

**NCAA Graduate Student Research Grant Program  
Summaries of Findings**

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**2016**

**Bystander behaviors related to potential sexual assault: Individual and contextual predictors among student-athletes**

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Recognizing that sexual violence is a major problem on college campuses, the NCAA released [Addressing Sexual Assault and Interpersonal Violence: Athletics' Role in Support of Healthy and Safe Campuses](#) in 2014. It urged athletic departments to “Educate all student-athletes, coaches and staff about sexual violence prevention, intervention, and response” (p. iv). Consistent with national recommendations, the report recommends using bystander training programs to educate student-athletes about sexual violence and appropriate ways to intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence. The report states that bystander training programs used with student-athletes should incorporate the “voices” of student-athletes. However, there are currently no evidence-based bystander training programs specifically designed for both male and female student-athletes. Additionally, limited research has investigated student-athletes’ perceptions of bystander training and whether participating in the training is associated with attitudes toward sexual violence, willingness to intervene, and bystander behaviors.

Using data collected from 251 student-athletes (66% female, 76% white) at one Division I University in the Northeast in spring 2016, this study examined the role of individual and contextual factors associated with student-athletes’ willingness to intervene in situations of sexual

violence. This study answered two research questions: RQ1: Do individual factors predict willingness to intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence? The following individual factors were examined: sex; attitudes toward sexual violence (i.e., rape myth acceptance); athletic identity; and team belongingness. RQ2: Do contextual factors predict willingness to intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence? The following contextual factors were examined: coaches' expectations; coaches' perceived discipline for inappropriate off-field behavior; and bystander training.

Findings indicated that there were no significant differences between male and female student-athletes with respect to bystander behaviors, likelihood of intervening in situations of sexual violence, attitudes about intervening, rape myth acceptance, team belongingness, athletic identity, or social support. Most student-athletes (86%) had participated in the University's bystander training program. Female student-athletes were significantly more likely than male student-athletes to say that the mandatory bystander training program made them think and was helpful. Furthermore, females were significantly more likely to indicate they liked the bystander training program and would recommend it than were male student-athletes. The majority of student-athletes (80%) indicated that their coach or an athletic department official had talked to them about their expectations for student-athletes speaking up when they see situations that could lead to sexual violence. Additionally, 93% of student-athletes reported that their coach would strongly discipline them for poor off-field behavior related to sexual violence.

Student-athletes who had greater rejection of rape myths were more likely than their peers to report they would be likely to intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence ( $r=0.17$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Also, student-athletes who had more positive attitudes about intervening in situations where somebody is in trouble were more likely than their peers to report they would be likely to intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence ( $r=0.24$ ,  $p<.01$ ). However, coaches' expectations, bystander behavior, attending bystander training, athletic identity, and team belongingness were not significantly associated with likelihood to intervene. In a logistic regression, only more positive attitudes about intervening ( $OR=1.20$ ,  $CI=1.04-1.15$ ) was a significant predictor of likelihood to intervene, although greater rape myth rejection approached statistical significance.

When examining attitudes about intervening in situations where somebody is in trouble, student-athletes who reported greater team belongingness were more likely than their peers to have positive attitudes about intervening ( $r=0.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Additionally, student-athletes who reported greater levels of general social support were more likely than their peers to have positive attitudes about intervening ( $r=0.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Coaches' expectations, bystander behavior, rape myth rejection, attending bystander training, and athletic identity were not significantly associated with attitudes about intervening. In a multiple linear regression, team belongingness ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and general social support ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ) were significant predictors of attitudes about intervening.

This study provides encouraging findings about student-athletes' reported likelihood of intervening in situations that could lead to sexual violence. These findings also demonstrate the need to support team belonging as a way to potentially foster positive attitudes about intervening. Additionally, the results demonstrate that the bystander training program was more popular among

females than male student-athletes, which highlights the need to incorporate male student-athletes' "voices" into the program. Future research should examine attitudes about intervening and bystander behavior longitudinally, focusing particularly on how these attitudes change before and after completion of bystander training programs.

### **Everyone else is doing it: The association between social identity and conforming to peer-influence in NCAA athletes**

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When building rich and cohesive teams that are vital for championship-level success, are we inadvertently fostering a team-environment that leads members to engage in *negative* health-behaviors? Given the strong social ties within sport teams, student-athletes often alter behavior (i.e., 'conform') to fit-in and seek acceptance from high-status teammates<sup>1,2</sup>. Although perceptions of closeness and commitment toward teammates are typically beneficial, strong identification with the team may also prompt athletes to engage in dysfunctional behaviors when they believe such behavior is the norm<sup>3,4</sup>. An individual's social identity is their self-concept that derives from the group to which they belong, whereby individuals are motivated to internalize and conform to group norms<sup>5,6</sup>. As such, strongly identifying athletes are liable to conform to risky behaviors of teammates. To better understand how identity shapes athletes' decision-making for risky behaviors, we conducted a study to investigate whether conformity was predicted by the strength of athletes' social-identity within their team.

