

# Perception of and Resilience to Pain Among Athletes in the Culture of Athleticism

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## Research Question

Does the culture of collegiate athletics alter the pain perception and the acknowledgement of pain in collegiate athletes versus college students?

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to gauge the influence of the Culture of Athleticism on pain perception, resilience to pain, and the other variables influencing pain (ethnicity, age, gender, sport, personality). My focus is on how the lifestyle or culture of an athlete enables them in such a way that they perform in spite of pain (regardless of which level it is).

## Methods

Two questionnaires were made to measure the pain experience, pain perception, pain resilience, and cultural influences. There was a questionnaire for non-athletes & one for collegiate athletes based off of an ethnoscience methodology. The Questionnaire used a 0-10 quantitative scale with qualitative anchors.

## What is Culture?

Culture is defined as the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. Each sport has its own practices; on physical, psychological, and social levels. Each sport may have its own beliefs and/or rituals attached to how they exercise their beliefs. Every sport has specific behavior patterns associated with it. Making athleticism and every sport candidates for ethnographic observation.



Fig. 1. The University at Buffalo Athletics Department is composed of over 500 student athletes that make up UB's 18 NCAA Division I sports teams.

## How is pain defined?

According to the International Association for the Study of Pain, "...pain is a subjective and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage or expressed in terms of such damage." (Wiesenfeld-Hallin, 138) Pain experiences of athletes are transformed through their conformity to the pain principles of the culture of athleticism.

## What is resilience?

The International Association for the Study of Pain states that, "The concept of 'resilience' refers to successful adaptation that unfolds within a context of significant and usually debilitating adversity or life stress..." The sport ethic and social/cultural construction builds resilience by changing how athletes interpret pain and redefining what responses to pain are acceptable.



Fig. 2. Some of the cultural components that contribute to the survival of an indigenous tribe economically, socially, and even in warfare are the same components that make championship teams.

## Results Athletes vs. Non Athletes

### Variable Means Chart via Independent Samples t-test

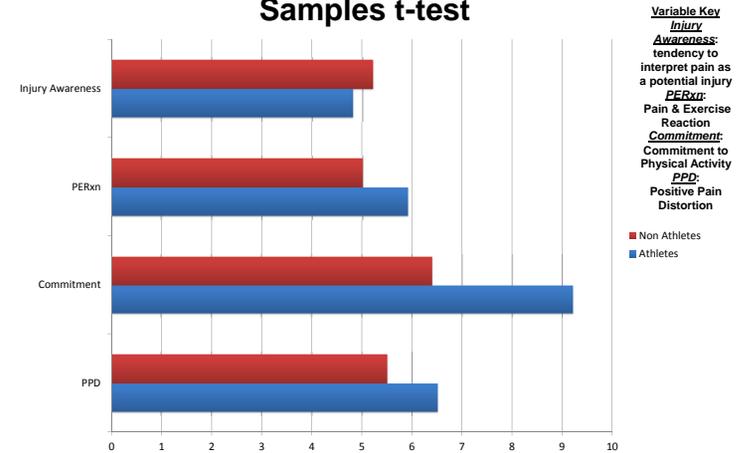


Fig. 2. On average athletes show a higher resilience and a higher positive pain distortion. This means that due to their participation in the culture of athleticism they have another factor influencing how they perceive and experience pain. What is key here is to look at how the culture has changed the lens by which these athletes experience pain and therefore raised their resilience.

## Conclusions

- Athletes have a higher positive perception of pain, while a non athlete is more likely to shy away if they experience pain during a workout.
- My general hypothesis was proven correct. My results indicate that student athletes have an altered relationship with pain (specifically a positive association) based on their undergoing intense ritual processes via the culture of athleticism.

## Research to come next...

Ethnographic observation of different collegiate sports needs to be done. Each sports team is likened to a community in its own right and has its own culture. Viewing each sports team's pain interactions in practice and then in competition can lead to a better understanding of the meaning of every behavior.