

**LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK
STUDENT-ATHLETES
IN REVENUE-PRODUCING SPORTS:
A DESCRIPTIVE EMPIRICAL
ANALYSIS¹**

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ABSTRACT

Recent NCAA reforms (Propositions 48 and 42) have made imperative a better understanding of the social and psychological factors affecting black student-athletes in revenue-producing sports. The present study focuses on the college experiences of black student-athletes at 42 NCAA Division I schools in comparison to white student-athletes and other black college students in four areas: demographic and academic background; college life experience; mental health; and social support. Black student-athletes differed from both comparison groups across all four topic areas. Results of the comparison are discussed, and policy recommendations are presented.

¹Conclusions drawn from or recommendations based on the data provided by the National Collegiate Athletic Association are those of the authors based on analyses/evaluations of the authors and do not represent the view of the officers, staff or membership of the NCAA. All correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to the first author at the Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville VA 22903.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

During the past ten years there has been an ongoing debate concerning the status of intercollegiate athletics as it relates to the educational missions of institutions of higher education. This debate has centered on the issue of academic integrity in intercollegiate athletics. Are major college athletics counterproductive to the educational mission of our universities? Do "student-athletes" belong in the same educational environment as other students? Questions such as these have led to legislation intended to restore academic integrity to intercollegiate athletics with the emphasis placed upon the academic preparation of potential student-athletes. As an example of this approach, the NCAA has passed and implemented Propositions 48 and 42, which set minimum eligibility requirements for incoming freshman student-athletes.

These eligibility requirements imposed by the NCAA have come under criticism for the adverse impact they have on black student-athletes. These reforms affect a much greater proportion of black student-athletes participating in the revenue-producing sports of football and men's and women's basketball. Unfortunately, relatively little empirical documentation of the college experiences of black student-athletes was available prior to the formulation and implementation of these reforms. Thus, the reform legislation was initiated without the benefit of a detailed understanding of the experiences of those individuals who were most likely to be affected. The dearth of empirical information on the black student-athlete has left no baseline data by which to evaluate the effects of the present reforms. Since the reform movement within the NCAA is gaining momentum, it is critical that we have a better understanding of the experiences of black student-athletes in revenue-producing sports during their college tenure.

Black student-athletes from Division I revenue-producing sports represent unique entities on our campuses. Whereas the median enrollment of black students at Division I universities is approximately 4 percent, blacks comprise approximately 12 percent of the student-athlete population. Black student-athletes are much more concentrated in the revenue-producing sports, where they comprise 37 percent of the football players, 56 percent of the men's basketball players, and 33 percent of the women's basketball players at Division I institutions. In the non-revenue sports, by contrast, black student-athletes make up approximately 8 percent of the female and 11 percent of the male student-athletes. At many institutions, black student-athletes comprise as much as half of the black student population (Center for the Study of Athletics, 1989).

Clearly there are disproportionate numbers of blacks in Division I intercollegiate athletics. They often come from very different backgrounds from the rest of the student body. Moreover, black student-athletes are different from the two student constituencies with whom they share the most in common: white student-athletes and black non-athletic students. As such, black student-athletes must be studied exclusively from white student-athletes and black non-athletes. It is inappropriate to assume that either white student-athletes or non-athletic black students represent the norm by which black student-athletes should be evaluated.

Despite the diverse demographic landscape in intercollegiate athletics, very few empirical studies have investigated the different experiences of black and

white student-athletes. Among the studies that have compared the two groups, most have focused on academic performance. These studies have yielded two consistent findings: (1) black student-athletes come to college less prepared than their white counterparts; and (2) black student-athletes do not perform as well academically once they are admitted (Ervin et al., 1985; Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986; Purdy et al., 1982; Sellers, in press; Shapiro, 1984). Few empirical studies have examined race differences in the actual experiences of student-athletes during their tenure as student-athletes. In a study of role conflict in student-athletes, Sack and Thiel (1985) found no race differences in the degree to which individuals felt they had to be "an athlete first and a student second." Other studies suggest that black student-athletes are coming from less advantaged backgrounds (Center for the Study of Athletics, 1989), are at greater risk for mental health trauma following academic failure (Edwards, 1984), and are more likely to experience racial isolation and alienation (Eitzen, 1989).