**Methods.** We recruited teams of athletes from NCAA division II and III teams to complete our survey using electronic tablets at a team meeting. In addition to providing descriptive information and indicating their social identification with their team (*Example item*: "I feel a sense of being 'connected' with other members of this team"), athletes indicated how they would respond to hypothetical risky behavior scenarios. Response options ranged from completely safe to extremely risky options for six scenarios (See Table 1). To test conformity to teammates, the researcher then presented average team responses to appear as though the majority of their teammates strongly endorsed the risky behaviors. Finally, athletes completed a second questionnaire where they responded to the same hypothetical scenarios. This enabled us to assess 'conformity' to alleged behaviors of teammates, operationalized as responding with 'riskier' response options in post-manipulation assessments than the original pre-manipulation assessment (i.e., a greater difference between time-1 and time-2 scores represented greater conformity). We expected that athletes who reported a stronger social identity would be more likely to increase the extent that they would engage in risky behaviors in their follow-up response.

**Results.** We sampled 379 NCAA student-athletes ( $M_{age} = 19.7$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ , 44% male) from 23 complete teams. At baseline, participants scored relatively low on risky behaviors – providing values near, or below, scale midpoints (Table 1). Across the six scenarios, 12-30% of participants conformed by showing an increase from pre- to post-manipulation. Paired samples t-tests confirmed that athletes were more willing to endorse a risky behavior following the manipulation ( $ps < .001$ ), meaning that exposure to high teammate responses swayed athletes' follow-up responses.

We then examined whether athletes who strongly identified with their team were more likely to conform to risky behaviors. The primary analyses included multi-level modeling, where we disentangled individual-level differences (between athletes) from group-level effects (between teams), while also controlling for potential confounders (i.e., gender, self-esteem, team tenure). Strong social identities positively predicted conformity to binge drinking, marijuana use, drinking/driving, playing through concussion, and hazing incoming teammates ( $ps < .05$ ). We also uncovered interesting group-level level effects. For example, athletes who belonged to *teams* that were higher on social identity (as a whole) were more likely to conform regarding whether they would ‘play-through’ a concussion. Full results from multi-level models are available upon request.

**Implications.** The current findings expose a potential pitfall for athletes who strongly identify with their team, in that they may be more likely to conform to risky behavior when they feel that teammates partake in such activity. Considering that teams with high social identity scores were similarly likely to conform on some behaviors, we expect that strong identification (i.e., the group defines the self) might lead athletes to feel pressure to make sacrifices for the team or do things that are aligned with that identity (e.g., play through concussion)<sup>7</sup>. Coaches/trainers should be aware that strongly-identifying groups are likely to put their own physical well-being at risk for the sake of the team, especially when they believe teammates would do the same.

Our findings are concerning because collegiate athletes tend to over-estimate the extent that teammates engage in risky behaviors<sup>1</sup>. However, this understanding also points to the potential benefits of promoting group environments that foster positive behaviors. For example, behavioral interventions to reduce one or more risky behaviors may seek to help athletes establish more realistic perceptions of team norms<sup>4</sup>, promote acceptance of all athletes regardless of the extent they conform to team norms, and channel the influence of social identities toward more adaptive behaviors. Advancing this work, our research team hopes to create interventions where peer-leaders are trained to create group environments that foster social identities while also promoting adaptive behaviors.

## **The Prevalence and Experience of Race Related Stress Among Black Male Student-Athletes: A Mixed Method Study**

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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 total 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 differ from their White peers (Anshel and Sailes, 1990). Specifically, 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). Chronic exposure to discrimination based on race, racism, can result in a complex reaction conceptualized as race-related stress (Utsey, 1999).

This study aims to provide preliminary evidence of the prevalence of race-related stress among NCAA Division I, male student-athletes and explore the potential psychological distress that racism-related stress may have on athletes. It is intended that the results of this study will add to the literature about the need for cultural competence in addressing the mental health and behavioral health needs of Black male student-athletes. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design was chosen to address the following research question: How prevalent are the racism experiences of African American male student-athletes? (a.) What are their experiences specifically attached to race related stress? (b.) How, if at all, do experiences with race-related stress impact psychological functioning? (c.) How do African-American male student-athletes understand race-related stress?

Current and former Division I Black male student-athletes were recruited nationally using snow-ball sampling. Participants completed online surveys and had the option to choose to participate in an interview. Approximately 52 completed surveys of current or former student-athletes were used to analyze the data. It should be noted that surveys not fully completed were not used in this data analysis (n=30); data collection is on-going. Those participating in the study ranged from 18 to 67 years with a mean age of 25.7 years (SD=10.68). Current student athletes accounted for 57.7% of the sample (n=30). Research participants reported seven different sports: football n= 24 (46.2%), basketball n=7 (13.5%), baseball n=2 (3.8 %), track & field n= 13 (25%), soccer n=3 (5.8%), rowing n= 1 (1.9%) and other n=2 (3.8%). 6 participants (11.5%) have completed qualitative interviews. How prevalent were experiences of race-related stress within this sample?

