
Hispanic	2	15	9	9	1
Black	1	3	2	0	0
Other	3	0	2	0	0

---

*High School B Survey Data – Administration Preferential Treatment of Student-athletes*

---

Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Students	16	28	25	15	4
Athletes	1	13	16	14	3
Non-athletes	15	15	9	1	1
Male	9	13	11	9	1
Female	7	15	14	6	3
White	5	14	12	7	3
Hispanic	7	9	12	7	1
Black	4	0	1	1	0
Other	0	5	0	0	0

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**APPENDIX E**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 5, 2020

Darrin Tipton  
David Gorman

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY19-20-339 A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATION: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF STUDENT ATHLETES

Dear Darrin Tipton, David Gorman:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: August 5, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent forms can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. These forms should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent documents should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**

## APPENDIX F

### MANIFESTATION OF MULTICASE THEMES IN EACH CASE

*Manifestation of Multicase Themes in Each Case*

Multicase Themes	High School A Student- Athletes	High School A Non- Student- Athletes	High School B Student- Athletes	High School B Non- Student- Athletes
<i>Ordinariness of this Cases Situation</i>				
Theme 1- Student Identity	M	M	M	M
Theme 2- Relationships	m	M	m	M
Theme 3- School Culture	M	M	M	M
Theme 4- Student Treatment	M	M	m	M

M – high manifestation, m – some manifestation



**APPENDIX G****PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**

August 31, 2020

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the perceptions of high school students on preferential treatment of student-athletes, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be in their senior year of high school. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher, as well as write a hypothetical letter to a teacher expressing their views on the topic. After the completion of the research, the participants will review the results and analysis of their interview and letter to ensure accuracy. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please sign and return the attached parental consent document to your child's school. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

Participants who choose to be interviewed and write letters will receive a \$15 gift card to Chick-fil-A upon completion.

Sincerely,

Darrin Scott Tipton  
Assistant Principal,

\_\_\_\_\_

**PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**  
Student Perceptions of Preferential Treatment of Student-athletes

Your student is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be high school seniors. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

This research study is being conducted by Darrin Scott Tipton, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow him or her to be in the study.

***Why is this study being done?***

The purpose of this study is to understand students' perceptions of preferential treatment of student-athletes.

***What will my child/student be asked to do?***

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, he or she will be asked to do one or more of the following things:

1. Potentially participate in an audio-recorded interview on their views of teacher treatment of student-athletes that will take approximately 30 minutes. The interview is optional.
2. Write a letter to a teacher explaining their feelings on teacher treatment of student-athletes. The letters are for the study only and will not be sent to teachers. Students who wish to participate in the interview will also be asked to write a letter.

***What are the risks and benefits of this study?***

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. However, because the researcher is a state mandated reporter, any information that comes to light regarding child abuse, child neglect, or intent to harm self or others may be reported to the appropriate agencies.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include insight into students' perceptions of the equitable treatment of students, as well as the affect the teacher treatment of student-athletes has on relationships between students and teachers and its impact on school climate.

***Will my child be compensated for participating?***

Students who are interviewed and write a letter will receive a \$15 Chick-Fil-A gift card for participating in this study.

***How will my child's personal information be protected?***

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- I will conduct the interviews at the school in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Pseudonyms will be used for student names so that they may

not be identified in the research report. Teachers will not be informed of students who are participating in the study.

- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

***Is study participation voluntary?***

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or [REDACTED]. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

***What should I or my child do if I decide to withdraw him or her or if he or she decides to withdraw from the study?***

If you choose to withdraw your child or if your child chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should your child choose to withdraw, I will not be able to remove anonymous survey data, but any data collected from students who choose to be interviewed and write a letter will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

***Whom do I contact if my child or I have questions or problems?***

The researcher conducting this study is Darrin Scott Tipton. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. David Gorman, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [REDACTED].

***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.***

The researcher has my permission to audio-record my child as part of his or her participation in this study.

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Signature of Minor

Date

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Signature of Parent

Date

**APPENDIX H****PARENT/GUARDIAN SUREVY OPT-OUT FORM**

August \_\_, 2020

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the perceptions of high school students on preferential treatment of student-athletes, and I will be asking seniors at the high school to complete a short survey on the subject.

The survey will be given to students in grade 12. Homeroom teachers will provide the students a link to an online survey. You have the right to preview the survey and may deny permission for your child to participate if you desire. If a student is uncomfortable with any question on the survey, the student does not have to answer that question or may elect to discontinue the survey. While it is hoped that as many students as possible will participate, you have the option of completing the attached form if you wish to opt out your child. The survey will be administered on \_\_\_\_\_, 2020. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. However, at the end of the survey, students will be asked if they would like to volunteer to participate in an interview and write an anonymous hypothetical letter. Those who volunteer will be asked to provide their name only. From those who volunteer, 8 students will be selected to participate in the interviews/letter writing and consent forms will be sent home to obtain parental or guardian permission. Information gathered in the interviews and letters will remain confidential.