Even fewer studies have compared black student-athletes to black non-athletic students. In 1986, the Center for the Study of Athletics was commissioned by the Presidents' Commission of the NCAA to survey student-athletes at 42 Division I universities. In a report devoted to the experiences of the black student-athlete, the Center (1989) concluded that black student-athletes are less prepared and demonstrate a poorer academic performance than black non-athletic students. The report also concluded that black student-athletes differ from other black students with regard to their sources of perceived support, career aspirations, and life goals. One interesting finding of the report is that despite having significantly lower grade point averages, black student-athletes were more likely than other black students to respond that getting a degree was of the highest importance.

THE BLACK STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

The purpose of the present study is to provide an empirical description of the unique experiences of black student-athletes who participate in Division I revenue-producing sports. This study specifically examines differences between black student-athletes and two relevant comparison groups, i.e., white student-athletes and black non-athletic students. The comparisons highlight four important areas of the black student-athlete's life: demographic and academic background; college life experiences; mental health, and social support. The results of the analysis are discussed in terms of the unique experiences of black student-athletes. Finally, interventions on the institutional level are proposed to enhance both the college experiences and life chances of black student-athletes.

It is important to note that hypotheses are not being tested in this study, but rather that a descriptive analysis is provided of the psychological and socio-cultural factors influencing the college experiences of black student-athletes. It is also important to note that this paper does not treat differences as deficits or deviance; on the contrary, these comparisons of black student-athletes with white student-athletes and with other black students provide a context in which to illuminate the unique experiences of black student-athletes.

Demographic Background

The individual's demographic background provides a lens through which all subsequent experiences are filtered; thus, it has an important influence on college performance and experience. Previous investigations have found that students' socioeconomic status affects academic performance (Crouse & Trusheim, 1988). Lang et al. (1988) found that family income and mother's education were important predictors of college grade point averages for a major college football team. In explaining the finding that mother's income was an important predictor of college GPA for black student-athletes but not for white student-athletes, Sellers (in press) noted that because of the greater prevalence of female-headed households in the black community, mother's income may determine the quality of high schools available to black student-athletes to a greater extent than for other groups of students. Given the apparent importance of background variables in the academic success of college students, researchers must account for differences between these groups.

College Life Experiences

Recent reports of increased racial tension on college campuses have unfortunately made matriculation in many universities an adverse experience for many black students; their adjustment to the adverse environment has implications for their academic performance. Allen (1988) found that for a national sample of non-athletic black students, measures of social integration such as campus race relations and student relations with faculty were important predictors of academic performance. Sedlacek (1987), in a review of twenty years of research on black students on white campuses, concluded that along with the adjustments and responsibilities faced by all college students, black students also must deal with racism, as well as develop both a healthy self-concept and a sense of community in an often hostile environment.

The hostile environment and racial isolation experienced by black non-athletic students leads to an important question regarding black student-athletes: Is the campus environment as socially adverse for black student-athletes as it is for other black students on predominantly white campuses? One possibility is that black student-athletes may experience a more hostile environment than other black students because they are different from other student-athletes and from other black students. Or conversely, the celebrity status that goes along with being a student-athlete often may serve as a buffer against many of the noxious incidents experienced by black non-athletic students.

Mental Health Status

Few studies have examined the mental health status of student-athletes. The body of literature that most closely pertains to the mental health status of student-athletes is the literature regarding mood states and athletes. Most of the investigations in this literature utilize the Profile of Mood States (POMS) questionnaire (e.g., Frazier, 1988; Friend & LeUnes, 1990; Ungerleider et al., 1989). Unfortunately, many of these studies inappropriately extrapolate results obtained from the state-specific POMS questionnaire to more trait-like

interpretations and conclusions (Rejeski et al., 1991). Other studies have focused on personality differences in athletes according to the sport or the positions in which they play (Kirkcaldy, 1982; Nation & LeUnes, 1983; Shurr, Ruble, Nisbet, & Wallace, 1984). While these studies use more stable personality measures, these scales are not measures of mental health status. Because of the scarcity of studies regarding the mental health status of student-athletes in general, an empirical description of the mental health status of black student-athletes would provide a valuable foundation for future investigations.