Preliminary results:

- 53 of the participants (98.1%) reported experiencing race-related stress; more than half of the participants reported experiencing greater levels of race related stress.
- Majority of the participants did not indicate experiencing clinically significant distress (71.2 %, n=37) on the Brief Symptom Inventory-18 (BSI-18) overall global severity scale. However, it is worth noting that almost a quarter of participants met the clinical threshold for depression (21.2 %, n=11).
- Higher levels of race-related stress did not predict higher levels of psychological distress.
- Institutional and individual racism positively associated with anxiety symptoms; the higher the number of instances of these specific types of racism the more symptoms of anxiety were endorsed.
- Somatization (distress caused by the perception of bodily dysfunction) positively associated with the overall global index score on the index of race-related stress (includes all 3 subscales: individual, cultural and individual racism); the higher the number of experiences with racism the more physical symptoms were endorsed.

Preliminary qualitative themes:

- Racism is a part of daily life: Current and former student-athletes discussed how experiences and/or thoughts of racism are an anticipated part of their everyday life.

- Coping through avoidance: Current and former student-athletes discussed how they coped with their experiences of racism by trying to ignore thinking about them or dwelling on them.

A critical exploration of the effects of race-related stress among Black male student-athletes provides significant implications for a deeper understanding of the development of mental and behavioral health concerns among this population. The preliminary results of this study suggest psychologists and other mental health professionals working with Black male student-athletes should consider how experiences of racism may influence mental health when diagnosing and treatment planning.

### **The One Dimensional Black College Football Player**

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NCAA Division-I college football provides an immense opportunity for young men to pursue a degree and a chance to attend a large university or college. This opportunity, in the form of an athletic scholarship, becomes problematic when looking at the numbers of Black males who do not graduate (approximately 48 percent) and those who do not reach the National Football League. Magnifying the issue is the fact that 54 percent of all Division-I and more than 60 percent of power-five conference football players are Black. Additionally, the media is a major partner with the NCAA and its member institutions. Historically, the relationship between Black males and the media has been one of tension due to misrepresentations. To this end, I questioned: how does the media impact the racial and athletic identity development of Black college football players and how do they make sense of it? Also, what are the implications?

In my national study Black college football players reported high levels of athletic identity, including a negatively correlated Afrocentric attitude. In essence, as their athletic identity increases their connection and internalization of Afrocentrism decreases at a significant rate. The data confirms that freshman Black college football players come in with the highest level of athletic identity and are also shielded from racism comparatively more than a departing senior. This is due to the colossal expectations to be a great athlete from their peers, professors, fans, the media, and their own community. To this end, Black college football players found refuge in exercising multiple identities, thereby rupturing the development towards athletic identity foreclosure. The prevalence of Black college football players who feel exploited by their institution is a larger issue than many are willing to admit. They describe experiences that show athletic isolation, being negatively sensationalized and attacked by the media, and inauthentic support for academic endeavors.

In order to remedy the attacks of exploitation and media sensationalism, the study's football players and athletic administrators discussed some impactful approaches. The suggestions were to offer a critical sports media course, targeted mentoring programs, and embracing civically engaged role model profiles as well as multidimensionality. A media education course is fundamental for anyone majoring in communications or media studies, however the usefulness of the course far precedes the classrooms of those specialized studies. Black college football players are continual subjects of 24-hour sports media that inundates consumers with images of criminals, domestic violence, and academic fraud. Thus, learning the tools to critically read and interact with media is imperative to increase positive psychosocial experiences for these young men.

In addition, institutional support for mentoring programs that connect Black players with community professionals and graduate students beginning freshman year can increase their association with multiple identities. This also includes connecting them to Black faculty and staff, as it is a proven catalyst for increasing graduation rates of Black males. NCAA institutions do a great job of connecting current college football players to NFL players, however this method alone may hamper the expression of multiple identities. Tailored mentoring develops networking possibilities, critical consciousness, and exploration of non-athletic opportunities. Through media education and the connection with mentors, a burgeoning class of civically engaged role models can be highlighted, reconfiguring the media landscape from Black males as just exceptional athletes.

The creation of an environment to foster multidimensionality is the job for all campus partners. Although methods vary, the need for academic centered study abroad programs in exchange for athletic abroad trips is a crucial piece. Black college football players are often dissuaded from studying abroad due to their athletic commitment, yet are transported to Ireland and Australia for football related activities. Sponsoring academic focused trips or eliminating consequences for participation in study abroad programs can further progress young men towards graduation and intensify satisfaction with their collegiate degrees. For the young men who do not make it pro, this can be the life changing experience that creates confidence outside of their athletic pursuits. In essence, planting a deep seed that football is not the end-all-be-all as the media overwhelmingly perpetuates for Black college football players.

### **How the Psychosocial Effects of Serious Injuries are Related to the Academic Lives of Student-Athletes**

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Student-athletes are a unique population on college campuses, who must tackle the difficult task of balancing their athletic and academic commitments in order to be successful college students. Competing within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) also involves an inherent risk of injury. For the student-athletes who experience serious injuries, the subsequent difficulties can be hard to navigate. While most research focuses on the athletic identity of recovering student-athletes, little is known about how they are affected within the classroom. This study aims to explore this gap in the literature, to gain a better understanding of this aspect of a student-athlete's injury experience.

