

**The Prevalence and Experience of Race Related Stress Among Black Male Student**

**Athletes: A Mixed Method Study**

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## **Abstract**

Utilizing scales measuring experiences of racism, stress responses to race related events and psychological distress, this study aims to understand a potential unique source of stress for NCAA Black male student-athletes. This mixed-methods study will investigate the prevalence of race related stress among this population and their experiences of race-related stress. Additionally, the potential psychological distress caused by race related stress will be explored. It is intended that results of this study will provide preliminary evidence of race related stress among collegiate athletes. Clinical implications based on the results will be useful for mental health professionals working among this population.

## Proposal Narrative

### **Problem Statement**

Black male collegiate student- athlete's make-up between 46%-61% of all division I, II and III athletes in the revenue producing sports of basketball and football (Beamon, 2014) and 18.9% of all college athletes in division I, II and III (Lapchick, Fox, Guiao & Simpson, 2015). This data suggests that Black male-student athletes constitute almost one quarter of the total National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) student-athlete population. Yet, the *Mental Health Best Practices* (NCAA Mental Health Task Force, 2016) released by the NCAA Sport Science Institute in early 2016, did not emphasize cultural considerations for student-athlete mental wellness despite evidence that the psychological needs of Black male student-athletes differs from their White peers (Anshel and Sailes, 1990). More specifically, recent research has highlighted the significant amounts of stress that collegiate Black males experience as competitors at the college level (Melendez, 2008; Sadberry, 2013); simultaneously being valued as a representative of the university community and discriminated against as a member of a racial/ethnic minority (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). The complex reactions resulting from chronic exposure to discrimination based on race, also referred to as "racism", is a phenomenon conceptualized as race related stress (Utsey, 1999).

Race-related stress is a combination of three different domains of racism: individual racism, institutional racism and cultural racism (Utsey, 1999). Studies have found racism can cause a psychological stress response, specifically for Black men (Beamon, 2014; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). More specifically, within a college sample, a 2004 study conducted by Neville, Heppner and Ji found that compared to other racial/ethnic minority students, African American college students reported higher levels of race-related stress. Race related stress has been linked

to symptoms of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Carter, 2007; Greer, 2011).

A goal of this study is to inform clinical practice by understanding the complexity of the effects of stress caused by racial discrimination. For student-athletes, this complexity is highlighted due to their dependence on both their physical and mental health to compete at the collegiate level; both of which can be negatively affected by race-related stress (Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Seaton & Yip, 2009). This research study will address the following questions:

Research Question 1: What are the discriminatory experiences of Black male student-athletes?

1b. What are their experiences specifically attached to race related stress?

1c. How, if at all, do experiences with race-related stress influence psychological functioning?

Research Question 2: How do Black male student-athletes understand race-related stress?

## **Methodology**

This research study will utilize a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. For the quantitative portion of the study, the predictor variable will be race-related stress and the criterion variable will be psychological distress. Participants will be recruited via snowball sampling in efforts to diversify the sample, including professional contacts, academic list serves and professional associations email list serves. Criteria for recruitment will include identifying as a Black male, a current *or* former division I NCAA athlete and age 18 or older. The recruitment email message will contain a link to the research survey. the link that will be used in the recruitment email for snowball sampling will include a self-report survey of approximately 39

questions, a demographic questionnaire and informed consent. Participants who participate in the quantitative study can choose to self-select into the qualitative study.

In an explanatory sequential design, it is intended that the qualitative sample be drawn from the quantitative sample pool so that participants are qualified to answer the qualitative questions (Creswell, 2015). The purpose of the phenomenological qualitative portion of the mixed-methods study is to describe and better understand the experiences of race-related stress for NCAA Black collegiate male student-athletes in the United States. The quantitative data is expected to guide the creation of interview protocol that will be utilized to collect the qualitative data (Curry & Nunez-Smith, 2015). To preserve confidentiality, participants wishing to engage in the qualitative interview will be directed to send an email to the primary investigator with their name and contact information. Participants from the study will be recruited nationally, therefore the qualitative interviews will be conducted via VSee, HIPPA compliant, tele-medicine software. Interviews will be audio recorded, but interview participants will have the option to decline to be recorded if they so choose. In order to protect confidentiality, a pseudonym will be assigned to the participant and used throughout the interview.