Social Support

As strangers in a strange land; where do black student-athletes get social support? To whom do they turn when they want to discuss their problems? Are their support networks any different from those of other student-athletes or other black students? Tracey and Sedlacek (1984; 1987) found that social support was an important positive factor in the academic success of black students. On the other hand, social support may also influence academic performance in negative ways. This too remains an open question. In an extensive qualitative investigation of the life experiences of major college basketball players, Adler and Adler (1991) documented the ways in which student-athletes' views of their role as students are shaped—and often misshaped—by teammates, coaches, advisors, and faculty.

METHOD

Sample

The present study examines data from a national representative sample of full-time undergraduate student-athletes at Division I institutions commissioned by the Presidents Commission of the NCAA. Forty-two of the 291 Division I institutions for 1987-1988 were randomly selected to participate. Institutions were relatively evenly distributed across the NCAA's geographic districts and regions and were representative on a variety of indicators of institutional and student body characteristics, as well as sports history and involvement.

A total of 5123 student-athletes and students was sampled. The present study focuses on three subgroups within the sample: black student-athletes participating in revenue-producing sports (n=847); white student-athletes participating in revenue-producing sports (n=1161); and a random sample of black students who were not members of an athletic team (n=511). The participants' informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were administered in groups of four or five students, with at least one data collector present. The data collector also provided participants with an assurance of confidentiality in their responses to the questionnaire. (For a more complete description of the sample, see Center for the Study of Athletics, 1988b).

Procedures and Measures

The student-athletes and the other black students were administered questionnaires that were nearly identical in content but differing in their wording to

reflect the diversity of activities in which the student-athletes and the black students were involved. The questionnaires elicited information on a variety of topics such as general academic and social background, personal and interpersonal experiences at college, and expectations and attitudes regarding education and career goals, as well as mental health status.

Four categories of variables were the focus of the present study, representing the major areas of the black student-athlete's life, i.e., demographic and academic background, college life experiences, mental health status, and social support.

Demographic and Academic Background. Demographic and academic background information was represented by six variables. Students self-reported their high school grade point average according to an 8-point scale in which "1" was a C- or below and "8" was an A or A+ average. Students' cumulative college GPA and actual SAT scores were collected from transcripts (SAT equivalent scores were computed for students who took the ACT). Socioeconomic status (SES) was derived from family income, parents' occupational status, and parents' education. Students reported their parents' education levels on a 6-point scale in which "1" represented less than high school graduation and "6" represented a post-baccalaureate degree (i.e., M.A. or Ph.D.).

College Life Experiences. Students' perceptions of college life experiences were represented by ten variables. Frequency of feeling racial isolation and of feeling different from other students was reported on a four-point scale from 1="never" to 4="frequently." Importance of earning a degree was rated on a four-point scale from 1="not important at all" to 4="of greatest importance." Satisfaction with coaches and with life in general was rated on a four-point scale from 1="not satisfied at all" to 4="totally satisfied." The extent to which student-athletes feel their head coach knows and understands what college life is like was rated on a four-point scale from 1="terribly" to 4="excellently." Scores for perceived difficulty with three aspects of personal growth and development were composites derived from twenty items rated on a five-point scale from 1="much easier" to 5="much harder." These composites were labeled "Social Development" (alpha=.81), "Opportunities" (alpha=.72), and "Assertiveness" (alpha=.73).

Mental Health Status. In addition, four self-description inventories were included to gather information on students' mental health status. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) includes ten items measuring levels of self-acceptance and self-esteem. The Spielberger Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, 1977) includes twenty items measuring the tendency to see stressful situations as dangerous and threatening and to respond with heightened anxiety. The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1974) measures the presence and frequency of twenty major clinical symptoms of depression. Finally, the Levenson Locus of Control Scales (Levenson, 1974) include 24 items measuring beliefs about three dimensions of control: internal control, powerful others, and chance.

Social Support. Social support networks were assessed using eleven items pertaining to knowing and being able to confide in people about personal

problems. Students responded to these items with either "yes" or "no." Variables that were relevant only to student-athletes' college experiences were omitted from the comparisons between black student-athletes and non-athletic students.