With Wiese-Bjornstal et al.'s (1998) integrated model of response to sport injury as the theoretical framework, and through a qualitative research design, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

R1: What are some of the psychosocial responses (cognitive appraisals, emotional and behavioral responses) student-athletes experience in response to a serious injury?

R2: How are these psychosocial responses related to a student-athlete's academic life (psychologically and behaviorally)?

R3: How are these psychosocial responses related to the balance between a student-athlete's athletic and academic responsibilities (psychologically and behaviorally)?

In response to the first research question, the related findings were meaningful in that they supported the use of Wiese-Bjornstal et al.'s integrated model of response to sport injury (1998) as a theoretical model through which to analyze and organize student-athletes' experiences with serious injuries. Of the 19 possible responses listed in the model—six under cognitive appraisals, six under emotional responses, and seven under behavioral responses—18 were observed in at least one of the 10 participants.

The most common cognitive appraisals, experienced by all ten participants in the study, were goal adjustment, sense of loss or relief, and cognitive coping. The most common emotional responses, also experienced by all participants, were fear of unknown, frustration/boredom, and positive attitude or outlook. In terms of behavioral responses, those experienced by all ten participants included adherence to rehabilitation as well as the use/disuse of social support.

The data for the second research question revealed that all 10 participants had psychosocial effects of their injuries that were related to their academics in some way. Psychologically, the effects of serious injuries caused these student-athletes to experience academic goal adjustments, similarly to how many of the participants adjusted their athletic goals as well. The emotional effects of their injuries also psychologically affected these student-athletes. For example, sadness and frustration from their injuries sometimes made it difficult for the participants to focus on their schoolwork. Others felt that having to deal with their injury and their schoolwork at the same time was incredibly stressful, and caused them to feel overwhelmed. The biggest behavioral change that occurred in terms of academics was a shift in time management, which was necessary due to changes to their daily routines because of the injury.

Regarding the third research question, what was found through data analysis was that many of the participating student-athletes experienced changes in the way they split their time and energy between these two commitments, both psychologically in terms of which of the two they prioritized, as well as behaviorally in terms of changes in routines.

One of the key aspects of Wiese-Bjornstal et al.'s integrated model of response to sport injury (1998) is the individualized nature of the experience. What is evident in the data collected from this study is that this is true in terms of student-athletes' academic lives as well. Just as the effects of injury are unique to each person, the same appears to be true for how these effects are then related to academics, as well as the balance between athletic and academic commitments. A student's academic life, similarly to their athletic journey, is complex and different for each person, so it will likely be affected differently in the occurrence of a serious injury.

What was true for all ten participants was that their injury experience was related in some way to their academic life, as well as the balance between their sport and schoolwork. In this study, there wasn't anyone who had experienced a serious injury and then found that it had absolutely no effect on their academics, either psychologically or behaviorally. It appears that the effects of serious injuries are related to student-athletes' academic lives, and most importantly this study shows that this previously unexplored topic is worth studying further.

## **Student-Athlete Pregnancy in Division I and Division II Athletics**

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Realizing the choice of being a mother and student-athlete is not easy. Pregnant student-athletes must decide whether to continue or terminate the pregnancy, whether to parent or place the child in an adoptive home, how to continue with academic goals and professional goals, how to pay for medical and living expenses, and how to tell significant others such as their coaches, peers, partner, and family members about their pregnancy. Furthermore, the emotional, social, and financial responsibilities associated with being both a parent and student may significantly impact a student-athlete's overall wellbeing, especially if there is no readily apparent support to help mediate the transition into motherhood.

Just how prevalent is student-athlete pregnancy? Data detailing the number of student-athletes who experience a pregnancy is absent in the literature. Previous research investigating the effect of pregnancy on elite athletes has observed that while competing in recreational and professional sports enhances the physical and psychological well-being of women, their participation is often compromised by domestic responsibilities. However, few studies focus primarily on the experiences of pregnant and mothering student-athletes who compete at the collegiate level. Therefore, understanding the meaning of maternity for college student-athletes may help to enhance resources for female student-athletes confronted with challenges linked to pregnancy while competing at the collegiate level.

The following research question guided this study: What are the lived experiences of a select group of female student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing at a NCAA Division I or Division II University? In-depth interviews were conducted with twelve student-athletes who experienced a pregnancy while competing in college sports and was a mother to at least one child at the conclusion of their collegiate athletic career. Participants represent four different sports across two NCAA divisions which included basketball, track and field, volleyball, and tennis. Ten (83%) of the participants reported competing at the Division I level and two (17%) reported competing at the Division II level.

The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 35 with a mean age of 21.2 years. Years since last participating in a collegiate sporting activity ranged from 0 to 10 years with mean years of 3 years. All participants (100%) reported receiving an athletic scholarship during their career as a student-athlete. In addition, seven (58%) reported they competed in college sports for 2-4 years and five (42%) reported they competed during all 5 years of their athletic eligibility. Of the total participants in this study, six (50%) were Black or African American, four (33%) were Multiple Heritage, and two (17%) were White or Caucasian.