Research participants have the opportunity to be compensated through a raffle for an Amazon gift card. At the end of the survey, participants who are interested in receiving compensation will be directed to another survey to enter their information in order to protect their identity. Participants will be eligible for a raffle entry for one of six \$25 Amazon gift cards for the quantitative portion and one of three \$50 Amazon gift cards for the qualitative portion.

The measures to be used for this study include, a demographic data questionnaire, The *Inventory of Race Related Stress-Brief* (IRRS-B; Utsey, 1999), The *Prolonged Activation and Anticipatory Race-Related Stress Scale* (PARS; Utsey, Belvet, Hubbard, Fischer, Opare-Henaku,

& Gladney, 2012) and the *Brief Symptom Inventory-18* (BSI; Derogatis, 2000). For the qualitative portion of the study, the interview protocol will be comprised of research questions and sub-questions to be asked during the qualitative interviews.

Correlations and multiple regressions will run for the statistical analysis to determine significance for the quantitative data. Upon completion of the qualitative interviews, transcription of the interviews will take place. Interviews will either be transcribed by the primary investigator or a professional transcriber may be utilized. Once the interviews are transcribed they will be imported into NVIVO qualitative data analysis software, version 11 Pro to store and code the data.

### **Significance/Potential Implications**

In a 2008 study, Melendez, concluded that Black student-athletes would benefit from interventions aimed at learning how to cope with the experiences of prejudice and racism they may experience on college campuses. The release of the mental health guidelines (NCAA Mental Health Task Force, 2016) earlier this year, indicates the desire of the organization to provide psychological services that fit the needs of each and every one of their student-athletes. In order to accurately meet the psychological needs of all student athletes, it is imperative to understand all of the cultural considerations that may influence mental health symptoms and psychosocial well-being. This study will help to achieve this goal by providing insight and expanding understanding of elements that may be contributing to negative psychosocial well-being for Black male student-athletes. Exploring the prevalence and experiences of race-related stress will allow the NCAA to continue to be at the forefront of the development of practices and policies promoting diversity and inclusion in college athletics. Thus providing a safe space for the cultivation of positive psychosocial adjustment for all athletes.

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## **Timeline**

### **May 2016 – July 2016**

Dissertation proposal approved by committee and submitted to the Graduate School; undergo the process of New Mexico State University's institutional review board (IRB) approval.

### **August 2016**

Expand on the literature review for the proposed study and compile a contact list of professional contacts and academic listservs for the study to be disseminated to.

### **August 2016- October 2016**

Email the survey link to the contact list and begin quantitative data collection; finish literature review (Chapters 1, 2 and 3).

### **November 2016 – December 2016**

Stop collecting quantitative data; send out gift cards to participants who entered and won the raffle for the quantitative data collection; clean data; begin and complete quantitative data analysis; begin writing abstracts and submitting abstracts for conference presentations.

### **January 2017**

Develop interview guide for qualitative portion of the study; contact participants who volunteered to be interviewed.

### **February 2017- March 2017**

Conduct qualitative interviews

### **April 2017**

Send qualitative interviews to be transcribed; send out gift cards to participants who entered and won the raffle for the qualitative data collection.

### **May 2017 – June 2017**

Review and code qualitative data; send midterm report to NCAA research staff by June 30, 2017.

### **July 2017 – August 2017**

Write up results and discussion (Chapter 4 & 5)

### **September 2017**

Defend dissertation

### **October 2017 – December 2017**

Send final report to NCAA research committee; edit dissertation to manuscript format; submit manuscript to a journal.

**EVERYONE ELSE IS DOING IT: PREDICTING SUSCEPTIBILITY TO PEER  
INFLUENCE IN NCAA STUDENT-ATHLETES**

**Principal Investigator:** Scott A. Graupensperger, M.A.

**Faculty Mentor:** M. Blair Evans, Ph.D.

*The Pennsylvania State University*

### **Abstract**

Existing literature provides ample evidence that NCAA athletes are at high-risk of conforming to peer influence regarding unhealthy behavior (e.g., alcohol abuse). However, little is known about individual- and group-level factors that may explain *why* athletes conform. The proposed research applies a novel quasi-experimental paradigm to directly observe in-group conformity to unhealthy norms, and investigate factors that may contribute to such conformity. By providing insight into the psychological processes underpinning group conformity, this investigation will provide evidence to subsequently guide the efforts of NCAA member institutions as they strive to enhance student-athletes' well-being and societal interactions.