RESULTS

Two sets of pair-wise comparisons were performed using t-test and chi-square procedures to examine the demographic/academic background, college life experiences, social support, and mental health characteristics of black student-athletes in relation to two relevant comparison groups: white student-athletes and black non-athletic students. Because of the large sample sizes included in these comparisons and the power of these statistical tests to detect mean differences between groups, a conservative standard of $p < .001$ was chosen to control for Type I error.

Comparisons of Black and White Student-Athletes

Demographic and Academic Background. Black student-athletes differed from white student-athletes on all six comparisons performed (see Figure 1). Black student-athletes lagged behind white student-athletes in educational achievement ($t = -17.16$), with their mean college grade point average just above the minimum standard of 2.00 for eligibility ($m = 2.12$), while white student-athletes averaged about a C+ ($m = 2.53$). Black student-athletes also lagged behind white student-athletes in their high school educational achievement, with an average of B- compared to B for white student-athletes ($t = -15.96$). Black student-athletes' mean SAT score of 753.14 was just 53 points above the minimum standard set in the NCAA's Propositions 48 and 42 and was significantly lower than the mean score of 899.83 of white student-athletes ($t = -19.46$).

Black student-athletes also differed from their white counterparts with regard to socioeconomic status ($t = -20.09$) and parental education. In terms of raw frequencies, both the fathers and mothers of the average black student-athlete had no training beyond high school. In contrast, both parents of the average white student-athlete had some training beyond high school, and the father had at least some college education. These differences were statistically significant ($t = -13.48$ for fathers and $t = -6.42$ for mothers).

Figure 1:
Comparisons of Black vs. White Student-Athletes¹

Variable	Black Mean	(SD)	White Mean	(SD)	T-Statistic
<i>Demographic and Academic Background:</i>					
Socio-Economic Status	44.69	(7.46)	51.36	(7.19)	-20.09*
Mother's Education	3.01	(1.56)	3.51	(1.48)	-6.42*
Father's Education	2.88	(1.59)	4.02	(1.65)	-13.48*
High School GPA	4.21	(1.69)	.44	(1.71)	-15.96*
SAT Score	753.14	(157.39)	899.83	(178.97)	-19.46*
College GPA	2.14	(0.43)	2.53	(0.57)	-17.96*
<i>College Life</i>					
Feel Racial Isolation	2.21	(1.08)	1.27	(0.65)	22.49*
Feel Different	2.90	(1.03)	3.06	(0.98)	-3.48*
Imp't. of getting degree	3.83	(0.43)	3.84	(0.42)	-0.10 ^{ns}
Satis. with coaches	2.92	(0.87)	2.87	(0.85)	1.30 ^{ns}
Head Coach knows	3.12	(0.73)	3.03	(0.73)	2.72 ^{ns}
Satis. with life in general	3.22	(0.61)	3.29	(0.57)	-2.65 ^{ns}
Harder to be Assertive	-0.20	(0.81)	0.12	(0.69)	-9.56*
Harder to gain Opportunities	-0.10	(0.71)	-0.10	(0.58)	-0.13 ^{ns}
Harder to gain Social Skills	0.02	(0.69)	0.04	(0.57)	-0.98 ^{ns}
<i>Mental Health:</i>					
Trait Anxiety	37.93	(9.17)	37.08	(8.47)	2.14 ^{ns}
Self Esteem	25.10	(4.64)	25.45	(4.39)	-1.70 ^{ns}
Depression (CESD)	13.84	(8.54)	12.41	(8.08)	3.77*
Locus of Control:					
Chance	20.45	(8.68)	17.30	(8.56)	8.07*
Internal	37.69	(5.86)	38.53	(5.70)	-3.22
Powerful Others	21.96	(10.68)	20.33	(10.72)	3.37*

¹N(Black) = 847; N(White) = 1161 (sample sizes vary slightly due to missing data)

*Significant at $p < .001$

^{ns}Not Significant

College Life Experiences. Significant differences were found on three of ten comparisons relating to student-athletes' college life experiences. Black student-athletes reported feeling racial isolation more frequently ($t=22.49$) but reported feeling different from other students less frequently ($t=-3.48$) than white student-athletes. Black and white student-athletes did not differ in their perception of the importance of getting a college degree, their perception that their head coach knows and understands what college life is like, or in their satisfaction either with their coaches or with their lives in general.