Among the twelve athletes who represented the research sample, eleven (92%) reported that their pregnancy was not planned and one (8%) reported that their pregnancy was planned. Nine (75%) of the participants reported competing in collegiate athletic activities (i.e. practice/or a game) during their pregnancy and three (25%) reported they did not compete in any collegiate athletic activities while pregnant. When asked if they were made aware of their legal rights as a pregnant student athlete by anyone on the athletic department staff, five (42%) reported they were informed and seven (58%) reported they were not. Nine (75%) of participants reported returning

back to their sport and three (25%) reported they did not return back to their sport following the birth of their child due to the following: graduated from college or financial reasons.

Major themes that emerged from the interviews included: (1) pregnancy decisions, (2) maternal mental health, (3) access to prenatal care and parenting resources, (4) the effect of pregnancy/motherhood on training and competing, (5) the effects of training and competing on pregnancy/motherhood , (6) social support, (7) organizational support, and (8) advice and recommendations. The shared experiences of the women in this study offer insight into improving the NCAA's development of resources and model policies for pregnant and parenting student-athletes in the following areas: (a) the development of more congruent support and resources for student-athletes faced with a pregnancy crisis, (b) accommodations that support the physical and mental health, and academic progress of pregnant and parenting student-athletes, and (c) programing that address the transitional barriers associated with pregnancy and motherhood to assist and educate student-athletes who become pregnant.

**2015**

**Student-Athlete and Student Non-Athletes' Attitudes Toward Seeking Online and Face-to-Face Counseling**

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Student-athletes face a number of stressors when entering college such as moving away from home, balancing their academic commitments with athletics, dealing with high pressure situations and performance results, injury, and the eventual end of their athletic career. Due to the additional stressors faced by student-athletes, it should come as no surprise that this population experiences mental health disorders at similar rates compared to their non-athlete counterparts. Furthermore, student-athletes experience a number of unique barriers that may deter this group from seeking the psychological help which they need. These barriers included a perceived lack of time, a negative view toward seeking help, and the stigma associated with receiving mental health treatment. Online counseling is a form of mental health help that possesses a number of benefits such as anonymity and convenience which could help reduce the barriers that student-athletes face, however, little is known about the attitudes that student-athletes hold toward this method of counseling.

The purpose of this study was to investigate student-athletes' and non-athletes' attitudes toward online and face-to-face counseling. More specifically, the authors wanted to investigate the difference in attitudes that student-athletes hold toward online and face-to-face counseling, the difference in student-athletes and non-athletes' attitudes toward online and face-to-face counseling, and the influence of athletic status (student-athlete or non-athlete), athletic identity, self-stigma, and perceived stigmatization from others, on attitudes toward online and face-to-face counseling.

Participants in this study included 101 NCAA Division I student-athletes and 101 non-athletes from a large southeastern university. Non-athletes were matched to student-athletes on gender and ethnicity as these variables have been found to influence attitudes toward counseling in previous research. Attitudes toward counseling held by participants were assessed by scales that provide measures of participant's value, and discomfort, toward each form of counseling. Additionally, self-stigma, perceived stigmatization from others, and athletic identity were measured using existing measurement scales.

Results of this study would show that student-athletes favor face-to-face counseling over online counseling. That is, student-athletes report more value in face-to-face counseling, and less discomfort in face-to-face counseling compared to online counseling. Moreover, student-athletes hold less favorable views toward both forms of counseling compared to non-athletes. In this study, student-athletes reported less value in both forms of counseling compared to non-athletes, but the groups did not differ on the levels of discomfort placed in each form. Results from this study would suggest that neither athletic status nor athletic identity influence the amount of self-stigma, or perceived stigmatization from others experienced by participants. As self-stigma increases however, all participants report less value and more discomfort in online counseling, and student-athletes report more discomfort in online counseling. In contrast, when perceived stigmatization from others increases in the sample, participants report more value in online counseling.

The less favorable attitudes held toward online counseling by student-athletes may be explained by a lack of knowledge that student-athletes have in regard to this method of counseling. Although online counseling was presented as counseling using videoconferencing, participants in

this study may have been unaware as to what online counseling involves, and what the relationship between a client and a professional entail. Therefore, they may not fully understand the benefits that this modality of service delivery offers. Due to the matching used in this study, the lower value placed in counseling by student-athletes may not be due to differences in gender or ethnicity between the groups. Furthermore, as athletic status did not influence the levels of stigma reported by participants, the lower values placed in both forms of counseling by student-athletes may not be explained by a difference in levels of stigma between the two groups. Despite face-to-face counseling being the favored method in this study, online counseling may be particularly beneficial for those presenting higher levels of stigma as it was seen that those with higher levels of perceived public stigma reported more value in the online method.

Findings from this study have implications for campus counseling centers and athletic departments. Future research in this area should focus on educating student-athletes as to the outcomes that can be achieved by engaging in mental health treatment. If more is known about how counseling can help, then student-athletes may place higher value in these services. Future studies should also focus on teaching student-athletes about what online counseling involves and the benefits provided by this form of counseling. If student-athletes better understand the process of online counseling, attitudes toward this form of therapy may increase, and more individuals would be willing to seek this kind of treatment.

