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Social Support Among Student-Athletes and Coping Strategy Differences Among Student-Athletes and Non-Student-Athletes

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Abstract

College student-Athletes face a variety of challenges and stressors that are unique to their academic and athletic responsibilities, and the types of support and coping strategies they utilize are often different than those of their non-student-athlete peers. For example, Cosh & Tully (2015) found that college student-athletes reported additional stress due to academic and sport schedule clashes. These additional stressors illustrate the need for student-athletes to use additional resources as they deal with their complicated schedules. Yang et al. (2010) found that college student-athletes have friends, family, teammates, coaches, athletic trainers, physicians, and counselors available to them for support. Our study investigated the different coping strategies that student-athletes engage in compared to their non-student-athlete peers while looking at the amount of social support the student-athletes received compared to what they desired. Participants rated their frequency of utilizing various types of coping behavior on a scale of 1-5 using the brief COPE (Carver, 1997). To assess social support discrepancies, student-athletes rated their perceptions of perceived and desired support for each support type on a scale of 1-5. A series of dependent t-tests were performed to determine if there were differences between student-athletes and non-student-athletes in their coping responses. Additionally, we investigated if there were differences in social support by sport type and gender. Overall, we found that student-athletes engaged in more adaptive coping strategies than their non-student-athlete peers. Further, we found that student-athletes received more social support than they desired generally, although individual-based sport athletes received significantly less network and tangible support than their team-sport peers. Future studies could investigate the nature of the difference between network and tangible support received by individual-based athletes compared to team-based athletes.



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Social Support Among Student Athletes and Coping Strategy Differences Among Student-Athletes and Non-Student-Athletes

Dillon Travis & Eric M. Martin, Ph.D.

I. Introduction

- Student athletes face many unique stressors, which are often heightened due to the pressure of performance both in the classroom and in their sport (Brown et al., 2015).
- Social support is defined as a measure of the number and quality of people a person can rely on during periods of stress (Yang et al., 2010).

Types of Support:

- Emotional Support: Encouragement, concern, or sympathy.
- Esteem Support: Sharing respect, confidence, or validation.
- Network Support: Fostering a sense of belonging.
- Tangible Support: Giving material assistance.
- Informational Support: Facts or advice.
- Assessments such as the brief COPE (Carver, 1997) measure how individuals deal with hardship.

Coping Strategies:

- Active Coping
- Planning
- Acceptance
- Positive Reinterpretation & Growth
- Focus On & Vent Emotions
- Denial
- Behavioral Disengagement
- Mental Disengagement
- College students face a variety of stressors, necessitating the utilization of coping strategies and social support to overcome challenges. Investigating coping strategies and social support among college students can be beneficial in understanding how to offer help and support.

Research Questions:

1. What is the gap between received and desired social support among student-athletes?
2. How do sport type and gender affect the amount of received and desired social support among student-athletes?
3. How do non-student-athletes (Non-SA) differ from student-athletes (SA) in their coping strategies?

Participants

- 270 student-athletes (133 female, 106 male, 31 missing) from two universities participated in this study as well as a control group of 97 non-student-athletes (51 female, 25 male, 21 missing)
- 100 team athletes (football, baseball, soccer, volleyball, & softball) and 170 individual athletes (cross country/track, golf, etc.)

Methods

- Frequency of various types of coping behaviors were evaluated on a scale of 1-5 using the brief COPE (Carver, 1997).
- Student-athletes rated their perceptions of received and desired support for each type on a scale of 1-5.

More positive coping than negative coping strategies were observed, and student-athletes utilized more positive coping strategies than non-student-athletes.