**If you DO NOT wish for your child to take part in the survey, please complete the attached form and return it to your child's school counselor no later than \_\_\_\_\_, 2020.**

A survey opt out document is attached to this letter. The opt out document contains additional information about my research. You do not need to sign and return the opt out document unless you do not want your child to participate in the survey.

Students who are selected to participate in the interviews and letter writing part of the study, and then complete the entire process, will receive a \$15 gift card to Chick-fil-A at the end of their participation.

Sincerely,

Darrin Scott Tipton  
Assistant Principal, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY OPT-OUT FORM**  
 Student Perceptions of Preferential Treatment of Student-athletes

This research study is being conducted by Darrin Scott Tipton, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University. Your child is being asked to complete a survey because he or she is a senior student at [REDACTED]. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow him or her to complete the survey.

***Why is this study being done?***

The purpose of this study is to understand students' perceptions of preferential treatment of student-athletes.

***What will my child/student be asked to do?***

If you agree to allow your child to participate, he or she will be asked to do the following things:

3. Complete a survey on their views of teacher treatment of student-athletes that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

***What are the risks and benefits of this study?***

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. However, because the researcher is a state mandated reporter, any information that comes to light regarding child abuse, child neglect, or intent to harm self or others may be reported to the appropriate agencies.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include insight into students' perceptions of the equitable treatment of students, as well as the affect the teacher treatment of student-athletes has on relationships between students and teachers and its impact on school climate.

***Will my child be compensated for participating?***

Your child will not be compensated for participating in the survey.

***How will my child's personal information be protected?***

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- The survey information will not include any identifying questions except asking for names from those students who wish to volunteer to participate in the interviews and letter writing.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

***Is study participation voluntary?***

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or [REDACTED]

██████████. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question on the survey without affecting those relationships.

***Whom do I contact if my child or I have questions or problems?***

The researcher conducting this study is Darrin Scott Tipton. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ██████████ or email at ██████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. David Gorman, at ██████████.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at ██████████.

***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.***

Complete this form **only if you do not wish** for your child to participate in the survey. Return it to your child's counselor no later than August 24, 2020.

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**I do not give permission for my child to participate in this survey.**

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Student's Name (please print)

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Signature of Parent

Date

**APPENDIX I**  
**RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

*Background Information*

Male                  Female

Athlete              Non-athlete

Standardized open-ended interview questions

1. How long have you been in this school?
2. In what extra-curricular activities, sports, band, chorus, clubs, etc., have you participated?
3. What time commitments other than sports or extra-curricular activities do you have outside of school?
4. To your knowledge, what percentage of your classes in high school had both athletes and non-athletes?
5. Describe the different social groups within the school.
6. How would you describe the social relationships between student-athletes and non-student-athletes?
7. Describe any conflicts between student-athletes and non-student-athletes you may have been a part of or witnessed.
8. How would you describe the overall relationship culture between students and teachers within your school?
9. Describe the culture of your school as it relates to sports and academics.
10. What is your opinion on how the treatment of student-athletes affects the overall climate of the school?
11. Describe how you believe teachers treat student-athletes in the classroom. Give examples.

12. Describe any differences you see in the way teachers treat student-athletes versus non-athletes, noting any differences due to a teacher's background with athletics.
13. Describe any specific instances in which you believe student-athletes received preferential treatment, noting differences, if any, between athletes of different sports.
14. Describe any personal instance in which you believe you were treated unfairly because of being an athlete or not being an athlete.
15. Describe any personal instance in which you believe you were treated favorably because of being an athlete or not being an athlete.
16. What academic supports do you believe that student-athletes need in the classroom due to their participation in sports?
17. What is your perception of the teachers' abilities to meet the needs of student-athletes?
18. What suggestion would you make to teachers regarding the treatment of student-athletes versus non-student-athletes?
19. What other insight do you wish to share with me about teacher treatment of student-athletes that you think would be important for me to know?



**APPENDIX J****SCHOOL DISTRICT PERMISSION LETTER**

## School District Permission Letter

February 20, 2020 *(to be updated when actual letter sent)*

Dr. [REDACTED]  
Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning

Dear [REDACTED],

As a graduate student in the school of education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate degree. The title of my research project is Student Perceptions of Preferential Treatment of Student-athletes and the purpose of my research is to investigate issues related to student-athlete needs and students' views of how teachers meet these needs.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in the [REDACTED] School System.

Participating students will be selected from two high schools and parental consent forms will be obtained before any research begins. All research will take place within the schools. Taking part in the study is completely voluntary and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on approved letterhead indicating your approval to me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Scott Tipton  
Assistant Principal  
[REDACTED]