### **Experiences of Impulsivity, Anxiety, and Anger in Concussed Collegiate Athletes: A Mixed Methods Study**

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The effects of sport-related concussions are a public health concern (Kelly, 1999) that have garnered attention with researchers and practitioners alike. The somatic and cognitive effects, which are often used for concussion diagnosis, have been studied more extensively than the emotional effects commonly reported by athletes. The emotional effects, specifically impulsivity, anger, and anxiety, have been studied more rigorously in a clinical population following head trauma, but these findings have not been extended in an athlete population. Athletes, specifically collegiate athletes, have emotional responses to injury as evidenced in research pertaining to musculoskeletal and orthopedic injuries (Tracey, 2003), but there is a lack of research specifically targeting concussed athletes.

To add to the existing research in this area, this study used a dual approach to examine impulsivity, anxiety, and anger in collegiate athletes following sport-related concussion. A repeated-measure design, followed by semi-structured interviews was utilized to determine if athletes are experiencing these emotions, and if so, when during the recovery process. The interviews provided athletes with the opportunity to talk about these emotions and describe how they make sense of and cope with these experiences.

Athletes were recruited from multiple universities in the East and Midwest regions of the United States. Surveys were administered within 10 days of the athlete's diagnosed concussion and again 10 days later. Impulsivity was measured using the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale –II (BIS-II; Patton, Stanford, & Barratt, 1995), anger was measured using the state scale of the State-Trait Anger Inventory (STAXI-2; Spielberger, 1999), and anxiety was assessed on the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item screening measure (GAD-7; Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006). Interviews were completed after the athlete had been medically cleared to return to play.

Currently, 12 athletes have completed the surveys and of those, five consented to the follow-up interviews. The athletes had an average of four concussions in their collegiate career and the most experienced in their current season was two. The athletes endorsed the strongest feelings of all three variables during the first survey time point, with anxiety and anger consistently scoring the highest. Two of the athletes scored above a ten on the GAD-7, which is indicative of severe anxiety. Both athletes were referred to the counseling services at their university by the principal investigator. The athletes scores were monitored for their second survey and both of their scores dropped below ten. Both were participated in an interview where their anxiety scores were addressed and counseling was again recommended.

Several themes were identified from the interviews with athletes. The major themes were school, loss of control, isolation, and frustration. Athletes discussed how they were unable to keep up with school work due to their symptoms. Loss of control referred to their recovery and feeling as if they could not do anything to return to play sooner as well as not feeling in control of their own emotions. One athlete said, "I felt angry all the time and I didn't know why." Similarly one said, "I had all these feelings.. were they normal? Do other people feel like this too?" Another athlete discussed how feeling isolated led to her frustration, "Because I didn't look injured, people didn't think I was injured. That was hard because you're hurting but you can't talk about it because people don't understand." Athletes believed that people wanted to understand, but their symptoms were difficult to explain.

Based on the data collected from surveys and interviews in this study, there are recommendations for medical professionals and staff. The first is the inclusion of an anxiety measure in return to play concussion protocols. All athletes spoke about their anxiety in regards to different aspects of their recovery, including their unknown playing status and how long their symptoms would last. Most importantly, of the two athletes who endorsed severe anxiety symptoms, only one had previously been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. A second suggestion is to offer athlete education groups on campuses specifically for concussed athletes led by a sport psychology practitioner or someone who is educated in the emotional symptoms of concussions. This would provide athletes a place to discuss their symptoms and help normalize their experience so that they can better understand why they feel the way they do.

By incorporating anxiety measures into the return to play concussion protocol and offering education groups on campuses, athlete mental health can be addressed in a proactive way. Too often athletes suffer in silence and it leads to tragedies in the college sport world that can be prevented.

## **"I Haven't Worked to be a Token:" A Narrative Inquiry of the Experiences of Eight Black Female Assistant Coaches in NCAA Division I Women's Basketball**

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### **The Scout**

In the 2014-2015 academic year, 4,984 women played NCAA Division I women's basketball (NCAA, 2016). Of these women, 2,543 identified as Black women, while only 50 of the 345 head coaches and only 314 of the 1044 assistant coaches of these athletes identified as Black women (NCAA, 2016). To state this more simply, 51% of the athletes in NCAA Division I women's basketball are Black females; in contrast, only 26% of the coaches are Black females. While initiatives encouraging Black women to pursue careers in coaching are being implemented by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) and the NCAA (e.g., *So You Wanna*

*Be A Coach*), little research has been conducted to probe the underlying issues related to the underrepresentation of Black female coaches. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to use narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of Black female assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball by examining three important components: (a) the roles they are asked to fill; (b) the ways being a Black female has impacted the participants' experiences as an assistant coach; and (c) the ways that Black women cope with the multiple oppressions they face in NCAA Division I sports.

### **Film Session**

During face-to-face interviews, participants described their path into coaching, the roles they are asked to fill, and the ways they cope with the multiple oppressions they experience as Black women in coaching. Four themes arose throughout a thematic analysis of these narratives, and each will be discussed below.