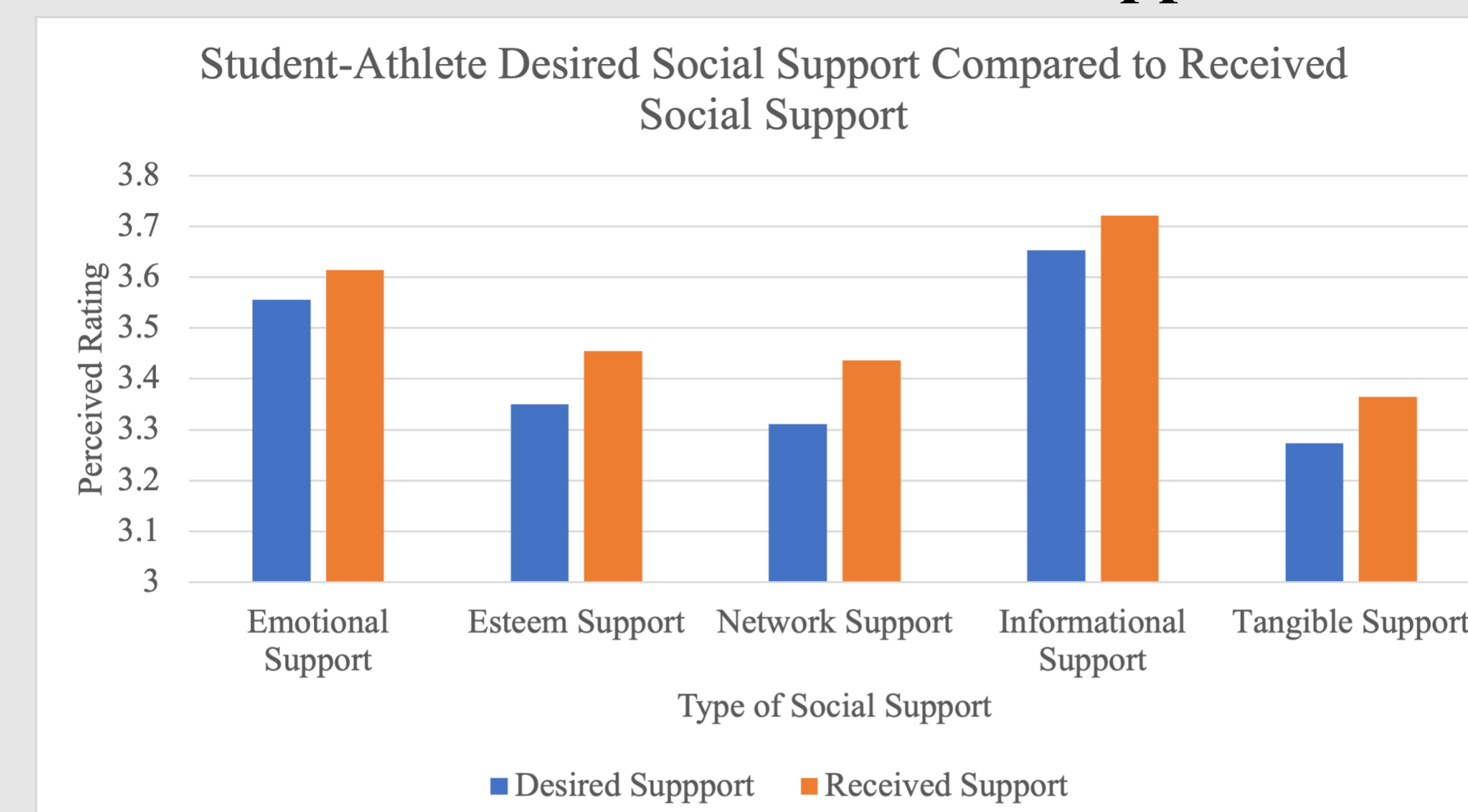
Generally, student-athletes experienced a surplus of social support.

Individual-sport athletes experienced significantly less network and informational support than team-sport athletes.