Black and white student-athletes were similar in their perceptions of how their experiences as college athletes affect their personal growth and development. These groups did not differ in the difficulty they experienced with gaining opportunities or developing social skills. However, white student-athletes reported having more difficulty in being assertive ($t=9.56$).

Mental Health Status. Black and white student-athletes differed on two of the four self-description inventories. It is important to note that these mental health scores fall within the normal range and do not approach clinically significant levels. Black student-athletes had higher levels of depressive symptoms ($t=3.77$), were more likely to attribute their success to chance ($t=8.07$) or to powerful others ($t=3.37$), and were marginally less likely to attribute success to their own abilities ($t=-3.22$, $p=.0013$). Black and white student-athletes did not differ on measures of trait anxiety or self-esteem.

Social Support. Black and white student-athletes differed significantly in five of eleven comparisons of perceptions of available support (see Figure 2). White student-athletes were significantly more likely to report knowing people with whom they felt they could talk about their problems ($X^2=28.51$). White student-athletes were more likely to feel they could talk to teammates ($X^2=16.91$), other students who were not athletes ($X^2=17.11$), and other friends ($X^2=16.84$) but less likely to feel they could talk to academic advisors ($X^2=9.25$). Black and white student-athletes did not differ in their reports of feeling they could confide in other student-athletes, coaches at school, parents, siblings, spouses, or other people.

Comparisons of Black Student-Athletes and Non-Athletic Students

Demographic and Academic Background. Black student-athletes differed from black non-athletic students in their academic achievement and academic preparation for college (see Figure 3). Transcripts showed that student-athletes had significantly lower college grade point averages (approximately C average for student-athletes versus C/C+ for non-athletes, $t=-5.40$) and lower SAT scores (753.14 for student-athletes versus 877.88 for non-athletes, $t=-10.79$). Student-athletes also reported lower high school grade point averages than their non-athletic counterparts ($t=-9.91$).

Figure 2:

Chi-Square Comparisons of Black vs. White Student-Athletes

Variable	Black % "Yes"	White % "Yes"	X ² Statistic
Know people with whom to talk about problems	88.19	94.75	28.51*
<i>Can confide in:</i>			
Teammates	71.75	80.00	16.91*
Other student-athletes	37.75	40.18	1.10 ^{ns}
Other students (not athletes)	58.50	67.91	17.11*
Other friends	86.88	92.64	16.84*
Coaches at this school	48.46	42.55	6.29 ^{ns}
Acad. advisors at this school	31.06	24.64	9.25*
Parents	91.30	89.64	1.40 ^{ns}
Brothers/Sisters	78.71	81.00	1.46 ^{ns}
Spouse[n = 31(blk); 28 (wh)]	83.87	92.86	1.14 ^{ns}
Other People	79.25	78.27	0.25 ^{ns}

N(Black) = 847; N(White) = 1161 (sample sizes vary due to missing data)

*Significant at $p < .01$

^{ns}Not Significant

Black student-athletes also come from different social backgrounds than their fellow black students. Their families have lower socioeconomic status ($t = -5.46$), and their fathers and mothers have lower educational levels ($t = -3.60$). As noted above, the parents of the average black student-athlete have no training beyond high school; in comparison, both parents of the average black non-athletic student have some (non-college) training beyond high school.

College Life Experiences. Black student-athletes differed from other black students on six of eight variables relating to college life experiences. Black student-athletes reported feeling racial isolation less frequently than non-athletes

Figure 3:

Comparisons of Black Student-Athletes vs. Non-Athletic Students¹

Variable	Athletes		Non-Athletes		T-Statistic
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	
<i>Demographic and Academic Background:</i>					
Socio-Economic Status	44.69	(7.46)	47.06	(7.89)	-5.46*
Mother's Education	3.01	(1.56)	3.41	(1.69)	-3.60*
Father's Education	2.88	(1.59)	3.27	(1.80)	-3.09*
High School GPA	4.21	(1.69)	5.17	(1.71)	-9.91*
SAT Score	753.14	(157.39)	877.88	(231.02)	-10.79*
College GPA	2.14	(0.43)	2.31	(0.62)	-5.40*
<i>College Life</i>					
Feel Racial Isolation	2.21	(1.08)	2.41	(1.08)	-3.32*
Feel Different	2.90	(1.03)	2.88	(1.05)	0.43 ^{ns}
Impt. of getting degree	3.83	(0.43)	3.78	(0.47)	2.08 ^{ns}
Satis. with life in general	3.22	(0.61)	3.07	(0.59)	4.31*
Harder to be Assertive	-0.20	(0.81)	0.79	(0.58)	-26.21*
Harder to gain Opportunities	-0.10	(0.71)	0.91	(0.60)	-28.36*
Harder to gain Social Skills	0.02	(0.69)	0.71	(0.50)	-21.36*
<i>Mental Health:</i>					
Trait Anxiety	37.93	(9.17)	38.31	(10.37)	-0.67 ^{ns}
Self Esteem	25.10	(4.64)	24.87	(4.65)	0.90 ^{ns}
Depression (CESD)	13.84	(8.54)	14.74	(9.74)	-1.73 ^{ns}
Locus of Control:					
Chance	20.45	(8.68)	18.05	(9.03)	4.82*
Internal	37.69	(5.86)	37.10	(6.75)	1.62 ^{ns}
Powerful Others	21.96	(10.68)	19.31	(10.89)	4.36*

¹N(Athlete) = 847; N(Non-athlete) = 511 (sample sizes vary slightly due to missing data)

*Significant at p .001

^{ns}Not Significant

($t=-3.32$) and were generally more satisfied with their lives ($t=4.31$). In terms of personal growth and development, athletes reported less difficulty in being assertive ($t=-27.90$), developing social skills ($t=-21.36$), and gaining opportunities ($t=-28.36$) than non-athletic students. Black student-athletes and non-athletes did not differ in the extent to which they felt different from other students or in the importance they ascribed to earning a college degree.

Mental Health Status. The analysis of mental health status found few differences between black student-athletes and black students. Black student-athletes and non-athletes did not differ in levels of trait anxiety, self-esteem, or depressive symptoms. While student-athletes and non-athletes were similar in the extent to which they ascribed their success to internal characteristics, student-athletes were more likely to attribute success to chance ($t=4.82$) and to powerful others ($t=4.36$).

Social Support. Black student-athletes differed from black students on five of eight indicators of perceived social support (see Figure 4). Whereas student-athletes and non-athletic students did not differ in their overall perception of knowing people with whom they felt they could talk, they did differ in the specific groups of people with whom they felt they could confide. Student-athletes were more likely to confide in academic advisors ($X^2=15.61$), parents ($X^2=43.34$), and siblings ($X^2=29.98$). In contrast, non-athletic students were more likely to confide in other students ($X^2=13.17$) and other friends ($X^2=7.38$).

Figure 4:
Chi-Square Comparisons of
Black Student-Athletes vs. Black Non-Athletic Students

Variable	Athlete % "Yes"	Non-Athlete % "Yes"	X^2 Statistic
Know people with whom to talk about problems	88.19	90.02	1.08 ^{ns}
<i>Can confide in:</i>			
Other students (non athletes)	58.50	68.91	13.17*
Other friends	86.88	91.96	7.38*
Acad. advisors at this school	31.06	20.65	15.61*
Parents	91.30	77.83	43.34*
Brothers/Sisters	78.71	64.35	29.98*
Spouse [n = 31(ath); 42 (n-a)]	83.87	83.33	0.00 ^{ns}
Other People	79.25	77.17	0.73 ^{ns}

N(Athlete) = 847; N(Non-athlete) = 511 (sample sizes vary due to missing data)

*Significant at $p < .01$

^{ns}Not Significant

DISCUSSION

The present results suggest that black student-athletes enter the university with very different educational and socio-cultural backgrounds than both white student-athletes and other black students. Black student-athletes have significantly lower family incomes and less educated parents. Many are first generation college students and are less prepared academically for college. Once enrolled, black student-athletes perform more poorly than their counterparts (Ervin et al., 1985; Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986; Purdy et al., 1982; Sellers, in press; Shapiro, 1984). On average, black student-athletes hover perilously close to the NCAA minimum requirements for eligibility both prior to admission (their average SAT score is 753 while a score of 700 is necessary for eligibility) and after entering college (their average GPA is 2.14 while a GPA of 2.00 is necessary for eligibility).

