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Athletes and jocks -- is there a difference?

5:17 PM, June 1, 2009

Do you consider yourself an athlete, a jock or both? Although the terms -- and the people -- often get lumped together, a new study shows that the differences may be vast.



Research recently published in the *Journal of Sport Behavior* looked at how 581 male and female college students with experience in organized sports identified themselves, either as athletes or jocks, or both.

The students completed various tests; in one, they were asked if they or others saw them as a jock or an athlete, and rated those feelings on a five-point scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly

disagree." Another test determined if, in sports, they were task-oriented or ego-oriented. Yet another asked the participants questions to determine how closely they conformed to masculine norms in areas such as violence, winning and risk.

In all, 18% of the study group identified as jocks, but 55% saw themselves as athletes. There was some crossover -- more jocks also identified as athletes than athletes identified as jocks. Men more strongly identified with being jocks and athletes than did women.

Jocks distinguished themselves as more ego-oriented, finding success in comparing their athletic performance with others'. Athletes, on the other hand, were more task-oriented, seeing success as developing and learning skills and striving for personal excellence. Jocks also tended to hang onto some typical masculine models more than athletes. The study also revealed that more men than women identified with both of these personae.

Kathleen Miller, the study's author and a researcher at the University at Buffalo, believes that for some, identifying as a jock could be associated with risky health behavior, especially in high-profile athletes.

-- Jeannine Stein

Photo credit: Christof Stache / AP

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Our Bloggers

Tami Dennis

Tami Dennis, who takes the word "skeptical" to previously uncharted territory, is the Times' Health and Science editor. She's adamant that pitches promoting awareness days, weeks or months are, by their nature, non-stories. And, because she's an adult, she refuses to use words like "veggies," "tummy" and "yummy."

Rosie Mestel

Rosie Mestel, deputy Health and Science editor, studied genetics before abandoning flies, fungi and DNA for health/medical writing. Her hero is the biologist [Ernst Haeckel](#), whose jellyfish paintings inspired snazzy chandeliers. Her favorite toast-spread is Marmite, a British delicacy made of yeast extract. Her least-favorite word is "millenniums."

Melissa Healy

Melissa Healy is a staff writer for the Health section reporting from Washington D.C. Healy's a veteran of The Times' National staff, having covered the Pentagon, Congress, poverty and social welfare, the environment, and the White House before shifting to Health in 2003. She writes frequently about mental health and human behavior, about federal health policy, prescription medication and ethics in

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chooses to believe in the health benefits of coffee and wine, and considers water a better work-out medium than beverage.

Karen Kaplan

Karen Kaplan covers genetics, stem cells and cloning. She and colleague Thomas H. Maugh II comprise about 25% of the unofficial MIT-Alumni-in-Journalism Club, and she is proud to have taken more math (5) than English (0) courses in college. Her contributions to Booster Shots will, she hopes, appear more frequently than postings to her mommy blog.

Thomas H. Maugh II

Thomas H. Maugh II has been a science and medical writer at the Times for 23 years. Before that, he was on the staff of the journal Science for 13 years. He has bachelor's degrees in English and chemistry from MIT and a doctorate in chemistry from UC Santa Barbara.

Shari Roan

After a brief stint as a sports writer, Shari Roan turned to health journalism and has covered the topic for The Times for 18 years. She is the author of three books and the mother of two daughters, both teenagers who refer to her as a "health freak." She likes to jog, watch baseball and is very happy that dark chocolate contains some health benefit.

Jeannine Stein

Jeannine Stein writes about fitness, sports medicine and obesity for the Health section. She's a gym rat from way back and never met an elliptical trainer she didn't like. Well, maybe one or two. She tempers exercise with a steady diet of reality television because she believes it's all about balance.

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