#### ***Pregame: Learning to coach***

All of the participants in the current study were former high-level basketball players, and the majority of them were influenced to go into coaching because of the positive impact of the Black females who coached them. Additionally, the participants discussed gaining coaching knowledge from informal (e.g. daily experiences) and informal learning situations (e.g. conferences).

#### ***First half: Experiences from the first 10 years***

The participants in this study who had been in coaching for less than 10 years stated that being a Black female often put them in a better position to obtain jobs. Rhea said, "Everybody wants a Black female on staff." Though they felt confident in being hired as assistant coaches, the participants recognized that they would likely be the only Black female on the staff and that their role would be recruiting and mediating. These coaches accepted this because they believed that if they worked hard, good things (e.g. career advancement) would eventually happen for them.

#### ***Second half: Experiences from the last five years***

A noticeable shift occurred in the narratives of the participants with more than 10 years of coaching experience. These participants spoke of being prepared to be a head coach; however, they were not sure that they would be allowed that opportunity. They also discussed that as Black females they were stuck in a "box" and "pigeonholed" as recruiters even though they wanted more on-court coaching responsibilities. Lastly, the participants expressed frustration in their need to constantly prove themselves to be taken seriously as coaches.

#### ***Overtime: Thinking about the future.***

The participants indicated a desire to become a head coach despite realizing the added pressures and lack of leeway that many Black female head coaches experience when compared to their White male and female counterparts. They also brainstormed several ways to get more Black females into coaching including more workshops geared toward Black females, administrators being more open to hiring Black females, and more Black female coaches being intentional about mentoring future generations of coaches.

These results speak to the importance of giving Black female coaches a variety of roles to expand their coaching knowledge. Limiting the roles that Black female assistant coaches are assigned could hinder their opportunities for growth as a coach and as a result, reduce their likelihood of becoming a head coach in the future. These results also bring to light the unjust hiring

practices at the institutional level and the possible negative effects gendered racism has on the psychological health of Black female assistant coaches.

### **Game Plan**

It is hoped that these findings will lead to the development of interventions that can empower NCAA Division I Black female coaches as well as challenge current structural ideologies that disadvantage Black female coaches in this context. Further, creating a more inclusive environment at NCAA Division I institutions could enhance the experiences and coaching career aspirations of Black female student-athletes by allowing them to see empowered Black female role models in coaching.

## **“Alternative Success Theory”: An examination of what athletics department success means for small colleges**

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What?

The small college athletics environment is a distinctive faction of the university that has arguably represented a shift in approaches and strategies for enrollment attainment goals. The stakes for many of these small schools are perhaps higher than simply competing for on-field success. For a school where student-athletes make up a small percentage of the student body and where athletics departments measure success on wins and losses, if the athletics program loses or ceases to exist, the school will still survive. If a small school “loses” with their definition of success and the athletics department does not attract student-athletes (and their tuition dollars), the school may not survive. Further, by gaining a holistic understanding of the small college athletics environment, we can better understand how such an “Alternative Success Theory” contextualizes sport as its own entity but also as an important faction of macro-level campus-wide processes.

### **Purpose and Method**

The primary purpose of this study was to explore alternative definitions of success and the overall role of athletics in the survival of small colleges where student-athletes make up 20% or more of the student body population. Specifically, in-depth interviews were conducted with NCAA Division III athletics directors, administrators (e.g., president, provost, Vice President for Enrollment Management), and faculty athletics representatives to better understand how university and athletics administrators define athletics program success at small colleges and how such definitions impact financial and organizational priorities and decision-making. In all, 33 in-person interviews were conducted at 11 different Division III institutions across seven different states. At each of the 11 schools, the athletics director, one high-level administrator, and one faculty athletics representative were interviewed for a total of 33 interviews.

### **Main Takeaways**

- In general, expectations about winning/losing were not discussed as part of the hiring process when athletics directors were hired.
- Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) were asked if they ever had to navigate any tensions between groups in their roles as the FAR. Each of the interviewees indicated that tension was almost exclusively about student-athletes missing class time for competitions. As a result,

while conference competition scheduling tended to be mostly out of the control of the athletics department, factions of faculty blamed the athletics department for class-competition conflicts. Many FARs did indicate they felt it was part of their FAR role to dispel this misconception amongst faculty members.