Greater differences are found when comparing black student-athletes with other black students than with white student-athletes. Black and white student-athletes do not differ in the importance they ascribe to earning a degree, their satisfaction in their relationships with coaches, and their overall satisfaction with life. For the most part, black and white student-athletes perceive the same levels of difficulty with achieving personal growth as a result of athletics, except that black student-athletes feel it is easier to become more assertive. Black student-athletes are more likely to experience racial isolation than white student-athletes. This finding is not surprising given the reported increase in overt racism on campuses and the demographic landscape of most universities. But it is interesting to note that black student-athletes feel less different as a result of being athletes than did their white counterparts. Black student-athletes may attribute their feelings of being different more to the fact that they are black and less to the fact that they are athletes.

The differences between black student-athletes and black students is interesting. While both groups are highly motivated to obtain a degree, black student-athletes perceive greater personal growth from being an athlete than black students perceive from being students. Overall, black student-athletes seem to feel that their college experience is more worthwhile and satisfying than do other black students. This finding may be as much an indicator of the social difficulties that many black students experience at predominantly white colleges as it is an indicator of the quality of the black student-athlete's college experiences (Allen, 1988). Black student-athletes also report feeling less racial isolation than other black students, perhaps because their enhanced status as athletes provides them with opportunities to socialize with people that other black students do not know.

Black student-athletes also differ in regard to their mental health from both white student-athletes and other black students. Our findings corroborate those of previous research, which found that blacks in general tend to score higher than whites on measures of external locus of control, resulting from

historical experiences with powerful others and cultural influences (Gurin et al., 1978). Black student-athletes are also more likely to attribute the locus of control to external factors such as luck and powerful others than did either comparison group. The tendency of black student-athletes to report an even greater external locus of control than other black students may be due to the fact that student-athletes in revenue-producing sports spend an average of 30 hours a week on sports during season (Center for the Study of Athletics, 1988a). Similarly, black student-athletes reported more depressive symptoms than white student-athletes. This difference between black and white student-athletes does not mean that the average black student-athlete is clinically depressed. It does, however, suggest that something about being black may lead to greater depressive symptoms for student-athletes.

Black student-athletes are less likely than white student-athletes to report that they have someone to talk to about their problems, and they differ in the groups of people with whom they are most likely to discuss their problems. Black student-athletes are also less likely to discuss their problems with peers (teammates, other students, and other friends) and are more likely to talk with an academic advisor. The relative emotional distance that black student-athletes report from their teammates and other students on campus may be a function of socio-cultural background differences. The greater utilization of and contact with the academic advisor for emotional support may be a byproduct of their poor academic performance.

While black student-athletes and other black students are similar in their perceptions of overall emotional support, the structure of that support does differ. Black student-athletes are less likely than other black students to talk to peers (other students and friends) and are more likely than other black students to receive support from loved ones who are not on campus (parents and siblings). One exception is the black student-athletes' closer relationship with academic advisors, which probably results from the fact that student-athletes are more likely to be assigned academic advisors than other non-athletic students.

Black student-athletes' reliance on off-campus support may interact with their socioeconomic background to place them at greater risk. Because black student-athletes come from poorer families and because their support systems are more likely to be located away from campus, it is more difficult for them to access their support systems personally. This problem is exacerbated by the NCAA's financial restraints which forbid student-athletes to work during the school year and yet do not provide them with any money beyond tuition, room, and board. Although black student-athletes' support networks may be very effective in providing emotional support, black student-athletes may have more difficulty receiving the instrumental support which often can only be provided by a person who has had some college experience. Because black student-athletes on average have parents who have never attended college and because they are more likely to seek support from parents, they are more limited in the type of support that their networks are able to provide.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Average black student-athletes probably would not have been admitted to the colleges they attend if they were not athletes. Some reformists have argued that it is athletes with academic backgrounds like the average black student-athlete who do not belong in institutions of higher education (Telander, 1989). They maintain that the presence of these student-athletes constitutes an injustice to the student-athletes and erodes the integrity of the university. This argument is invalid and misdirected. First, if these student-athletes do not belong in institutions of higher education, then where do they belong? With the technological advances in the work force, a college degree does not mean the same as it did fifteen years ago. A college degree is no longer an advantage in today's labor market; it is a prerequisite. In addition, there is an ever-increasing decline in the number of viable, legal opportunities for individuals without at least some college experience to earn a living that will support a family. While the current graduation rates for black student-athletes in revenue-producing sports are deplorable, it is clear that many black student-athletes do graduate. With less than ten percent of all black Americans receiving bachelor's degrees, the exclusion from school of any black student-athlete who would have graduated is unacceptable.