## Proposal Narrative

Collegiate student-athletes are at a developmentally critical period that is marked by increased susceptibility to peer influence and a high sensitivity for peer approval which involves altering behavior to fit in with a group (i.e., conformity; Burnett et al., 2011). While elite sport involvement during late adolescence and early adulthood can elicit personal development, being a collegiate student-athlete is also related to conformity towards unhealthy norms (e.g., alcohol abuse; Green et al., 2014). As a practical example of this issue, the NCAA Student-Athlete Substance Use Study (2014) revealed that 81% of student-athletes had consumed alcohol within the last 12 months, and from this group, 44% of men and 33% of women reported binge-drinking tendencies. I have prepared this proposal to engage in research aimed at uncovering individual- and group-level factors that predict conformity to unhealthy norms within collegiate sport teams. The current proposal is one project within a larger line of inquiry that is broadly focused on the impact of within-team social influences on student-athlete health and well-being, that will ultimately make up my doctoral dissertation. Through this research, I hope to inform NCAA efforts to maximize student-athlete well-being and promote positive interactions between student-athletes and society as a whole.

**Conceptual framework.** Group socialization in sport generally benefits both the group and its members by outlining acceptable behaviors and giving members a sense of belonging (Allen & Antonishak, 2008; Graupensperger & Krane, 2015). Although feelings of closeness and commitment towards teammates are largely seen as beneficial perceptions, such group-dynamics may also prompt group members to engage in dysfunctional behaviors when the group is united around maladaptive norms (Stattin et al., 2005). Indeed, decades of literature suggests that adolescents are more likely to engage in unhealthy behavior if they believe that peers, and especially their in-group, approve of and partake in such behaviors (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Despite the known contribution of peer-group influence on health-risk behaviors of student-athletes, recent studies have yet to investigate

conditions that make it more likely for athletes to conform with other team members. The overarching goal of the proposed study is to identify individual and group factors that make in-group conformity to unhealthy behaviors more likely by using a novel theoretical perspective that will be the first to disentangle the interaction of group processes with individual characteristics.

**Method.** To directly investigate in-group conformity and further develop group-dynamics theory within sport research, the proposed study involves a quasi-experimental test of the basic mechanisms and processes that underlie conformity towards unhealthy norms.

**Participants and procedures.** The proposed study will target male and female student-athletes of all varsity sports from Penn State University (Division I), and its 22 branch campuses (Division II and III). Based on recent multilevel sport psychology studies (e.g., Bruner et al., 2014), 450 total participants from 35 teams should provide adequate statistical power.

Following IRB approval, teams will be recruited through coaches. Participating athletes will be in a large classroom and will participate as entire teams, where data will be collected from team members simultaneously using electronic tablets, which I have access to for data collection at Penn State University. Having all participating members of a team present at the same time is integral to successful execution of the experimental paradigm. Participants will be compensated with \$10.

**Predictor measures.** In addition to demographic information (e.g., gender, sport, starter status), I will investigate student-athlete individual characteristics that may predict conformity. Specifically, perceived competence (i.e., Reynolds, 1980), peer acceptance, global self-worth (i.e., Daniels & Leaper, 2006), and perceptions of status within the team (i.e., Moore, 2007) will be assessed. Furthermore, I will assess athletes' perceptions of their group environment by measuring group identification (i.e., Bruner et al., 2014), group cohesion (i.e., Carron et al., 1985), and commitment to teammates (i.e., Klein et al., 2014). All instruments being used are described in the appendix.