- When asked what goes into judging whether the athletics program was successful or not, many interviewees indicated the importance of the student-athlete experience, enrollment, retention, gaining more resources, and competitiveness. Importantly, competitiveness was not usually at the top of the list regarding what was valued most. Rather, valuing the student-athlete experience was considered to be mutually beneficial for enrollment and retention.
- Interviewees were asked what role tuition discounting for the general student body played in the overall institution's financial stability. Respondents indicated that the high tuition-high discount model was extremely important and represented a change in the financial landscape of small colleges. Further, there was an emphasis on the importance of coaches' recruiting in order to make up gaps in financial aid packages between their institutions and the financial aid packages of competitors.
- Interviewees were asked to think about what would happen to the institution if the athletics department ceased to exist. Respondents used words such as "devastating," "catastrophic," "big trouble," "cripple us almost completely," and "we would close down," further demonstrating the critical role of small college athletics to the overall institution.
- Interviewees were asked about athletics department strategies to add stability to the athletics department and the institution. Many spoke of the role of having specific roster size targets and of the notion of adding sports to increase enrollment, all as a shared discussion between coaches, athletics directors, and campus administrators.
- The willingness to adapt was emphasized as well. Athletics directors, campus administrators, and faculty spoke of the trend of adding more full time head and assistant coaches. Doing so dually helps with recruiting/enrollment and also with student-athlete experiences because more full-time coaches provide stronger on-campus mentors.
- Athletics directors, campus administrators, and faculty were asked about the specific missions of the athletics department and the university. Many relied on the Division III philosophy with programmatic development. Interviewees indicated using the Division III philosophy as a guide was extremely helpful because it contains a large a set of measurable, actionable items.
- When asked how level of a playing field Division III athletics is, nearly all respondents indicated that it was clearly not a level playing field because of varying levels of resources, academic offerings and prestige, differing endowments and enrollment numbers, and whether the institution is public or private.

# Evaluating Student-Athletes' Stress Coping Experiences in their Academic and Athletic Lives: A Test of the Stress-Buffering Model

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A formidable research literature indicates that stress can significantly harm one's physiological and psychological well-being, and there is extensive agreement that social support can help assuage those negative effects. Theorists of the stress-buffering model predict that social support will moderate the stress coping response. For collegiate student-athletes, the stress that accumulates across their dual roles as a student and an athlete is arguably unavoidable. Stress sources may include pressures from meeting scholarship criteria, athletic culture-shock, brawn-no-brain stereotypes, and managing their dual roles as a student and athlete. Fortunately, student-athletes are also afforded a myriad of support networks that can help mitigate the harmful effects of stress. For example, athletic departments have ensured student-athletes have access to free academic advising, tutoring, student study centers, athletic training, and doctors among other interpersonal support groups. Student-athletes may also receive support from family, friends, teammates, and the community. The purpose of this study was to test the stress-buffering model and to examine how five different types of social support influence the stress-coping process for student-athletes.

This study included  $N = 459$  Division I collegiate student-athletes. The sample included student-athletes from 18 different sports and 18 different colleges, were predominantly Caucasian, and included those on partial scholarship ( $n = 189$ ), full scholarship ( $n = 119$ ), and those not on scholarship ( $n = 99$ ). The sample included both men ( $n = 140$ ) and women ( $n = 267$ ) and the average age of participants was  $M = 20.18$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ . Student-athletes were sent an online survey where they were asked to think about their role as a student and as an athlete and completed the following measures: stress, social support, self-efficacy, and performance. It was predicted that (H1) stress would negatively predict self-efficacy, (H2) social support would moderate the relationship between stress and self-efficacy, and (H3) self-efficacy would positively predict performance (in both an academic and athletic setting). A research question was also posed that asked how student-athletes' dual roles influenced performance in each setting. To test these predictions, a series of hierarchical linear regressions were conducted. Results were mixed and provided partial support for predictions as well as interesting exploratory results.

For the first hypothesis, in both an academic and athletic setting, stress negatively predicted performance such that the more self-reported stress reported, the worse performance student-athletes felt in their academic and athletic lives.

For the second hypothesis, social support did not moderate the relationship between stress and self-efficacy, however, social support was a positive predictor of self-efficacy such that the more social support a student-athlete perceived was available, the higher their feelings of capability in their academic and athletic lives. Exploring this finding further, esteem support and information support were the only significant support types of self-efficacy (emotional, network, and tangible support were not significant predictors of either academic or athletic self-efficacy).

The third hypothesis was supported; self-efficacy positively predicted performance in both an academic and athletic setting such that the more capable a student-athlete reported feeling, the better they reported their performance. Additionally, and only in an *academic* setting, social support moderated the relationship between stress and performance such that when stress is low, it did not matter if social support was high or low, your performance was about the same, but when stress is high, social support makes a significant impact on performance such that the more support

you for during high stress times, the better your performance. High levels of stress and low levels of social support resulted in the lowest performance scores.

The research question was also explored with hierarchical linear regressions. *Academic* stress was a negative predictor, and *academic* self-efficacy was a positive predictor, of *athletic* performance. *Athletic* stress was a negative predictor, and *athletic* social support, self-efficacy, and performance were positive predictors of *academic* performance. Overall, partial support for the stress-buffering model is provided.

Several important implications can be gleaned from these results. First, as esteem support and information support were the only significant predictors of self-efficacy in both an academic and athletic setting, social support structures designed to help student-athletes in their endeavors should reinforce in these two social support types. For example, athletic departments might include training for coaches or teams, or slogans that boost self-confidence (esteem support), and workshops and materials that provide facts and advice for student-athletes in their academic and athletic lives (informational support). Especially as student-athletes dual-roles are influencing performance in each setting, it would be helpful for student-athletes to learn how to manage their time and understand how their roles are not separate constructs, but intermixed in their self-identity.