Second, educating those student-athletes who come from disadvantaged backgrounds enhances rather than erodes academic integrity. Since most public universities are obligated to provide community service, an important part of their mission is to provide access to educational opportunities for those who have been historically denied access. They are responsible for educating citizens to help them become productive members of society. Because it is also the mission of all institutions of higher education to pursue understanding and knowledge, it is necessary to include students from diverse backgrounds who can contribute valuable new perspectives to the quest for knowledge. Thus, the emphasis in reform should not be to eliminate those individuals who "do not belong" in college, but instead to provide those same individuals with the best opportunity to succeed.

Three recommendations are proposed to meet this goal and enhance both the educational opportunities and college experiences of black student-athletes. These include institutional changes, provision of more minority role models, and more effective academic support. Because the black student-athlete is a hybrid of both student-athletes and black students, these reforms can have the serendipitous effect of benefitting the three groups of students investigated in this study.

First, institutions must provide black student-athletes with a greater opportunity to interact with other students. The NCAA has taken a step in this direction by passing legislation that limits the amount of time student-athletes can be required to participate in any activity related to their sports. However, there should be little doubt that the pressures to win will force many coaches to test the limits of this new rule. It will be up to the NCAA to enforce this

legislation and to athletic directors to discourage such searches for loopholes. Other policy changes must also be enacted to provide black student-athletes with real opportunities to intermingle with the rest of the student body. For example, athletic dorms and athlete-only eating facilities should be abolished.

The second recommendation is that universities must hire more black coaches and athletic administrators. These people (particularly former black student-athletes) are more likely to understand the unique experiences of black student-athletes and thus are more qualified to design programs that will enhance their life chances. Black coaches and athletic administrators also provide important role models for both black and white student-athletes. Currently, there are only two black head football coaches and only one black athletic director in NCAA Division I. Universities must move beyond employing a token black running back coach or a black recruiter on the basketball team and move toward hiring blacks to fill decision-making positions.

Finally, universities must provide more appropriate and effective academic support systems for student-athletes. Because many black student-athletes come from deficient educational backgrounds, academic support systems must be sensitive to these deficits and provide skill building opportunities along with tutorial services. Such programs must shift the focus from the short-term goal of eligibility to the long-term development of the black student-athlete.

This philosophy can best be accomplished through at least two broad policy changes. The first involves providing academic advising services with a measure of autonomy from the eligibility pressures of the athletic department. The academic well-being of student-athletes is not best served by academic advisors who must answer to coaches or athletic directors whose livelihood is dependent upon the winning percentage of athletic teams.

The second policy change involves mandating the use of trained professionals in teaching programs. It does not make much educational sense for a second-year graduate student to tutor a student-athlete in writing an American history paper if the student-athlete has problems with sentence structure or has a learning disability. Rather than serving the intended purpose of providing the student-athlete with a learning experience, the project is likely to become a struggle with the rules of grammar; the graduate student should not be blamed for this sort of problem because of a lack of training. It is up to the university to provide a structure that values the long-term development of black student-athletes and provides them with an atmosphere conducive to learning. Once this is accomplished, student-athletes will have the responsibility for attaining the highest quality of education offered at their institution.

CONCLUSIONS

Black student-athletes in revenue-producing sports are strangers in a strange land. They are the product of two marginal groups on most of our

campuses (black students and student-athletes), yet they are very different from both of these groups. Black student-athletes come from very different socio-cultural and educational backgrounds, have different college experiences, have different perceptions of control, and have their own distinct patterns of social support. Some institutions have placed their own integrity at stake by concentrating their efforts on maintaining eligible athletes instead of producing literate student-athletes. Universities would best serve their educational missions, their students, and society by taking steps to improve college life and foster an intellectual atmosphere for all the diverse groups of students on campus.

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