***Quasi-experimental paradigm.*** In the proposed protocol, athletes will read vignettes of hypothetical situations that collegiate athlete are likely to encounter, such as being at a house party (i.e., adapted from previous research through NCAA athlete focus group discussions), where unhealthy behaviors may take place (e.g., binge drinking). Participants respond by selecting the Likert-format response options that most closely matches what they would do in the given situation. Hypothetical response options range from not at all unhealthy (e.g., choosing not to drink) all the way to highly unhealthy (e.g., extreme binge drinking). Once all participants finish answering, researchers will display the team's responses as a whole. Although some of the statistics presented will be the team's *actual* responses, other parts of the displayed data will be changed by the research team to deceptively represent strong team endorsement of unhealthy behavior. After exposure to the actual and fabricated team data, researchers will instruct participants to respond to the same hypothetical situations again, this time under the presumption that their responses may be shared with teammates at a later point in time. In actuality, researchers are assessing *conformity* by testing whether or not participants alter their responses to correspond with teammates.

***Data analysis.*** Consistent with existing theory (Cohen & Prinstein, 2006), conformity will be operationalized by calculating within-subjects standardized difference scores between the pre-test and the post-test (i.e., after being shown bogus team responses), whereby conformity will exist to the extent that athletes' post-test responses shift toward bogus team responses. Preliminary analyses will investigate differences in conformity based on demographic groupings (e.g., gender, sport type, year in school). Regarding the primary analyses, hierarchical linear modeling will be used to test the extent that conformity is predicted, using individual- and group-level processes. Table 1 details the factors at each hierarchical level that may affect conformity. Demographic variables related to conformity will also be tested for moderation effects on other study variables. Considering that

participation is occurring at the group level, multilevel modeling is vital to disentangle the individual-level effects from variance that is expected to occur at the group-level.

**Expected results.** Based on Social Influence Theory (Asch, 1951) and Social Norms Theory (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986), it is expected that athletes who perceive that they have low levels of group status, acceptance by teammates, and self-worth will be more susceptible to peer influence in conforming to unhealthy norms (Coakley, 2014; Messner, 2002). Furthermore, athletes who perceive greater closeness and commitment to teammates, as well as those who strongly identify with the team, are expected to show greater conformity. At the group level, despite the many associated benefits, it is expected that teams that are more united as a whole, and have members that identify strongly with the group, will be more susceptible to unhealthy conformity.

**Implications.** By identifying predictors of unhealthy conformity in collegiate athletes, the proposed investigation will provide insight into the basic science underpinning group decision making. Notably, the experimental manipulation provides direct implications for collegiate athletic departments and initiatives such as the NCAA CHOICES grant program in their pursuit of promoting student-athlete well-being. For example, existing approaches to mitigate problematic behavior in NCAA athletes, such as social norm interventions (e.g., Seitz et al., 2014), could be adapted to promote close team environments while also developing and uniting the team around prosocial norms. Moreover, findings from the proposed research may provide evidence that athletes from certain demographic groups (e.g., freshmen), or with certain characteristics (e.g., low perceptions of peer acceptance) are in greater need of a behavioral intervention. Ultimately, this line of research is well-positioned to inform efforts to promote group processes that mitigate dysfunctional peer influences, while nevertheless ensuring that student-athletes can identify strongly and positively with teammates.

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## Timeline

Actions	2016				2017								
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	...
<b>NCAA timeline</b>			<i>Award announcement</i>					<i>Interim report</i>			<i>Brief report</i>	<i>Final Report: NCAA Research Committee meeting</i>	
<b>Research activities</b>	<i>Focus groups with individual NCAA athletes to adapt vignettes</i>		<i>Further pilot testing of paradigm</i>		<i>Data Collection</i>						<i>Present results to coaches</i>		
			<i>Contact Coaches</i>										
<b>Data management</b>						<i>Input and clean data</i>			<i>Run HLM analysis</i>		<i>Prepare final report and presentation.</i>		
						<i>Run preliminary analyses</i>			<i>Finalize findings</i>				
<b>Writing and reporting</b>			<i>Write introduction and literature review sections</i>			<i>Write method section</i>	<i>Prepare and submit interim report</i>		<i>Write results and discussion sections</i>			<i>Prepare final report</i>	<i>Submit paper to journal</i>
<b>Administrative actions</b>	<i>University IRB submission and approval</i>										<i>University IRB final report</i>		