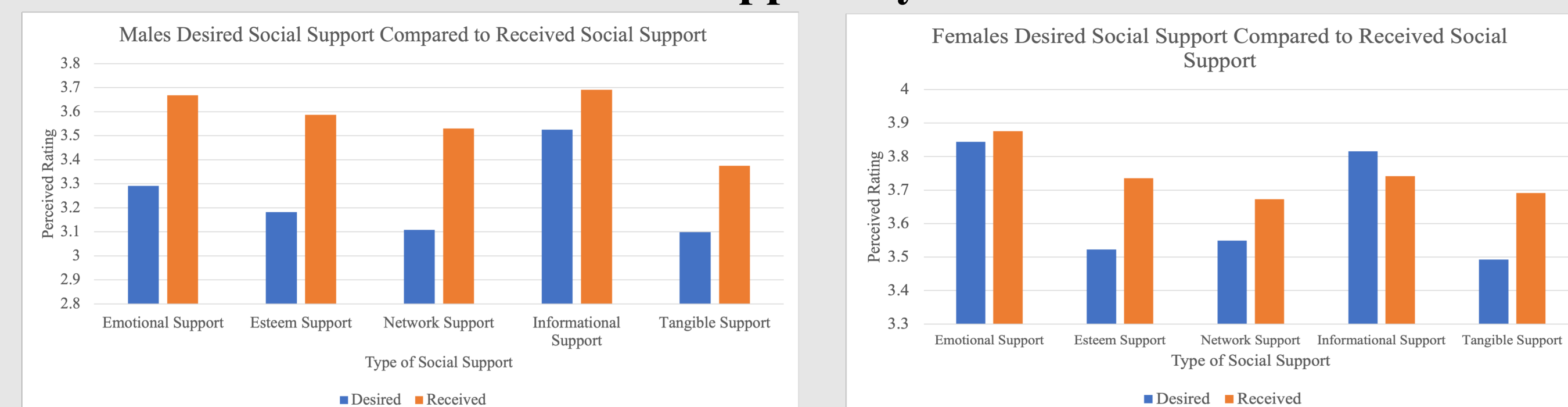
Sources Available Upon Request

III. Results

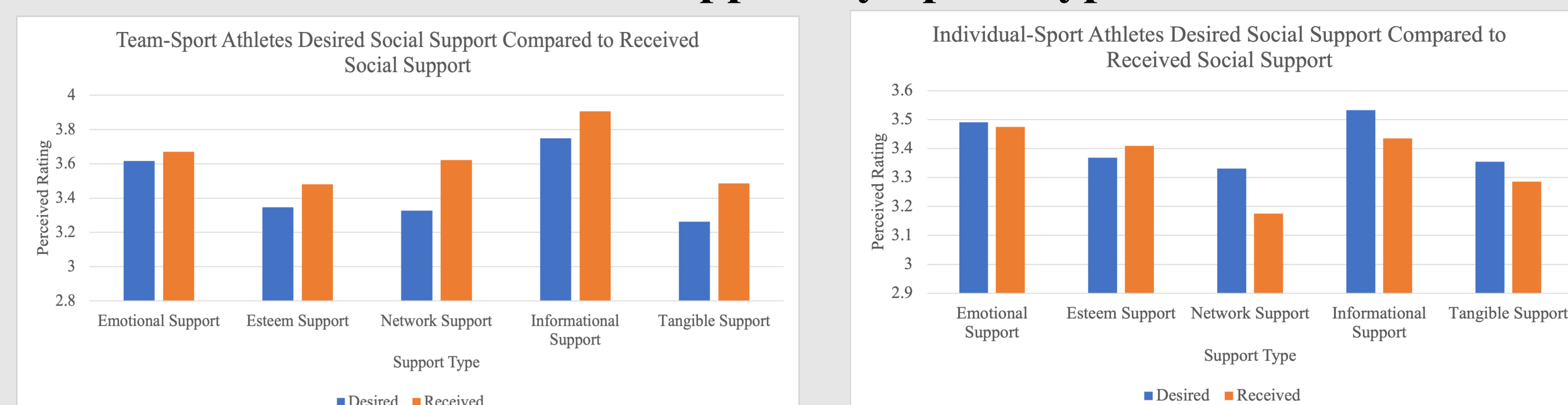
Student-Athletes Social Support



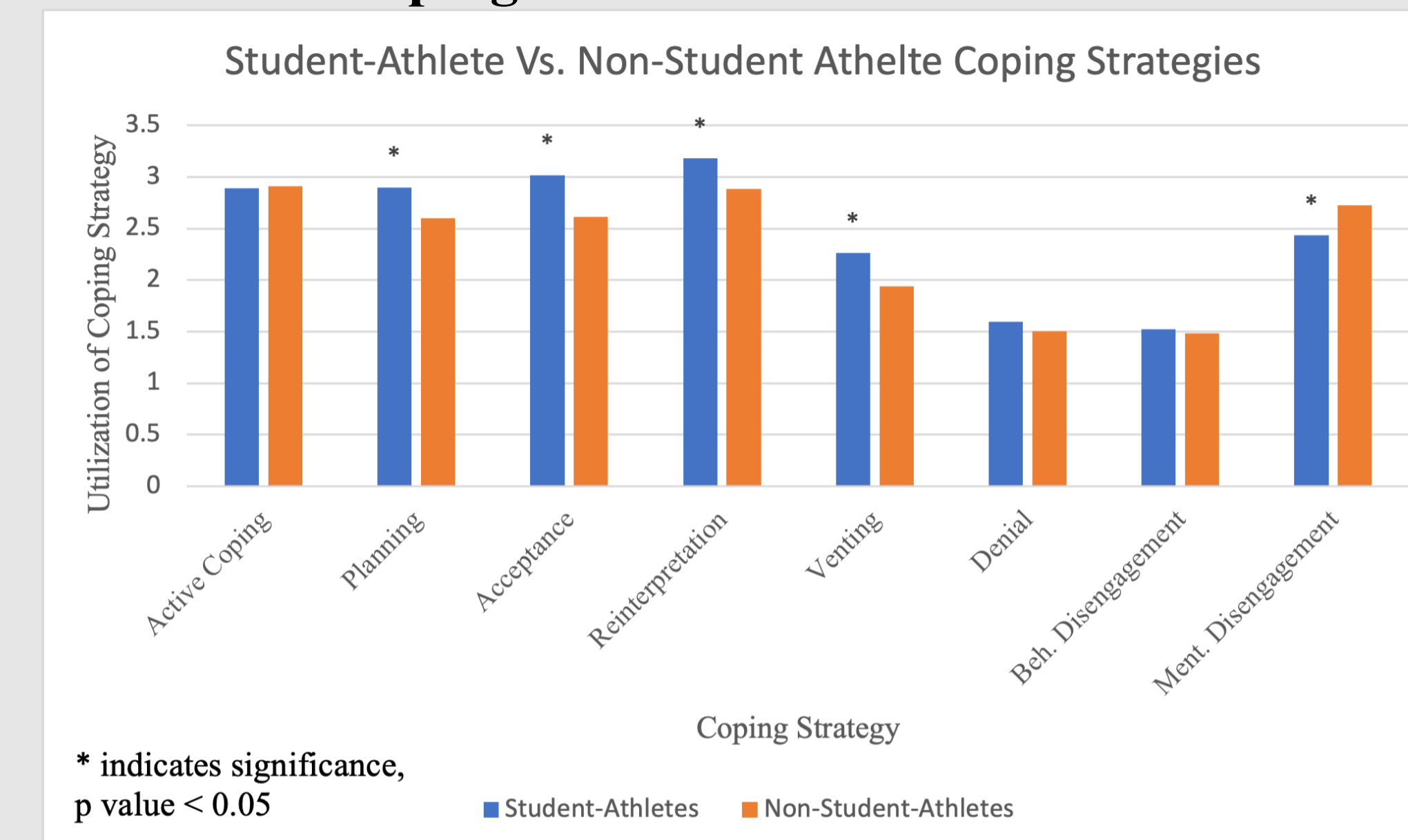
Social Support by Gender



Social Support by Sport Type



Coping: Student Athletes Vs Non-Student-Athletes



IV. Discussion

- Coaches and administrators are doing a good job of providing team-sport athletes with the necessary support and resources, but individual-sport athletes are not receiving the same support and resources.
- This gap between team and individual athletes could be addressed through increased availability of academic support and an increase in team-oriented events among individual sport athletes. These may increase their perception of network and informational support resources available to them.
- The increased sense of belonging and social contacts of student-athletes could explain the difference between positive coping strategy utilization of student-athletes and non-student-athletes. For non-student-athletes, participation in clubs and organizations can foster that same sense of belonging that student-athletes enjoy, and access to these organizations should be a priority.